Dyslexia in Victorian Government Schools:

Shaping Policy and Practice

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Student Declaration

Doctor of Philosophy Student Declaration

"I, Bec Marland, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *Dyslexia in Victorian Government schools: Shaping policy and practice* is no more than 80,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

"I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures".

Signature: [redacted] Date: 01/07/23

Ethics Declaration

"All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC), Approval Number HRE18-007".

Signature: [redacted] Date: 01/07/23

Abstract

This PhD explores education rights and the notion of best practice for teaching primary and secondary students with dyslexia in Government schools in the state of Victoria, Australia. Drawing on seminal reports and research literature dyslexia is defined as a 'disability', aligning with human rights frameworks and the views of researchers with lived experience of dyslexia. The Australian Government has increased the right of all students to access literacy, although interpretive approaches from state governments vary widely. Victorian Government policy requires dyslexia screening for students in the first year of school, yet best practice for teaching students with dyslexia remains unclear. While an estimated 10% of students have dyslexia, government policy positions these students as having 'additional needs', with different education support rights to students classified as having a disability.

Aligning with a social justice perspective, the research explored the education rights of students with dyslexia. The research questions did not fit neatly when adopting a reflective approach, which triggered the development of a research puzzle (Gustafsson & Hagström, 2018). The question asked in the research was *why the current approach to dyslexia is used in the Victorian education system despite other possible approaches?* From the outset, the research presented possibilities of deriving policy and practice understandings from exemplar schools and comparative analysis of practice from England. Disability theory broadened pre-conceived ideas about dyslexia by introducing human rights frameworks. The utilisation of a research puzzle recognised the potential to increase communicability between academic paradigms.

The case study methodology explored systematic approaches to dyslexia from policy and teacher perspectives; firstly, through a single case study of Victorian state education policy; and secondly, through multiple-case studies of three Victorian Government dyslexia exemplar schools. Representations of Victorian Government policy for dyslexia were sampled from government policies for literacy, disability and dyslexia. Research sampling suggests that government policy uses discourses of 'otherness' which may devalue learners and understate the role of the school in providing best practice and inclusive

pedagogical approaches. Victorian Government policy outlines inconsistent pathways to diagnosis and support, presenting access and equity issues for students with dyslexia.

From online sampling of school websites, a small number of Victorian Government schools were identified as dyslexia exemplar schools. Data were collected from two primary and one secondary Victorian Government schools using research interviews and document analysis. Nine research interviews with principals and specialist dyslexia teachers were analysed, along with school documents, to shed light on enactment of dyslexia policy. Findings suggest that schools adopt contrasting policies and practices based on varying definitions of dyslexia. Best practice and inclusive pedagogies for dyslexia in schools were challenged by the expectations within Victorian Government policy and at broader systems level.

My research highlights innovative practices developed by the exemplar schools that disrupt and challenge current models of practice. It identified tensions for inclusive practice in the Victorian education system and led to me developing a new dyslexia response model. This research is important in identifying how schools are meeting their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Disability Standards for Education (2005), hence shaping future policy and practice.

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Glossary

Ableism: attitudes that discriminate against people with disabilities.

Access: enabling an individual to have the information and services required for everyday life.

Accommodations: adjustments to teaching and learning to promote access for students with disabilities.

Agency: the ability to make self-determined choices that affect one's own life including education and employment.

Best practice: a subjective term often used alongside the notion of evidenced based practice. Within the research, best practice for teaching students with dyslexia includes assessment and support practices.

Bioecological Systems Theory (BEST): Bronfenbrenner & Ceci's (1994) paradigm for examining broader social systems that impact on the experiences and development of children.

British Isles: the geographical region that includes England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland.

Comparative analysis: a methodological tool to acquire knowledge, through problematisation of existing policy modelling.

Decoding: reading text by converting letters as symbols for sounds and words.

Deficit view: a focus on problems rather than recognising individual strengths for people with disability.

Disability: the term *disability* has powerful sociological and legal implications. In Australia, dyslexia is categorised as a disability but excluded from disability status for funding and support. I define dyslexia as a disability, using the Social Relational Model of Disability perspective.

Disability theory: theory that challenges social assumptions to normalise disability.

Discrimination: exclusionary practices that restrict human rights and fundamental freedoms (political, economic, social, cultural, or civil) including denial of reasonable accommodations in education.

Dyslexia: a working definition of dyslexia for my thesis is adapted from Rose's (2009) systematic review. Throughout the thesis, students with dyslexia and students with reading difficulties are clustered together as a category as it is impossible to differentiate the two in many contexts (including the situation of undiagnosed students).

Dyslexia exemplar school: a school with a stated interest in addressing dyslexia.

Encoding: the ability to spell words through the knowledge of spelling patterns and letter-sound correspondence.

England: in the thesis, I draw specific comparisons to England, as opposed to the wider United Kingdom or Britain. England is discussed for comparative examples of policy, rather than the United Kingdom, to reflect devolved education systems.

English Online Interview: (EOI) also referred to as *The Dyslexia Screening Tool*.

Equity: fairness and justice. Recognising that people begin from different starting points, equity requires adjustments to address imbalances in opportunities.

Etymology: the origins of words and the ways in which meanings have changed throughout history.

Evidenced-based: a contested term often used in relation to views of best practice for reading.

Exosystem: a systemic layer from Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), including the Victorian Government policy domain.

Expertism: elitist claims to knowledge that exclude other forms of knowledge and experts.

Impairment: denotes functional limitations of the body or mind and reflects a medical model discourse.

Inclusive education: teaching and learning that promotes equity and belonging for all. Values the right of an individual child to be taught in local schools alongside their peers in the same classrooms.

Initial teacher education: pre-service training undertaken at university, distinct from teacher professional learning while employed within a school.

Intervention: intensified support designed to accelerate learning or development.

Learning support: also referred to as intervention and early intervention.

Medical Model of Disability: The perspective that individuals with an impairment are disabled and have deficits that require fixing.

Metacognitive strategies: teaching awareness of learning and thought processes to enable students to take greater control in their own education and development.

Microsystem: the immediate environment of the child including home, school, and classroom (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

Morphology: the study of components of words such as prefixes and suffixes.

Neoliberalism: political and economic practices that promote capitalism, privatisation, deregulation and free market operation rather than government spending.

Norm-referenced assessment: compares student achievement to their peers, as opposed to criterion-referenced assessments that are measured against a set of criteria.

Pedagogy, Dyslexia: a dyslexia pedagogy is an approach to literacy teaching that considers the rights and needs of all students, including those with dyslexia.

Phonics-based approach: a pedagogical approach that explicitly teaches the relationship between letters and sounds, with application for reading and spelling. The term phonics-based approach may imply the use of a phonics program, although the concept embeds subjectivity through teacher self-identification.

Phonology: a branch of linguistics concerned with the systematic organisation of sounds within a language and the rules that are used to convey meaning.

Post-humanism: the view that contemporary society is entering a stage of transformation where anthropologic assumptions and the notion of what it means to be human, are being redefined (Braidotti, 2013).

Private dyslexia organisation: a private business or organisation offering dyslexia assessment, support, teacher training or other services.

Prep: A term used in the state of Victoria, Australia, for students in their first year of school (around age five). Also, known as the Foundation stage in the Australian National Curriculum.

Professional development: the specific instances of development (e.g., a workshop on how to teach students diagnosed with dyslexia is professional development).

Professional learning: ongoing teacher improvement. How a teacher interacts with a workshop and specific instances of development, as their practices evolve, is professional learning.

Reading difficulties: a broader term that can include students with dyslexia but without a specific diagnosis.

Reflexivity: reflection on one's own personal values, belief systems and rationales for decision making within the research.

Social Model of Disability: refers to barriers constructed by society to exclude and oppress people with disability. Dyslexia is a disability through the lens of the Social Model of Disability.

Social Relational Model of Disability: refers to disabling barriers resulting from social oppression combined with possible negative effects of living with an impairment.

Special education: denotes segregated systems for students with disability. The term is developed throughout the thesis, utilising a disability theory approach. Special education is contrasted with inclusive education ideals, although both terms are subjective.

Special school: denotes a segregated school setting for students with disability. Also known as a *specialist school*. A non-special school is a mainstream school.

Specialism/Specialist: a teacher with advanced training in, for example, mathematics or literacy, is a specialist teacher with a subject specialism. Specialist is a subjective term that can privilege groups or have a positive association with highly trained teachers.

Specific Learning Difficulty SpLD: dyslexia is known as a Specific Learning Difficulty alongside dysgraphia and dyscalculia. SpLD is an acronym for dyslexia.

Speech and language therapist: also known as a speech pathologist within the policy and practice context in the state of Victoria.

Strengths-based practice: is underpinned by assumed capabilities and self-determination. In education, it means challenging deficit perspectives, valuing student capabilities, and providing opportunities for success in the classroom and at school.

Students with dyslexia: person-first language refers to students with dyslexia (rather than dyslexic students) to acknowledge that a person comes before their disability.

Text-based literacy: involving reading and spelling rather than other literacies including digital literacy.

Transitions: when learners move from one education setting to another including preschool, primary, secondary, and post-secondary settings.

Universal design: “the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaption or specialized design. ‘Universal design’ shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed” (UN General Assembly, 2006, article 2).

Victorian education system (Australia): a system comprised of multiple stakeholders, structures and institutions for the purpose of teaching and learning. Victorian Government policy and school level interpretation of policy are major elements of the Victorian education system emphasised in this research.

Voice: the right to participate in decision making that affects self-autonomy.

List of Abbreviations

ACARA Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

ADA Australian Dyslexia Association

AUSPELD Australia Federation of SPELD Associations

BDA British Dyslexia Association

DES Dyslexia Exemplar School

DET Department of Education Victoria

DI Dyslexia International

DfE Department for Education England

DSE Disability Standards for Education (Australian Government, 2005)

EOI English Online Interview (Dyslexia Screening Assessment)

ICSEA Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage

IDA International Dyslexia Association

NAPLAN National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (Australia)

NESB Non-English Speaking Background

NDIS National Disability Insurance Scheme

PISA Programme for International Student Assessment

PSD Programme for Students with Disabilities

RTI Response to Intervention Model

SoR Science of Reading

SPELD Specific Learning Difficulties Victoria

SpLD Specific Learning Difficulty

UNCRPD United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

VIT Victorian Institute of Teaching

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

My interest in this research grew from an ethical belief that education rights underpin a socially just education system. Experiences in my teaching career prompted me to question how systemic differences between local and international contexts impacted on students. Specifically, it was teaching students with dyslexia that led to my deep reflection on policy and dilemmas in teaching practices, with my thesis focusing on policy document and teacher perspectives.

At the time of writing this thesis, there was a global focus on critical matters of social and educational inequality from *Crip Disability* Awareness Campaigns, *Black Lives Matter* and the *Me-Too* Movement. Reviews of the Australian context highlighted urgent issues of marginalisation and neglect for students with disability (Australian Government, 2020; Gonski et al., 2011). Therefore, it seemed that now was the time for examining these dyslexia policy and practice systemic matters.

In this section, I retrace chapters of my personal and academic research journey. My teaching experiences over the past 20 years led to a Masters in dyslexia which sharpened my lens on pedagogy and culminated in this PhD research, to address what I believe are significant questions in the context of an inclusive education imperative. From early graduate days through to teaching in England and the state of Victoria, Australia, then finally as a postgraduate researcher in dyslexia, these experiences have been central to interrogating my own assumptions and those embedded in systemic responses to dyslexia.

My early teaching career in Australia yielded limited practical knowledge on how to teach, support and implement inclusive pedagogy for students with dyslexia. Initial teacher education for literacy and reading instruction—conceived of rich literacy experiences, authentic texts, and storytelling—assumed that young students could rely upon language and contextual cues to enable their reading development. Views of supporting students with reading difficulties were based on Clay’s (1994a) Reading Recovery (RR) program and theories from Clay’s (1996) PhD in psychological aspects of literacy ‘emergent reading behaviour’, although the program was not specifically designed for students with dyslexia. This background experience prompted me to unconsciously imagine a certain homogeneity, rather than diversity, among my future learners. Contemporary debates have shifted and will be discussed in the literature review (including Clay’s Reading Recovery program).

Soon after graduation, I moved to England. Teaching posts in government schools were abundant due to unfilled vacancies, particularly in special education settings. Conditions were notoriously challenging. Students’ needs were diverse, complex, and often required a broader range of support than I could have imagined.

Mainstream schools kept Special Education Needs (SEN) Registers to track students and identified the supports they required. With schools reporting in 2010 that over 20% of students were recognised as having special educational needs, it was evident that all schools had a responsibility for special education needs and this is still the case (Department for Education England, 2021). From this viewpoint and from a social justice perspective, the concept of special needs or additional needs is challenged.

In England in 2004, I accepted a position as a classroom teacher in a special school (see ‘Special Education’ in Glossary). I enjoyed teaching in the setting, with small classes where diverse student outcomes were celebrated. I learned a great deal about individualising lessons, recognising student strengths and catering to each student’s abilities. Nonetheless, I was poised to reflect on what had led the students to be at a special school, rather than attending their local mainstream school. Experience in special education deepened my consideration of the issues that segregation raises.

Years later, while teaching in a mainstream school in England, I found myself under-prepared to support students with reading difficulties and dyslexia. I recall that one of my students with a dyslexia diagnosis was unable to read the class text with the required fluency to support comprehension. Despite being creative and talented in other areas, her writing was slow, with significant spelling weaknesses. Although she was flourishing in other curriculum areas and had unique talents, she shared with me feelings of deep frustration and shame. She desperately wanted to 'fit in' with her classmates. Speaking with colleagues, they shared similar experiences of being ill-equipped to provide the necessary teaching and support for students with dyslexia.

In 2009, The English Government instigated a dyslexia reform agenda, beginning with commissioning a review, henceforth known as *The Rose Review* (Rose, 2009). The Rose Review responded to a call for evidence on best practice for dyslexia, yielding a framework to increase the capacity of teachers and principals within the school setting. For the first time, there was a consensus on how to support students with literacy difficulties and dyslexia. While there were limitations to the 214-page review (see section 2.2.2), *The Rose Review* provided a framework for teaching students with dyslexia, an issue that had historically not received due attention. The review set a sweeping agenda, including articulating best practice for dyslexia teaching in England and initiating government funding for postgraduate training in dyslexia. This funding enabled me to complete my Masters in Dyslexia Studies.

Dyslexia postgraduate programs were transformative to teaching and understanding of the rights of all students to access the curriculum. They aimed to prepare educators to critically evaluate research for teaching and assessing students with literacy difficulties. These programs explored complementary linguistic features of reading processes, challenging the efficacy of traditional literacy pedagogical approaches. I was struck by new understandings of the complex skills required for the development of text-based literacy.

On returning to teaching in the state of Victoria, Australia, I had a heightened awareness of the contrast between the education systems in Australia and in England. In 2016 the Victorian Government's (Victorian Government, 2016) dyslexia policy agenda was announced with early identification as a priority issue, a notion broadly supported by research (Buckingham, 2018; Jha, 2016; Snowling, 2013). While designed to address the issue, it was unclear how schools were enacting Victorian Government policy for dyslexia.

I therefore began to consider policy from England governing teaching and support for students with disabilities (Department for Education England, 2018) and how it might differ in the Victorian context. Specifically, I was interested in policies that frame understanding of best practice and inclusive education for students with dyslexia. These reflections became the motivation for this project.

1.2 The Puzzle

To explore opportunities for best practice and inclusion for students with dyslexia, I consider that students with dyslexia are at the centre of this research, through the lens of their teachers. My decision to focus on teachers and principals rather than individuals with lived experience of dyslexia stems from a deliberate choice to illuminate dyslexia policies and practices within the Victorian education system. My research methodology was orientated towards evaluating a systemic approach to dyslexia within the Victorian education system, an area that remains under-researched. Recognising that disability theory emphasises the value of exploring lived experiences, my research aims to highlight professional strategies and perspectives that shape support mechanisms for students with dyslexia (future studies may consider researching firsthand student perspectives).

I assume that student diversity enriches education systems and that students with dyslexia have their own strengths and abilities (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2008). Maslow's (1943) consideration that learners are entitled to belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation, gives importance to lived experience of disability within dyslexia frameworks. These realisations ground my exploration as a research puzzle. Far from being just a political problem, this research considers Gustafsson and Hagström's (2018) assertion that the status quo can be subject to uncritical acceptance. In contrast, research puzzles have the potential to increase communicability between academic paradigms.

Initially, I identified the following three research questions:

> *How is dyslexia being approached in the Victorian education system?*
> *How are students with dyslexia being included in the Victorian education system?*
> *How might dyslexia exemplar schools and practice from England further our understanding of dyslexia policy and practice?*

Like Hopman's (2017) research puzzle, along this research journey my understandings and assumptions shifted. For instance, how did I reconcile a conflict between my training in constructivist pedagogies from initial teacher education to my present research? How did I view teacher agency and autonomy within an analysis of education rights for dyslexia? Even the research questions did not fit neatly when adopting a reflective approach.

Engaging with Gustafsson and Hagström's (2018) *Why x despite y?* formula for conceptualising research puzzles, new questions emerged in response to a reflexive stance (reflexivity as reflection on one's own personal values, belief systems and rationales for decision making within the research). The question asked in the research was *why the current approach to dyslexia in the Victorian education system despite other possible approaches?* My research questions, from the outset, presented possibilities to derive policy understandings from exemplar schools and practice from England. The utilisation of disability theory expanded on my pre-conceived bounded questions by introducing human rights frameworks for dyslexia.

As Gustafsson and Hagström (2018) identify, previous neglect of a topic is not adequate justification for pursuing research questions. Rather than addressing a knowledge gap, my research is grounded in social justice in seeking education rights for students with dyslexia. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) propose that a paradigm encompasses ethics (axiology), epistemology, ontology, and methodology. Ethics asks, "How will I be as a moral person in the world?" (p. 245). They consider ethical research to be critical of social hierarchies, oppression, and exclusion, underpinned by the assumption that "the societies of the West are not unproblematically democratic and free" (p. 249).

Problematisation of policy contradictions prompted a research puzzle, to disrupt dominant paradigms. Indeed, the key topics for the thesis are embedded with contextual reflexivity, subject to redefinition over time. Reflexivity pertains to reflection on one's own personal values, belief systems and rationales for decision making within the research. As Hopman (2017) articulates, the project "aides the search for new understanding but the search does not end with [the] thesis" (p. 16).

1.3 The Research Aim

This research aimed to understand how Victorian Government policy constructs perspectives of best practice and inclusion for students with dyslexia. Its overarching aim was to influence dyslexia policy and practice at a systemic level in Victoria, considering practices that support student outcomes. Firstly, document analysis aimed to examine the Victoria Government policy context framing dyslexia pedagogy, assessment and support in order to emphasise contradictory discourses and unclear paradigms. A disability theory approach (Thomas, 2004) and Bacchi's (2009) policy problematisation model aimed to interrogate ableist assumptions that are barriers to access and inclusion. Secondly, document analysis and interviews from Dyslexia Exemplar School settings aimed to understand interpretation of dyslexia best practice for pedagogy, assessment, and support at a school level. Lastly, insights from exemplar schools and education paradigms from England, endeavoured to elicit best practice and innovate ways of addressing the intent behind Victoria's dyslexia education initiatives. The framing of this work from an educational rather than a psychological perspective, aimed to offer new insights and understandings of dyslexia teaching policy and practice.

1.4 The Context

According to Reid (2019), burgeoning neoliberalism in Australia with a focus on national curriculum testing (NAPLAN) has increased pressure to improve student literacy outcomes. Neoliberalism is a political and economic ideology that "proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade"

(Harvey, 2005, p. 2).

Interest in improving student attainment has been influenced by a perception of Australia’s declining literacy performance, based on global league tables (Thomson et al., 2019). The issue of how universal education rights might apply to students with reading difficulties and dyslexia has been largely averted. Government reviews and research have focused on teacher performativity in favour of understanding the broader systemic impact on students with disabilities (Rowe, 2005).

In social policy, Rittel and Webber (1973) originally conceived of the wicked problem as an issue that is difficult to define, embeds incomplete or contradictory knowledge, engages competing stakeholders and intersects with other issues. Articulating best practice for dyslexia may be seen as a wicked problem as it involves competing agendas from state, federal and international contexts and transcends overlapping policy domains of literacy, dyslexia and disability (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022; Australian Government, 2005; Victorian Government, 2016). Jobst (2014) argues that defining priority areas, adopting a human centred approach and the use of prototypes (exemplars) present opportunities to address complex policy issues.

The Victorian Government (2022a) employs, 50,000 teachers, and enrols 645,000 students across 15,550 Government schools. This research is relevant to these people and sites by considering best practice for teaching students with dyslexia. Reading literacy is a key indicator of life opportunities for individuals, and is connected to social participation, employment, and life chances. Therefore, the right of individuals to be included and supported in the classroom frames this research.

One way of supporting schools to enact dyslexia models might be to have exemplar schools which may serve the purpose of providing a model of best practice, aiding in networking, and sharing resources and knowledge to other local schools (Chikoko, 2007). Although the first Australian Dyslexia Exemplar

School emerged in the state of Queensland in 2012 (Learning Difficulties Australia, 2021; Robina State High School, 2022), there are barriers to identifying exemplar schools in Victoria (Marland, 2021). This situation contrasts with England where specialist dyslexia schools have existed for many decades, including the Fairley House School in London which opened in 1982 (Fairley House School, 2022).

This research took place at three co-educational government schools in Victoria. Each of these schools—one secondary and two primary schools—were selectively sampled due to their stated intent to address dyslexia. I approached each of the schools following research sampling that identified schools which referred to dyslexia on their school websites. Consent was individually negotiated with principals and teachers. Nine participants agreed to take part in the research, comprising of the principal and two specialist literacy teachers from each school. Participants represented specialist teachers with broad experience; none were considered junior teachers. My research does not report on age or gender, but notes that there were more females than males interviewed.

I initially assumed that exemplar schools were cases that merited investigation, having initiated a response to address dyslexia. They were examples of schools that publicly address dyslexia in some way. In education, case studies offer opportunities to research people and programs for their uniqueness and commonality, with a sincere interest in learning how they function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus. Case study methodology was expected to capture the particularity and complexity of a single policy case and multiple-case studies of school practice, while exploring connections to broader circumstances (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

My thesis is focused on the perceptions gleaned from teachers and policy documents. Findings were orientated towards understanding perspectives of best practice from teachers and school principals, alongside examples of policy documents for dyslexia teaching. Semi-structured interviews were directed at developing collaborative conversations with rather than about teachers.

Documents and artefacts from school settings added contextual value and trustworthiness to the research. My assumption was that teachers and principals held valuable knowledge within education systems. I do not assert that exemplar schools or special schools for dyslexia are necessarily the optimum way of providing inclusive pedagogies for students. Nonetheless, research into dyslexia exemplar schools potentially supports innovation and improvement of current policy and practice for dyslexia (see *Chapter Six*).

1.5 The Research Benefit

This research aims to explore approaches to inclusive practice, assessment, and dyslexia pedagogy in Victoria. Positioned within concepts of education rights and inclusive practice, it may have benefits for public policy in Victoria and further afield. The research aims not only to critique existing policy but also to suggest specific models for systemic change at government and school level that have implications for teaching practice. In the context of an unclear dyslexia paradigm, there may be a case for learning from international perspectives of inclusive education, which form a part of this research. Although I recognise there may be no direct advantages for participants, some may benefit from expressing views, having opportunities to reflect on their practice, gaining self-knowledge and contributing to understandings of best practice for teaching students with dyslexia. The potential for positive pedagogies with application in wider education informs a rationale for the research.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured into seven chapters – the introduction, literature review, methodology and methods, policy case study findings, school case study findings, discussion and conclusion. I introduce the background and motivation for the research before examining the key literature that frames dyslexia in the Victorian education system. The findings chapters separately address the Victorian Government policy context (as one case study) before examining findings from dyslexia exemplar schools (multiple-case studies) in the following chapter.

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter One is the background that positions me within the research. I unpack my research assumptions, present research aims, the context, research design, research benefit, a glossary of terminology and a guide for reading the thesis. I outline how my style of writing and use of personal pronoun aligns with a social constructionist ontology. I pose three research questions: (i) How is dyslexia being approached in the Victorian education system? (ii) How are students with dyslexia being included in the Victorian education system? and lastly; (iii) How might dyslexia exemplar schools and practice from England further our understanding of dyslexia policy and practice?

This chapter identifies 2016 as being a pivotal year for dyslexia reform in Victoria, with the introduction of dyslexia screening measures and heightening intent to address dyslexia. I argue that measures have been introduced without a cohesive framework for teacher professional learning, guidance, assessment, and support. Furthermore, there is a lack of research into the systematic response to dyslexia in the Victorian education system. I highlight the aims and benefit of my research; firstly, to shed light on dyslexia teaching practice in Victoria and secondly, to elicit best practice to innovate ways of addressing the intent behind Victoria's dyslexia education initiatives.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Two examines the historical and global influences that have shaped approaches to dyslexia in Victoria. I identify tensions in current research, highlighting the contested territory for dyslexia. Reflecting that dyslexia expertise is claimed across disciplines, the chapter is organised around key themes of education, psychology, medicine and disability. I explore the notion of a *Science of Reading* and review the claims of research evidence for best practice. My review of the literature highlights conflicts and tensions in methodology, evidence and conclusions that have been examined in previous studies. Highlighting gaps in existing literature, I introduce under-utilised perspectives from a disability theory approach that emphasise education rights to re-frame debates on dyslexia pedagogies. The chapter introduces new ways of viewing inclusive practice for dyslexia in Victoria.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

Chapter Three outlines the case study methodology and chosen methods to interrogate best practice and inclusion for students with dyslexia in the Victorian education system. I discuss the qualitative research paradigm grounded in social constructionism. I introduce the lens of Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and The Social Relational Model of Disability (Thomas, 2004) embedded in my theoretical framework. I outline the two types of case studies used in the research; firstly, the case study of Victorian Government education policy and secondly, multiple-case studies of three Victorian Government dyslexia exemplar schools.

This chapter introduces the rationale for the theoretical framework used in the research, underpinned by a disability theory approach, Social Constructionism and Bioecological Systems Theory. I explain how my policy analysis is influenced by Bacchi's (2009) policy problematisation and Colebatch's (2006) policy cycle. I argue a case for the usefulness of comparative policy research from the English context—not for policy borrowing per se—rather to further problematise broader dyslexia policy issues.

This chapter provides a working definition of dyslexia and highlights how my research is guided by Merriam's (1998) perspectives of design and implementation of a case study. It highlights the alignment of my methodology and methods to research questions and an ethical framework. The chapter encompasses operational definitions, methods, design of the research, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, research position and participants.

Chapter four: findings and discussion: Victorian Government policy document analysis

Chapter Four is the first of the findings chapters, where I present findings from document analysis of Victorian Government Policy (followed by *Chapter Five* which presents multiple-case studies of policy enactment at school level). I situate Victorian Government policy within the Australian policy context as evidence that government policy streams address dyslexia as a specialist area, a disability issue and a literacy issue. Findings provide a snapshot of how the state government has constructed views of dyslexia including, best practice and what is meant by inclusive education.

My analysis of Victorian Government policy considers that policy is constructed in a complex cycle—shaped by multiple stake holders—encompassing more than just the official creation of legislation and acts of parliament. Victorian Government policy encapsulates the response to parliamentary committees, government commissioned inquiries, government statements of policy intent and extends to discourse within the state education department website. This chapter excludes analysis of local policy such as school policies that are addressed in *Chapter Five*.

Chapter Five: Findings from Exemplar School Case Studies

Chapter Five presents findings from the case studies in order to gain insight into dyslexia policy enactment at school level. This chapter grapples with questions such as what is a Victorian dyslexia exemplar school? How do schools and teachers understand best practice for dyslexia? and how do exemplar schools interpret inclusive education for dyslexia? In describing these findings I highlight under-explored issues that lay the foundation for further problematisation later in the thesis.

The *Chapter Five* findings draw on multiple case-studies with fieldwork research that build on the policy findings presented in the previous chapter. Using document analysis and interview methods, the perspectives of school principals and teachers are presented as examples of policy interpretation for dyslexia. These findings illustrate how examples of policy enactment connect to the broader dyslexia and inclusion agenda in ways that may reflect or deviate from education rights under *The Disability Standards for Education* (Australian Government, 2005).

Chapter Six: Findings and Discussion

Chapter Six explores systemic relationships, making links to policy and practice in the Victorian education system, using case study exemplars to highlight systematic issues. The assumption that students with dyslexia are entitled to best practice linked to access and inclusion underpins the discussion, with bioecological systems theory and the social relational model utilised to disrupt dominant paradigms such as the medical model of disability.

Chapter Six addresses the third research question, *how might dyslexia exemplar schools and practice from England further our understanding of dyslexia policy and practice*? Here, I identify the tensions for the Victorian education system in developing a model for best practice that borrows from understandings of exemplar schools and England. I highlight four key areas where reform is required, detailing steps to advance best practice for teaching students with dyslexia. Finally, I propose a new dyslexia response model—developed from multiple systems and contexts—utilising a hybrid model with traditional assumptions disrupted.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Chapter Seven, the conclusion of the thesis, summarises the systemic response for dyslexia in Victorian Government schools, embedding new understandings from the research. I argue that issues of access and inclusion are urgent matters for students with dyslexia. Revisiting the original research questions, I reflect on the challenges for dyslexia best practice in Victoria, concluding with opportunities for innovative and inclusive responses to policy problems.

Publications and conference presentations

While my submission of this thesis for examination is by the traditional thesis route, I have presented at conferences and have had my research published during candidature. For a list of publications and conference presentations during my doctoral candidature (2017 to 2023), see Appendix A (Marland, 2018a; 2018b; 2019; 2021). The process of receiving and responding to peer review helped shape my work and deepened my reflexive questioning. Likewise, conference presentations enabled me to engage with differing standpoints and tensions within the fields of my research.

1.7 Terminology

In this section, I define terms that underpin the thesis. These terms are duplicated in the glossary section where they are only afforded a brief definition. My rationale was to ensure that definitions of terms can be easily located, rather than buried in lengthy sections.

This thesis is underpinned by a Social Constructionist philosophy (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Berger & Luckmann, 1991). As a researcher, I am the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In acknowledging that research is a situated activity, I choose to write in the first-person. The convention of using the personal pronoun allows for attribution and connection to my work (American Psychological Association, 2020).

As I have written in the person-first style, I refer to students with dyslexia—rather than *dyslexic* students—to acknowledge that a person comes before their disability (Disabled Person's Organisations Australia, 2021). I acknowledge that identity-first language is used within the social model and in countries such as England, but in contrast some people prefer identity-first language (American Psychological Association, 2020). Thomas (2004) argues that in “talking about you as a disabled person I not only perform the act of constructing who you are, I am also performing the construction of myself as normal” (p. 42).

Disability: the term *disability* has powerful sociological and legal implications. In Australia, dyslexia is categorised as a disability but excluded from disability status for funding and support (Australian Government, 1992, 2005). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN General Assembly, 2006) defines persons with disabilities to include “those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UN General Assembly, 2006, p. 4). See also, the Social Model of Disability.

Throughout the thesis, I define disability using the broader lens of the Social Model of Disability (Armstrong, 2017; Oliver, 1983), thus connecting my analysis with human rights frameworks. Wider literature on which I have drawn captures my lived experience of teaching students with a dyslexia diagnosis. Teacher experiences in pedagogy for dyslexia are under researched.

Discrimination: Within article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN General Assembly, 2006) discrimination based on *disability* means:

> any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation. (p. 4)

Dyslexia: a working definition of dyslexia for my thesis is adapted from Rose's (2009) systematic review. In the thesis students with dyslexia and students with reading difficulties are clustered together as a category, as it is impossible to differentiate the two in many contexts (including the situation of undiagnosed students).

Inclusive education: Inclusive education is a contested term (Sheehy et al., 2005), which is developed throughout the thesis in alignment with a disability theory approach (Best et al., 2018; Booth, 2018). Drawing on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (UN General Assembly, 2006) inclusive education recognises the right to full educational participation in local schools alongside peers. Key principles for inclusive education include the normalisation of disability, the movement away from deficit perspectives, and promoting access and a sense of belonging.

Special education: The term is associated with special schools, special classrooms, special teachers, and support. I argue that special denotes the segregated systems assigned to those with a disability. The term is developed throughout the thesis, utilising a disability theory approach. I argue that special education is contrasted with inclusive education ideals, although these subjective terms are not binary in nature. The blurred parameters between the two constructs are addressed in the thesis.

Specialisation/Specialist: within the thesis special (as in special education or special classrooms) implies segregated systems, as distinct from specialisation and specialist that implies enhanced teacher qualifications. A teacher with advanced qualifications in a specific subject (e.g., literacy, science, history, or maths) is a specialist teacher compared to a generalist teacher who teaches broadly across curriculum areas. The Victorian Institute of Teachers (2021) is the accreditation body for subject specialisation for Victorian Teachers. A specialist is a subjective term and can be used to privilege particular groups. See also, expertism.

Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD): is the preferred term for dyslexia in England but is used inconsistently in Victoria. It features in peak body dyslexia organisations such as SPELD Victoria (the acronym itself is subject to variability from SpLD to SPELD).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter is divided into two main perspectives: firstly, historical perspectives and secondly, contemporary perspectives. While historical views provide a lens on the origins of current research tensions, the contemporary perspectives section highlights recent developments in the fields of literacy and disability that intersect with the issue of teaching and support for students with dyslexia. By addressing the issue in two sections, I aim to highlight that modern perspectives on dyslexia teaching and support are complex, with competing research, agendas, stakeholders, and systemic influences.

Part I Historical Perspectives

Multiple seen and unseen political and global influences have shaped dyslexia policy and practice in Victoria. For many years dyslexia has been perceived as a medical deficit (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). While I reject this view, this approach contextualises historical literature and research in Part I. In examining contemporary perspectives, I introduce emerging views from research that challenge (or reinforce) deficit framing of dyslexia and present new ways of thinking about literacy, dyslexia and disability in Part II.

I acknowledge that dyslexia expertise is claimed across various research fields, and thus present research from the domains of education, psychology, disability, and medicine. I explore the contribution and limitations of each field in bringing about positive outcomes for individuals with dyslexia, identifying trends in published research while examining contested territory. Disparate perspectives underpin knowledge and research that frames dyslexia debates. I challenge assumptions from research which has both shaped literacy policy but also constructed a view of the learner.

Highlighting gaps in existing literature, I introduce under-utilised perspectives including disability theory to reframe dyslexia debates. I aim to present advancements in dyslexia policy and shine a light on issues in the field. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that dyslexia policy has traditionally been constructed within rigid professional domains rather than through a cross-disciplinary approach.

A central question for this thesis relates to the very definition of dyslexia. What is dyslexia? Is it an impairment? A learning difficulty? A disability? Does it even exist? And how might it be different from other issues experienced by literacy learners? In the previous chapter, I noted that dyslexia has been defined as a *learning difficulty*, an *impairment* and a *disability* (Snowling & Hulme, 2005). In the next sections, I summarise dyslexia research and competing paradigms to construct a working definition of dyslexia for this thesis. A definition is offered after outlining the field of literacy research known as the *Science of Reading*.

Through exploring the notion of a *Science of Reading,* I review the claims of *research evidence*, *expertise* and *best practice* for literacy teaching. My review of the literature problematises findings from previous research to unpack long-held assumptions embedded in dyslexia research. I present multi-disciplinary perspectives that might encourage new directions and understandings for policy and practice. This chapter examines understandings of person-centred approaches and inclusive practice for dyslexia that are required to meet the education rights of learners.

Noting that the use of subjective terminology is commonplace in dyslexia debates, I interrogate the use of discourse for discussing disability, such as *inclusive* and *special education*, *Disabled* and *Abled*. I draw attention to these terms as ideological constructs that signal power and belonging for students in the Victorian education system. To address the context of the research, I consider the political backdrop of governmentality, managerialism (Ball, 2016; Codd, 2005; Ozga, 2015) and ableism (Horsell, 2020).

My review highlights conflicts and tensions in methodology, evidence and conclusions that have been drawn. In highlighting assumptions in the existing literature, I reflexively connect myself to the research and introduce new ways of viewing inclusive education for dyslexia in the Victorian context.

2.1 Dyslexia: A Historical View

In this section, I take a long historical analysis of dyslexia definitions due to the tensions between medical deficit and disability perspectives of dyslexia. I trace early dyslexia research to the late 1800s, to Germany within the domains of medicine and ophthalmology (Kirby, 2018; Stein, 2018). The field of study is attributed to physician Kussmaul (1877) who conceptualised *word blindness* (German: Wortblindheit) to broadly describe the phenomenon of being unable to read words, despite having unimpeded vision (Stein, 2018; Wagner, 1973). His identification of word reading difficulties is considered foundational to the work of several German physicians and ophthalmologists who followed. Original works of early researchers including Kussmaul (1877) and Berlin (1887) were published in German, translated, and re-published by a select group of researchers in the late twentieth century (Kirby, 2018).

Shortly after Kussmaul's (1877) defined word blindness, German ophthalmologist Berlin (1887) is credited with coining the term *dyslexia*. According to Oxford University Press (n.d.) the term dyslexia originated from the Greek language for dys (meaning abnormal) + lexis (word) + ia (indicating a condition or quality) (para. 1). While Kussmaul (1877) incorrectly believed that dyslexia stemmed from ocular deficits, Berlin (1887) advanced knowledge with his proposal for previously overlooked neurological causes of dyslexia (Wagner, 1973).

Berlin (1887) conducted six case histories collected over 23 years of his patients' lives (Wagner, 1973). He built assumptions on medical pathologies of dyslexia, viewing it as a brain disease (Anderson & Meier-Hedde, 2001; Wagner, 1973). He theorised that symptoms of dyslexia may result from specific anatomical features of the brain, including impaired neurological pathways and left-hemispheric brain dominance (Anderson & Meier-Hedde, 2001). He typically researched adult patients with complex medical histories including stroke, which added to understanding of subtypes of dyslexia.

Berlin's (1887) research demonstrated that patients who had previously been able to read, can become unable to read following a neurological trauma or stroke, while visual and oral processes remain intact. This hypothesis isolated and defined unique symptoms of dyslexia, that steered away from visual deficit theories which were embedded in Kussmaul's (1877) research. Berlin's work utilised medicalised approaches, including observational studies of the brain during autopsy to observe the brain structures for faults, disease, and lesions. Kussmaul (1877). Berlin and other ophthalmologists and physicians of their time created new knowledge on dyslexia (or *word blindness*) that cemented dyslexia in a tradition of medicalised approaches.

Medical researchers from the UK, including medical officer Kerr (1896), general practitioner Pringle Morgan (1896) and ophthalmologist Hinshelwood (1896) extended the research of Kussmaul (1877) and Berlin (1887). Working independently but perhaps sharing influences, they broadened dyslexia research to include studying children, creating a distinction between dyslexia acquired in adulthood (following brain trauma or disease) and dyslexia which is congenital (Anderson & Meier-Hedde, 2001; Kirby, 2018).

Kerr's (1896) case study research was considered to precede Pringle Morgan's (1896), although his successor's work received an honour award (Anderson & Meier-Hedde, 2001). While bearing similarities to Kerr's (1896) work, Pringle Morgan's case study of a 14-year-old boy named Percy, may have become more famous than Kerr's similar case study work, due to the detailed and personalised case description (Anderson & Meier-Hedde, 2001). Prominently, Pringle Morgan (1896) published a description of a specific reading disorder in the *British Medical Journal* entitled *Congenital Word Blindness* (Pringle Morgan, 1896; Stein, 2018). When describing Percy, Pringle Morgan (1896) noted his strong mathematical skills and demonstrated intellectual capabilities. He observed that for Percy "words written or printed seem to convey no impression to his mind, and it is only after laboriously spelling them that he is able, by the sounds of the letters, to discover [them]" (1896, p. 1378).

The case studies (Hinshelwood, 1896; Kerr, 1896; Pringle Morgan, 1896) made some important contributions to dyslexia knowledge. Firstly, they introduced dyslexia as a developmental condition and offered the provocative view that a child may have reading difficulties despite having access to good educational opportunities. Secondly, the case studies found that children with dyslexia often demonstrate intellectual and academic capabilities—a view that has underpinned modern research (Gough & Tunmer, 1986)—and introduced strengths-based (competency-oriented) approaches to the debate (Tanaka et al., 2011). Lastly, the case descriptions such as those of Percy, constituted a step towards qualitative educationally based research that considers children in the context of experiences in their learning environment.

The research of Kerr (1896), Hinshelwood (1896) and Pringle Morgan (1896) raised the possibility that cognitive development and reading skills may be affected by environmental factors, including home environment and teaching instruction (Vellutino & Fletcher, 2005). Perhaps influenced by his contemporaries, physician Samuel Orton's (1925) conducted psychometric testing and research on children at an experimental clinic at Iowa State Psychopathic Hospital. Children were referred to Orton's (1925) clinic on the basis being categorised by teachers as "dull, subnormal or failing or retarded in school work" (p. 581).

Orton used the Stanford Binet IQ Test (Gale, 2003) to measure the cognitive abilities of 84 so-called *deficient students.* He found that lower reading abilities were not correlated with lower than average intelligence scores, a conclusion that supported earlier accounts of children with dyslexia, including the case of *Percy* (Pringle Morgan, 1896). The study had methodological issues including the broad participation criteria. Orton's research has been influential in demonstrating the complexity of reading processes and interrogating the interplay between biological and environmental factors for dyslexia. His proposal that reading difficulties stem from issues within the visual cortices of the brain, differed from previous visual perception theories (Orton, 1925).

Orton (1925) was a foundational researcher of phonological theories, introducing the term "strephosymbolia" to explain reading difficulties. He argued that his research revealed confusion in the ability to memorise images and a failure to associate the visual symbol with its associated concept *phonology*. Division in the research community was evident through contested terminology and theories on reading difficulties. Orton’s view perhaps highlights an early example of emerging tensions with the use of deficit terminology and causal theories:

> A strong tendency to characterize these children as “defectives”. This has, of course, been furthered by the belief of Hinshelwood and others that there is here a true focal lack of development in the brain center for visual word memories. Because of the term “defective” so constantly implies a general intelligent defect, I have consistently attempted to make use of the word disability in describing this difficulty. (p. 610)

Research into reading difficulties continued to be divided, even on the matter of whether to use the term *dyslexia* or *word blindness* (Whyte, 2020). Throughout the mid-twentieth century both terms were used until *word blindness* lost currency due to the dominance of the phonological hypothesis theory (Frith et al., 1985). Tensions prevailed over research that claimed to be aligned to scientific rigour, while other research was disparaged for unreliable findings (Seidenberg, 2019; Snowling & Hulme, 2005). To distinguish, legitimise and privilege certain research the concept of *The Science of Reading* evolved.

Part II Contemporary Perspectives

In this section, I introduce research and literature that have shaped contemporary perspectives of literacy, dyslexia and disability. I explore ‘the Science of Reading’, phonological theories of dyslexia, policy and practice from England, models of disability, dyslexia identification and support, issues of educational inequality and international systemic influences. I highlight assumptions from research which has both shaped literacy policy but also constructed a view of the learner. I introduce under-utilised perspectives including disability theory to reframe dyslexia debates. In showcasing policy and practices from England, I present exemplars of dyslexia policy and practice that frame potential for new systemic insights and tensions in Victoria, Australia.

2.2 The Science of Reading Research

The *Science of Reading* (SoR) legitimised a body of research connected to literacy pedagogy that underpins debates on dyslexia and effective literacy instruction (Seidenberg, 2013; Snowling & Hulme, 2005). Previously, the *problem* of dyslexia was simply a medical one, where neurobiological accounts implied an inevitability of learning disabilities. Research on how learners acquire reading skills placed new emphasis and accountability on those within the education system, to *empower* rather than *disable* learners. Nonetheless, the strength of the SoR research is its intent to articulate best practice and access issues for dyslexia, although this field is often distinct from inclusive education research from a disability theory standpoint.

Although accounts of the SoR have been documented since at least the 1800s (Kirby, 2018; Shanahan, 2020), only in research from the past few decades has the term been popularised (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2003; Snowling & Hulme, 2005). The SoR construct is used to support policies, instructional practices, and approaches to dyslexia intervention. The SoR is a body of research which includes “basic cognitive mechanisms of reading, the neural processes involved in reading [and] computational models of learning to read” (Shanahan, 2020, p. 235).

The SoR is often positioned through psychological and medical views of dyslexia within the positivist tradition (Comte, 2015). Positivism is linked to fact-based investigations and the view of an existence of an objective reality in human science (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Denzin and Lincoln juxtapose qualitative research with contrasting positivist methodologies, the latter being underpinned by methodological conservatism with reliance on biomedical, random, and clinical trial models. The language of the SoR claims objectivity through *evidence-based research*, such as the work of Snowling and Hulme (2005) presented through a positivist lens primarily using quantitative research design.

A significant body of SoR research favours clinical discussion of the *brain* rather than the *child* and their environment (Kussmaul, 1877). Duke and Whitburn (2020) challenge the notion that the SoR is infallible science with advanced understanding of the skills involved in learning to read, further criticising the emphasis on standardised testing. Their criticisms align with the imperative of the student at the centre of best practice, emphasising their right to accessible and inclusive education. Nonetheless, the SoR is useful to my investigation as it seeks to address barriers in the education system that restrict the right to participate on an equal basis with one's own peers. Issues stemming from the SoR are unpacked through the thesis, including the ways it may further reinforce normative assumptions about student literacy achievement.

The SoR is underpinned by research into the alphabetic principle, the idea of a predictable relationship between letters—graphemes and phonemes—sounds (Ehri, 2014). I examine the notion of a mental lexicon (akin to the brain's dictionary of learned words) and consider decoding (reading) encoding (spelling) and morphology (the study of the constituent part of words). I discuss how the Science of Reading has grappled with skilled reading in relation to a range of neurological processes including auditory, phonological, visual and verbal aspects of memory. These processes are framed by the importance of processing speed and the development of fluency and automaticity. Finally, I end the section with an overall critique of advancements in research, application to understanding of dyslexia and limitations of the research.
Herein, I identify some major contributions to the SoR field including *The Simple*

View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), connectionist models of learning to read (research using computational models), *The Dual Route Cascade Model* (Marshall & Newcombe, 1973; Pritchard et al., 2012), Seidenberg and McClelland's *Parallel Distributed Processing Model* (1989) and the *Double-deficit Hypothesis* (Wolf & Bowers, 1999). I present an overview of research into how children learn to become skilled readers, to identify research which may be useful to understand and define dyslexia.

The SoR is dominated by research of brain processing mechanisms to develop skilled reading, likening reading to computation (Snowling & Hulme, 2005). SoR research is often distanced from the child or learner and the unique ways children may interact with their learning environment (Castles & Coltheart, 1993; Pritchard et al., 2012). Certainly, this circumstance widens the division within research and education communities and adds to the likelihood of polarised positions, hostility, and debate (Snyder, 2008; The Australian College of Educators & The Centre for Independent Studies, 2018). However, Hindman (2020) challenge the assumption that SoR proponents simplify reading to a narrow set of mechanical processes and that teaching reading is highly skilled and complex work.

The body of research within the SoR provides a valuable framework—albeit incomplete—about how children learn to read. It can be viewed alongside broader empirical research on classroom practices including teaching, learning and targeted support (intervention). The SoR challenges the idea that *all* teaching practices can equally enable learners to develop skilled reading (The Australian College of Educators & The Centre for Independent Studies, 2018).

Within the SoR, it is useful to examine the contested claims and the emerging research consensus. It is widely accepted that reading comprehension skills are promoted by early exposure to texts and shared literacy experiences (Seidenberg, 2017). Debate remains contested about pedagogical approaches to reading and spelling, the role of phonics, assessment and diagnosis of dyslexia, and resources to support effective teaching.

Gough and Tunmer's (1986) conceptualised reading skills—as an interplay of decoding (D) and linguistic comprehension (C) to produce reading comprehension (RC)—through the formula D x C = RC. This theory proposes that learners can be grouped as either lacking the ability to comprehend, decode or both. Gough and Tunmer (1986) perceived that a lack of decoding skills signifies a learner with dyslexia, *not* the inability to comprehend language. Although avoiding discussion of the ultimate causes of dyslexia, they argued that the inability to decode is the “common denominator in every case of dyslexia, a deficit which could well stand as the proximal cause of the disorder” (p. 8). While the argument presented was polemic rather than based on new research evidence, it was built on their analysis of previous studies, including Chall (1967), and intended to provide a hypothesis to inform experimental studies and future research. Gough and Tunmer (1986) set a challenge to researchers to either disprove or build on their model using a scientific method.

Gough and Tunmer’s (1986) model, The Simple View of Reading, has been applied to categorise readers into distinct groups. Their theory gave rise to categories of students to distinguish *typical developing readers* from those with *dyslexia*, *hyperlexia* and *general learning difficulties.* The Simple View of Reading (Sleeman et al., 2022) describes learners with hyperlexia, who often have a dual diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2022), with reading capabilities exceeding language comprehension skills (Norbury & Nation, 2011). The Simple View of Reading provided a framework for creating learning profiles and targeted support within a holistic view of reading comprehension. The application of this theory has historically been to the detriment of equity and access (Tanaka et al., 2011), by implying that learners with general learning delays are less entitled to dyslexia support than those with a diagnosis of dyslexia. Gough and Tunmer (1986) classify non-dyslexic type struggling readers as having “garden variety reading disability” (p. 7), a definition that is a subversion of status.

The Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) has been used alongside the assumption of an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) discrepancy to theorise dyslexia. IQ discrepancy theories perceive that learners who perform better in measures of intellectual ability—while performing lower than expected in reading ability—are displaying markers of dyslexia. Within this notion, "discrepant low achievers constitute a unique group of children who are different in a number of ways to nondiscrepant low achievers" (Gresham & Vellutino, 2010, p. 194). The IQ discrepancy theory has been a cornerstone in psychological test batteries for dyslexia, where an IQ test is often administered in conjunction with tests of skills associated with reading (Ferrer et al., 2010).

Stuebing et al.'s (2002) meta-analysis of 46 studies into the classification of 'poor readers' found overlap between the IQ-discrepant and IQ-consistent poor readers, to discredit IQ discrepancies models. Similarly, research from Tanaka et al.'s (2011) MRI brain imagining studies found limited evidence to support discrepant IQ theories.

Gresham and Vellutino's (2010) correlational and hierarchal regression analysis found that IQ was not a strong predictor of reading achievement or response to intervention. Debates continue as subsets of learners are classified in the tradition of Gough and Tunmer's (1986) SVR theory. Likewise, IQ tests have remained contentious for averting the stigmatisation of learners with dyslexia, while stigmatising other learners. Tanaka et al. note that the strict application of IQ discrepancy theories "would deprive nondiscrepant children of the educational interventions that could promote their advancement in reading ability" (p. 1448).

2.2.1 Phonological Theories of Dyslexia

Despite the contested territory and debates, the late 1980s signalled the re-emerging popularity of the SoR and consensus on aspects of dyslexia (Vellutino, 1979). Shortly, after Gough and Tunmer's (1986) Simple View of Reading, psychologist Maggie Snowling (1987) published a book entitled *Dyslexia: A Cognitive Developmental Perspective*. Her work has been described as a "landmark study" that helped cement phonological theories of dyslexia (Kirby, 2019, p. 18). Snowling (1987) presented a breadth of research evidence to demonstrate that phonological difficulties inhibit phonetic decoding and encoding. In other words, learners with dyslexia have difficulty mapping the correspondence of graphemes (letters) to phonemes (sounds).

Phonological skills have been studied widely, including through tasks which require learners to manipulate sounds within words. For instance, a learner might demonstrate their phonological abilities by deleting, adding, or blending phonemes within words. Researchers, including those who embed the phonological theory of dyslexia, have found further support for wider difficulties including areas of verbal memory and verbal processing speed (Rose, 2009). While the phonological theory of dyslexia (Snowling, 1987; Vellutino, 1979) was widely accepted, broader factors are recognised as impacting on reading abilities. Wolf and Bowers (1999) support a double-deficit view of dyslexia, noting that alongside phonological difficulties are barriers to “rapid recognition and retrieval of visually presented linguistic stimuli” (p. 415).

While researchers claim the SoR allows understanding of the processes involved in becoming a skilled reader, there is widespread debate about the causes of dyslexia. Although hereditary factors are believed to play a role, it is unclear about the extent that the environment shapes the likelihood of developing dyslexia (Rose, 2009). There is consensus that learning rich environments and a supportive home environment in early childhood and primary school years are foundational for later life. A theoretical window of opportunity for a child’s developmental and life trajectory (Jha, 2016) was supported by *the Australian Temperament Project: The first thirty years* (Edwards et al., 2013) and research of over 10,000 Australian children from the *Longitudinal study of Australian children: The first decade of life* (Edwards, 2012).

Establishing dyslexia as a developmental issue (Goswami, 2011) has brought about a focus on early learning environments of the home, preschool and primary school (Buckingham et al., 2013; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Graham et al., 2020). Research has reinforced the need for high quality literacy opportunities, for early intervention, and for bridging social equity gaps present in the education system (Gonski et al., 2011). Recognition of early childhood developmental theory Vygotsky (Smagorinsky, 2011) has further highlighted the systemic issues for marginalised groups such as those from lower socio-economic groups and Indigenous children (Gonski et al., 2011).

Peer and Reid's (2016) edited text highlighted that the intersecting issues of dyslexia and English Additional Language (EAL) are under-researched. The dominance of Anglocentric curricula and pedagogies has been demonstrated in Western research contexts (Brown et al., 2015), in addition to barriers to accessing well-resourced schools (Kenway, 2013). In Australia similar issues have been demonstrated in research to suggest that learning to read in English becomes more complex for students from non-English speaking backgrounds and Indigenous students (Gutierrez et al., 2021).

Zeegers et al. (2003) argue that within the Australian context there are gaps in providing equitable and inclusive opportunities for Indigenous children. They highlight exclusionary practices in the Australian education system that disadvantage Indigenous children and propose a system that values the richness and complexity of the *mother-tongue*, noting that English may be seen as a second language that requires the establishment of frameworks for language success.

All sides of literacy debates emphasise the need to promote *reading enjoyment* as central to equitable literacy opportunities. It is widely agreed that adult-led reading promotes vocabulary development and exposure to broad linguistic styles, not always common to spoken everyday forms (e.g., rhyme, poetic, formal, play on words and alliteration) (McKenzie, 2021). A distinction between the competing views is that the proponents of SoR suggest that general exposure to books is not enough to develop competent readers. For instance, being read to by an adult is not equal to providing opportunities for a child to *practice* reading. Rather, the SoR position asserts that becoming a skilled reader is reliant on also being taught to decipher opaque orthography in the English language, including complex and irregular spelling patterns (Florit & Cain, 2011).

The SoR has advanced following neurological studies, where Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is able to detect the brain centres that are activated in the performance of certain cognitive tasks. Research from Shankweiler et al.

(2008) found shared neural structures are required for understanding spoken language and comprehension of print and speech. Researchers have consistently found that skilled reading relies on oral language competency, with evidence that reading and speech centres of the brain overlap (Seidenberg, 2019). It is the co-dependency of oral language and reading that underpins the rationale for phonics instruction. Researchers such as Seidenberg (2019) argue that skilled readers understand the relationships between print and sound.

Research has found that oral language skills (speaking *expressive* and listening *receptive*) are a strong predictor of reading and spelling ability (Snow & Clarke, 2015). Children with oral language competencies are best equipped to comprehend the words they are trying to decode. Snow (2020) suggests that the important relationship between reading skills and oral language highlights the potential to rename the SoR the *Science of Language and Reading.*

A child that starts school with good oral language skills has an advantage, although Fisher and Larkin (2018) note that evaluations of children's language can be subject to sociocultural biases. Research of Hulme and Snowling (2016) supports the need for learners to develop understanding of the alphabetic principle—alongside letter and sound knowledge—targeting skills within the domains of oral language skills together with decoding skills. These umbrella terms encompass specific competencies including linguistic conventions, pronunciation and morphology that have relevance for early years education and beyond (Bowers & Bowers, 2017).

While it can be argued that the SoR has advanced the understanding of reading processes, some have challenged the usefulness of a definition for dyslexia. Elliot and Gibbs (2008, p. 475) in their book *Does dyslexia exist?* argued that there is insufficient evidence "to justify a category of dyslexia as a subset of those who encounter reading difficulties". Most notably Elliot's later book, *The dyslexia debate,* with colleague Grigorenko (2014) argued that the lack of a stable definition for dyslexia was highly problematic in an operational sense. They were concerned about the concept of dyslexia existing on a spectrum or continuum with no clear cut-off points. They contended that the concept of dyslexia is unhelpful as it can allow a *wait and fail* situation while waiting for a diagnosis. Their views have been refuted by people with dyslexia and advocacy organisations that overwhelmingly argue for an increase in awareness, diagnosis and support (British Dyslexia Association, 2022; International Dyslexia Association, 2020; SPELD Victoria, 2022a).

As I discuss later in this chapter, the *wait and fail* argument proposed by Elliot and Grigorenko (2014) is flawed. Dyslexia research provides a clear rationale that learners who are not making adequate reading progress should advance to a tiered intervention approach prior to being formally diagnosed (Rose, 2009). While the work of Elliot and Grigorenko (2014) and Elliot and Gibbs (2008) have contributed to scholarly debate in dyslexia research, their circular debates inhibit the advancement of education rights for learners with dyslexia.

In constructing a definition for dyslexia, I acknowledge the diverse and complex spectrum of learners and cognitive abilities. Otherwise, a highly specific definition can encounter further criticism within the contested areas and restrictive parameters that exclude certain learners (Protopapas, 2019). The broadness of Rose's (2009) *Identifying and teaching children and young people with dyslexia and literacy difficulties* offers a useful model. The guide, also known as the *Rose Review* (2009), has been adopted widely and cited by dyslexia charities and advocacy groups to serve as an operational model for practice (British Dyslexia Association, 2019).

2.2.2 The Impact of the Rose Review During My Experience in England

The *Rose Review* (2009) made a major contribution to the field of dyslexia in England, with the convening of an expert advisory panel of prominent researchers and stakeholders. Its call for evidence was reported to have received 863 responses including "659 responses were from parents or carers of children with dyslexia. A further 75 from children and adults with dyslexia, and 129 were from teachers, researchers or organisations involved with tackling dyslexia and/or literacy difficulties" (2009, p. 1). The review is a rare example of consultation which includes children and adults with dyslexia, with supporting quotes to highlight their voices. It should be noted that children represent only the minority of voices when compared with parents and carers. Furthermore, children and adults were reported collectively, making it unclear about the extent to which children participated in consultation. There are further limitations to this report, particularly the lack of empowering discourses and an over-reliance on deficit terminology. Later in this chapter, I discuss the benefit of greater consultation with disability scholars and perspectives from those with lived experience of disability. Yet, if the Rose Review (2009) is judged as a practical resource for teaching within the education system, it has much to offer.

The *Rose Review* (2009) argues that:

> Despite different definitions of dyslexia, expert views very largely agree on two basic points. First, dyslexia is identifiable as a developmental difficulty of language learning and cognition. In other words, it is now widely accepted that dyslexia exists. Secondly, the long running debate about its existence should give way to building professional expertise in identifying dyslexia and developing ways to help learners overcome its effects. (p. 9)

The review (2009) constructed a *"working definition of dyslexia and its characteristics"*:

> 1. Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate word reading and spelling.
> 2. Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.
> 3. Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities
> 4. It is best thought of as a continuum, not as a distinct category, and there are not clear cut-off points
> 5. Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.
> 6. A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexic difficulties can be gained by examining how the individual responds or has responded to well-founded intervention. (p. 10)

Rose (2009) argues that the report aims to establish an evidence base to strengthen best practice in schools. There is a focus on building capacity of teachers and principals within the school setting. The 214-page document has an accessible format with large font and simplistic layout, with it being particularly useful for teachers but less accessible to young people. Using the Flesch-Kincaid readability scale (Readable, 2020), the document meets the approximate accessibility level of a college graduate. This is relevant when considering issues of voice, agency and power. Certainly, these considerations warrant a new edition of the *Rose Review,* with an accompanying suite of alternative formats including an audio version and an easy-English summary version (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016).

The Rose Review (2009) flagged the urgent need to address dyslexia teaching in England. It served as a call to action for those in the education system, emphasising the need for early identification of literacy difficulties, effective teaching practices, improvement in initial teacher training and professional learning, and the development of effective school systems (2009). The impact of the report can be measured in various ways, including the fact that the recommendations were adopted by the Department for Children Schools and Families DCSF in the United Kingdom, leading to the Government accepting and endorsing “all of Sir Jim’s recommendations and made available £10 million to support their implementation, including funding for the training of 4,000 specialist teachers” (House of Commons UK Parliament, 2009, para. 63).

2.2.3 Evidence-Based Practice in England

Findings from the National Reading Panel (2000) made a significant contribution to the evidence base for systematic explicit phonics instruction. Few longitudinal research studies have explored the efficacy of specific reading intervention programs. Brooks’ (2016) *What works for children and young people with literacy difficulties?* has been instrumental in leading critical evaluation of reading intervention programs (Rose, 2009). This guide has been revised multiple times to include a broader range of reading intervention programs, tested using randomised control trials. Brooks’ review notes that there is a greater evidence base for the characteristics of an effective reading program than findings which might endorse individual schemes.

Similarly, Kelly’s (2018) *Scoping review of the evidence base for dyslexia-friendly classroom teaching and whole school approaches,* found that dyslexia research is focused more on causation than how to address the needs of students in the classroom, hence the need for this research. Kelly’s review found that research involving students identified a number of effective practices to support literacy learning including "not being asked to read aloud in front of the class, the teacher reading key information to them, being prepared to repeat instructions, providing support materials, simplifying worksheets, and working with a partner" (p. 20). It detailed a limited number of small-scale studies to support dyslexia-friendly teaching practices that target cognitive processing issues (e.g., auditory, phonological and visual processing, and working memory). Kelly found evidence that improved curriculum access could be achieved by improving assistive technology and focusing on areas that students with dyslexia find stressful or difficult.

2.3 Dyslexia, Disablement and the Social Model

I previously highlighted the strengths of *The Rose Review* (2009), although the reliance on the *Medical Model of Disability* (Macdonald, 2019) was a weakness of the report. In this section, I introduce and interrogate three distinct ways of framing dyslexia; (1) the *Medical Model of Disability* (Areheart, 2008)*;* (2) *the Social Model of Disability* (Oliver, 1983, 1990a)*;* and (3) *the Social Relational Model of Disability* (Reindal, 2008; Thomas, 1999) and ask whether it is necessary to conceptualise dyslexia as a disability at all and the possible consequences of doing so. Arguments are introduced that connect disability theory to issues of policy, teaching practices, assessment and learning support.

My research assumes that dyslexia is a specific learning disability, although not aligned to traditional medical models of disability (Fisher & Goodley, 2007). Because the SoR has been dominated by psychologists, education research is on the margins of dominant approaches (Snowling & Hulme, 2005). As previously discussed in this chapter, the traditions of researching dyslexia through psychological experiments (including autopsy research on cadavers) has led to a dominant medical paradigm for dyslexia (Berlin, 1887). Since the post-war era, the global North and Australia have been marked by a "technocratic culture characterised by confidence in experts rather than in practising professionals (i.e., teachers and administrators). In this technocratic shift, first a technological system of reasoning emerged, and it was then replaced by a medical paradigm" (Tröhler, 2015, p. 749).

Dominant medicalised practices for disability have historically been scrutinised by disability advocacy groups including the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation UPIAS (1975). In their 1975 Policy Statement, UPIAS acknowledged that bodily or brain impairments can require medicines, intervention, treatments, and therapies. However, UPIAS reinforced the need for greater empowerment and opportunities to make informed choices. Criticisms of medical approaches stemmed from forced institutionalisation, the extraneous use of restraints, over-medicalisation, and eugenic practices (Appleman, 2018; Johnson, 2016). UPIAS asserted that social barriers were imposed on top of physical impairments. “In our view, it is only the actual impairment which we must accept; the additional and totally unnecessary problems caused by the way we are treated are essentially to be overcome and not accepted” (1975, para. 15).

The UPIAS (1975) policy framework presents alternative paradigms for viewing disability relevant for dyslexia, refocusing on societal causes of disablement. UPIAS has been credited with highlighting both impairment effects and the social barriers including exclusion and discrimination. Building on UPIAS, sociologist and disability rights advocate, Oliver, introduced *The Social Model of Disability* SMD (1983) in his book ‘Social Work with Disabled People’. Unlike UPIAS, he devoted less attention to the possible effects of bodily or brain impairments. Oliver’s social model theory has played a central role in disability scholarship, emphasising that society must change to accommodate people with a disability. In education, the social model has been applied to challenge the assumption of *special* or *additional needs* and segregated systems. Instead, barriers in the school environment are challenged when they are incompatible with the needs of all children. A social model of disability for education systems is described by Booth and Ainscow (2002) as follows:

> The use of the concept ‘barriers to learning and participation’ for the difficulties that students encounter, rather than the term ‘special educational needs’ is part of a social model of difficulties in learning and disability. It contrasts with a medical model in which difficulties in education are seen to arise from deficiencies or impairments in a child or young person. (p. 6)

The assumptions of the social and medical models of disability have relevance for my research and the rights of students with dyslexia to access the education system. The social model of disability provides a lens on ableist assumptions about disability and is under-utilised in dyslexia research. Originating from the disability rights movement, theorists challenge socially constructed views of *Normal*, *Abled* and *Disabled*. Theorists including Jolly (2009), Oliver and Barnes (2012), Shakespeare (2006), and Young (2014) emphasise the urgent need to give voice and agency to people with lived experience of disability.

The *Social Model of Disability* SMD (Oliver, 1983) is a useful construct for viewing dyslexia, there are both benefits and limitations when applied to the experience of learners. The SMD argues that there should be wider acceptance of all individuals with a disability, refocusing attention on exclusionary and negative practices. In the case of dyslexia, the SMD particularly applies to providing broad and diverse participatory opportunities for learners to express their knowledge. Inclusion therefore involves accommodations to the curriculum such as the flexibility of using multi-modes of assessment (Ashman, 2019). Broadening opportunities is an important part of inclusive education but the SMD under-emphasises the effects of *impairment,* as noted by UPIAS (1975). Similar to UPIAS (1975), dyslexia advocacy groups have argued for the right to better access to treatments and *intervention* to support difficulties with reading (Levi, 2017).

The SMD steers away from support that might be broadly seen as interventionist (such as targeted reading and spelling intervention). Instead, it suggests that impairments should be accepted as a normal part of human diversity. For instance, Armstrong (2017) who operates within a SMD framework, argues that schools should engage in activities that celebrate the differences and favours “building on strengths and using them to overcome challenges” rather than “remediating weaknesses” (2017, p. 13).

The SMD makes an important contribution to debates about disability rights, calling for institutions such as schools to be accountable for inclusion. However, it is an oversimplification of disability rights. Indeed, individuals with dyslexia have fought to have their differences recognised and valued (McKinney, 2021; Zephaniah, 2015). Reindal (2008) asserts that it is necessary to move beyond the SMD to receive full recognition of education rights. In a challenge to the views of Armstrong (2017), many individuals with dyslexia report exclusionary practices related to limited access to reading support. Far from leading to a sense of belonging, learners with dyslexia are denied agency when their education rights are overlooked (Levi, 2017).

2.3.1 The Social Relational Model of Disability

Traditional disability studies (i.e., the social model) is currently evolving and some scholars have argued for a realist disability studies movement and have applied the Social Relational Model (Macdonald, 2019; Shakespeare, 2013; Thomas, 2007) which underpins my study. The social relational model has relevance as a powerful tool for activism and is a disrupter of ableism in the education system. It is a tool for understanding *special* and *inclusive* education perspectives discussed throughout the thesis.

Moving beyond the Medical and Social Model of Disability is *the Social Relational Model of Disability SRMD* proposed by Thomas (1999, 2004). Identifying as a *medical sociologist* and *disabled feminist scholar*, Thomas (1999) introduced a conciliatory approach to theorising disability. The SRMD, revisits UPIAS' (1975) reasoning that impairment effects are worthy of attention. In relation to dyslexia, it is only possible to consider the lived experiences of people with dyslexia through the SRMD (Macdonald, 2009; Riddick & Fawcett, 2009).

The Social Relational Model of Disability SRMD recognises both the social and biological aspects of dyslexia through an interactionist approach. SRMD scholars Riddick (2001) and Macdonald (2009) have highlighted the need to recognise "neurological variations/learning styles which have been labelled as 'dyslexia' … [with] concerns over a lack of diagnosis and recognition of the condition" (p. 412) within educational contexts. Thomas (2007) argues that disability theory should place the 'disablement' of people with disability at the forefront. In addition to disabling barriers within educational contexts the realities of impairment effects for students with dyslexia need to be confronted. For instance, the SRMD focuses on social barriers and discrimination; the psychological implications of being excluded; and impairment effects which interact within a disabling environment.

According to Deacon et al. (2020) the SRMD maintains a focus on social disablement, discrimination, and disablist attitudes, whilst considering the impact of an individual's functional impairment for the purpose of navigating these issues. The SRMD utilises realist disability perspectives to enable concepts of dyslexia identification, labelling and support to be addressed.

Thomas' SRMD model (1999, 2004) has been adopted for education contexts broadly by Reindal (2008) in *A Social Relational Model of Disability: A theoretical framework for special needs education* and specifically to dyslexia by Macdonald (2009) who observed that "the social model was receiving increased criticism due to its lack of acknowledgement of the impact that impairment had on the lives of disabled people" (2019, p. 11).

Macdonald's work bears some similarities to Thomas (1999, 2004) in that he positions the SRMD as a cohesive approach, bridging the tension between two distinct medical and social paradigms. The *Social Relational Model* (Thomas, 2004) is situated within the *Social Model*, embedding a critique of social barriers, with the advantage of acknowledging the right for learning support *interventions.*

Macdonald (2019) who identified as having dyslexia, aligned himself with the SRMD after consideration of frameworks which originate from the *biosocial, biomedical, critical realist,* and *social.* Macdonald's work has evolved since his early writings. Although he was using the social model he was also arguing to bring back impairment, because people with dyslexia, experience different disabling barriers to people with other conditions, such as bipolar, hearing impairments, and cognitive impairments. It is in his later work (Macdonald and Deacon 2015; Deacon et al. 2020) that he starts applying the social relational model. His work is revisited in this chapter for its contribution to scholarship in the area of *neurodiversity*.

Thomas (2004) highlights institutionalised inequality to raise important questions surrounding disabled individuals' existential security, identity, and self-esteem and asks "who has the power, and how is it wielded? What are the decisions made, the words said, the meanings conveyed, in these networks of relationships?" (p. 41). These questions contextualise and provide insights into the field of dyslexia in the Victorian education system.

2.3.2 Dyslexia Identification and Support

The varying theoretical positions of the *Medical and Social Model,* outlined in the previous section apply to assessment and identification of dyslexia. A purely medical model and deficits-based definition can be found in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (American Psychiatric Association, 2022), used by clinical psychologists. The Victorian peak body for Dyslexia, SPELD states that "diagnoses of [dyslexia Specific Learning Difficulty SLD] are always made in accordance with the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria" (SPELD Victoria, 2022b, para. 3). The DSM-5 classifies dyslexia as a specific learning disorder—marked by a subset of poor skills associated with reading, writing, spelling, and comprehension—with descriptions of deficits, impairment and limited capabilities (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Disability theory (Oliver, 1983; Thomas, 1999, 2004) views the learner through a contrasting lens.

Dyslexia diagnostic assessment involves psychological assessment batteries and underlying abilities as indicators of dyslexia. An assessment battery might include the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT-III) (Pearson, 2009) designed to test early reading skills, reading comprehension, word reading, pseudo-word (made up words) decoding, oral reading fluency, listening comprehension, spelling, sentence composition and alphabet fluency. Psychologists have discretion to test other skills such as rapid automatic naming and tests of verbal and auditory memory (Pearson, 2009). SPELD the peak body dyslexia organisation in Victoria, explains that "a full combined diagnostic assessment tends to take between 5-6 hours to complete on the day, with a written report being prepared afterward" (SPELD Victoria, 2022b, para. 3).

Dyslexia assessment can yield valuable information for teaching and support if orientated towards identifying learning priorities and learning goals to develop individual education plans. Alternatively, the medical model tends to negatively frame learning needs in ways that can be limiting to learners. A psychological assessment may discuss a learner in terms of poor abilities, deficits, disorders, co-morbidities, and low IQ (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015; Snowling & Melby-Lervåg, 2016). Education and psychology are not necessarily pitted against each other—as reporting can vary between professionals—with scope on both sides to employ deficit or strengths-based reporting styles (Billington & Goodley, 2020).

Considering the tensions between medical and social perspectives of disability, I acknowledge the recent development of the neurodiversity movement and its relationship to dyslexia (Rappolt-Schlichtmann et al., 2018). The neurodiversity movement has a prominent global following and has arisen in counter response to deficit and pathological perspectives of disability (Macdonald, 2019). Macdonald argues that from a neurodiversity perspective, dyslexia is a neurological difference or a learning variation like a biological typology. Macdonald highlights an area of significant debate originates from the neurodiversity perspective that rejects the concepts of 'disability' and 'impairment' (concepts used within disability theory to challenge oppressive practices, exclusion and social barriers).

Haegle and Hodge (2016) suggest medicalised approaches including dyslexia assessment can be problematic for interpretation in education settings. If the purpose of a dyslexia assessment is to provide access to appropriate teaching and support, assessors become the gatekeepers, with powers to include or exclude. In effect, there is a systemic disconnection of the medicalised and privatised spheres where psychologists conduct their business outside the learner environment of school and classroom (Marland, 2018b). Slee (2011) argues that rather than access for all, education systems are designed to exclude, in ways that spurned the original UPIAS statement (1975), the SMD

(1983) and the SRMD (Thomas, 1999, 2004).

In the next section, I explore major contributions to dyslexia research, theory and practice from an international context. Within the international landscape, I highlight the significant role of the *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development* (OECD) through the administration of the *Programme of International Student Achievement PISA* (Schleicher, 2019). I draw on international influence from outside the government sector, before narrowing my focus to England. The emphasis on England as a comparative example aligns to socio-historical events and reform agendas relating to dyslexia (in *Chapter One*, I described my role in teaching learners with dyslexia in England under such reforms).

2.4 Comparative Education and the International Context

Comparative education is its own specialist discipline—with opportunities for borrowing policy and problematisation— and has its theoretical assumptions (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014). The field of international comparative study is gaining momentum as researchers engage in critical policy analysis, with policy transfer and policy borrowing a growing phenomenon (Comparative International Education Society, 2021; Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014). Comparative education offers valuable practice exemplars to inform emerging ideas and innovation in education. If dyslexia is framed by education rights and equity, policy must align to the same ethical assumptions (Norwich, 2010). Therefore, policy examples from England offer not just exemplars but opportunities to problematise existing models.

Policy problematisation is discussed in *Chapter Three* with reference to the work of Bacchi's policy analysis framework *What's the Problem Represented to be?* (WPR) (2009). The WPR analysis framework aligns to social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) to unpack discourses and identify exclusionary paradigms. Through the WPR (2009) it is possible to view policy assumptions to suggest that normality and disability are imagined concepts of the social world.

Ball (2012) is a key contributor to theorising *policy problems* with an emphasis on England and comparative education. Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014) point to fallibility in policy borrowing, through a descriptive metaphor of picking plants from a garden and expecting to create a new living garden elsewhere from only those elements. In contrast, Colebatch (2006) and Althaus et al. (2020) explore the *policy process* in Australia, with its own unique complexities and challenges to systemic reform. Critical reflections and problematisation of policy (Gale, 2001; Lingard, 2010; Lingard & Gale, 2010) are offered throughout the thesis to provide new insights for teaching students with dyslexia in the Victorian education system.

2.4.1 The Example of Dyslexia Reform in England

Education reform in England offers a comparative example of policy implementation (Bray et al., 2014; Chong & Graham, 2013; Norwich, 2010). As described in *Chapter One*, the English Government has embarked on significant reforms for dyslexia and special education over the past few decades (House of Commons UK Parliament, 2009; Rose, 2009). English reforms demonstrate a coordinated systematic approach embedded in legislative frameworks, presenting opportunities for comparisons with the Victorian context (Bernardes et al., 2015). The *Special Education Needs Code of Practice 0-25 UK Statutory Guidance 2015* (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015) is a pinnacle policy document for education rights and special education provision, offering new possibilities for policy problematisation. To mediate gaps in local research, the English context demonstrates examples of policy guidance and research scholarship on dyslexia and inclusive practice.

The English reform example provides valuable opportunities for understanding a comparative education paradigm. Empirical research has aimed to understand how students with dyslexia are provided inclusive opportunity in schools, curriculum adaptation and policy conditions that provide access to learning. The English context offers examples of research similarly framed to my research—from an education rather than psychological perspective—drawing on qualitative methodologies including interviews with teachers (or parents and students) to learn from their experiences. For instance, research has focused on the prevalence of the so-called dyslexia-friendly school in England (Norwich et al., 2005; Riddick, 2006). Coffield (2008) examined dyslexia-friendly primary schools, included examples of student voice. Of special interest to my research are rare examples of dyslexia research examining secondary school practice (Blunkett, 2001; Griffiths & Kelly, 2018).

More broadly, research from England has problematised inclusive and special education systems within the context of formalised special education frameworks (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015). In 2002, Booth and Ainscow devised the *Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools*, a tool that remains instrumental for schools in England to monitor and evaluate inclusive practices. Research from England has addressed issues with teacher professional roles and responsibilities for inclusion, illuminating tensions with the administration of specialist student support (Cole, 2005; Mackenzie, 2007; Webster et al., 2015). It has reviewed pedagogical approaches for inclusion of students with disabilities (or so-called special needs) within mainstream classrooms (Rix et al., 2009).

This research draws on Rose's (2009) report, *Identifying and teaching children and young people with dyslexia and literacy difficulties.* An operational definition of dyslexia aligns with a "specific disability" (p. 24)—a term that connects to human rights frameworks—and is adopted by researchers with lived experience of dyslexia (Macdonald, 2009; Riddick & Fawcett, 2009). My research places greater emphasis on the social construction of disability than Rose (2009) although aligning to Rose's key assumptions that (1) dyslexia is a disability; (2) there is a best practice for literacy teaching and supporting students with dyslexia; and (3) that being taught to read is a fundamental education right. In the following sections a rationale is provided for these views.

2.4.2 International Comparative Studies, the OECD and PISA

International comparative studies on dyslexia are rare. One example by Mather et al. (2020) aimed to provide a review of the "global picture of the services and opportunities available for individuals with dyslexia" (p. 1). Using internet-based research they presented a snapshot of examples of the broad range of services, assessment practices, interventions, and attitudes regarding dyslexia for 195 countries. The review was limited to researching data published online and sampled only the first two pages of *search results* for each country. The researchers noted examples of dyslexia knowledge being monopolised in capitalist marketplaces and the internet.

This study (Mather et al., 2020) shed light on broad global responses to dyslexia and suggested that variability in dyslexia services and opportunities were influenced by factors that included culture, orthography and language. The research identified that Australian national and local dyslexia practices may be traced back to the influence of international dyslexia organisations with specific paradigms and ideologies such as The Australian Dyslexia Association (ADA) and the MultiLit (Making Up Lost Time in Literacy) system.

Australia as a member of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), has a tradition of comparatively high rates of literacy (Thomson et al., 2019) although it may have fallen behind in measures of reading ability (Ferrari, 2014; Rowe, 2005). It has been assumed that if dyslexia support improves, PISA results may be positively affected (Sim et al., 2015). The OECD are a significant global authority with a systemic connection to perspectives on literacy practice and dyslexia in Australia.

Australia is a participant in the OECD's *Programme for International Student Assessment PISA* (Thomson et al., 2019), a study that makes international comparisons of student performance in the aspects of the following key areas: *reading literacy (reading abilities)*, *mathematical literacy* and *scientific literacy*. Since 2000, the OECD has published its findings triennially (OECD, 2001). They provide a powerful reflection of *successes* and *failures* within national and state education systems. Ball's (2008) *The Education Debate* highlights the dubious relationship of the OECD to neoliberal capitalist organisations and quotes from the opening passage of a non-governmental organisation article "if the World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank are the body of globalisation's dark side, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is its head" (Flying Fish, 2000, para. 2).

Thomson et al. (2019) note that the 2018 PISA study examined data from a randomised sample of 14,273 Australian 15-year-old students. Within the sample, 2,492 students were from Victorian schools with 56% from government schools, and the remaining 44% from Catholic and Independent schools (Thomson et al., 2019, p. 2). The PISA study highlighted achievement patterns based on gender, socioeconomics, and demographical location. The 2018 data suggested that female students performed at a higher level than males in reading literacy (with a 32-point difference in mean score) equivalent to around one year of schooling (Thomson et al., 2019, p. 14). Measures of reading literacy suggest students from metropolitan schools achieve higher scores than those in provincial and remote schools (Thomson et al., 2019, p. 16).

The 2018 PISA study found that 59% of the Australian students sampled performed at *the National Proficient Standard NPS* compared with the OECD average of 54%. In Victoria 62% achieved the NPS—three percent more than the national average. Conversely, comparisons of literacy standards in China—where 80% of students achieved the NPS (Thomson et al., 2019, p. 37)—have been used to imply that Australian students are underachieving. The data revealed declining reading literacy rates in Australia since PISA’s first published data (OECD, 2001). The 2018 PISA study identified that *low achievement* in reading literacy was up 7% in Australia from the original study (Thomson et al., 2019, p. 7) and an overall decline in *reading literacy* at the NPS over the same period.

2.4.3 Educational Inequality

Data from the 2018 PISA study demonstrated that over ten million students represented by the study “were not able to complete even the most basic reading tasks — and these were 15 year-olds living in the 79 high‒ and middle‒income countries that participated in the test” (Schleicher, 2019, p. 5). The PISA study highlights widespread inequality both within Australia and at a global level, although data is often represented without qualitative analysis of intersectional issues and barriers to access and inclusion.

The 2018 PISA study highlighted the persistent achievement gap for Indigenous students who ranked lower than *non-Indigenous* students in all assessment domains. In reading literacy, the difference was equivalent to over two years of schooling (Thomson et al., 2019, p. 20). Hunter (1999) argues that Australia continues to be a divided nation, with ongoing systems that marginalise Indigenous people, and suggests that disadvantage is linked to broad systemic concerns, implying that Australian social systems (including education) are built upon cultural bias. Similarly, Zeegers et al. (2003) argue that our schools are conceived on white ideologies and power, to endorse the subversion of knowledge, wisdom, and culture of those who have been *othered*.

Bunda et al. (2012) argue from the standpoint of an Australian Indigenous Ngugi/Wakka Wakka woman that decolonising education entails a complete re-imagining of education and power (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). To ensure that Indigenous Perspectives are not erased from research and decision making, efforts must go beyond *whitestreaming* equity (Bunda & Phillips, 2018; Bunda et al., 2012). International research favours Indigenous co-design and collaboration to promote enhanced community capacity, connection to culture, identification of strengths and sustainability (Hudson & Vodden, 2020, p. 1). Gunstone (2012) asserts that Australia must “acknowledge the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations, recognising Indigenous self-determination” (p. 82). Indigenous people should be represented as teachers, story tellers, and artists and share in authentic reflections of culture embedded throughout the education system (Zeegers et al., 2003).

Hence, researchers have highlighted several issues, from an ‘Anglocentric curricula’ to a lack of knowledge about the possible interplay between dyslexia and young people who are culturally and linguistically diverse. The literature points to a lack of clarity around what dyslexia is, how to recognise a young person with dyslexia and how to support them. These broad gaps in knowledge might be feeding into the educational divide.

Scholars interested in social justice and education rights criticise PISA’s practice of providing league tables for negatively impacting on democratic and inclusive education, and discouraging schools from enrolling students with a disability or those who are marginalised (Slee, 2013; Teather & Hillman, 2017). Although possible to observe patterns of inequality through PISA, Duke and Whitburn (2020) argue that performative testing regimes are driven by ableist cultures intent on standardising rather than reforming education. In turn, governments interpret achievement gaps less in terms of inequalities for marginalised groups of students (Gonski et al., 2011) and more in terms of *productivity problems*.

Benchmarking Australia’s performance in reading against countries such as Finland and China, represents teacher performativity (Codd, 2005) rather than highlighting systemic gaps and inequalities (Ball, 2008; Sellar & Lingard, 2013). Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow (2018) argue that cross-cultural comparisons can be over-simplistic, ignoring socio-cultural factors such as workforce participation, gender equity and access to early childhood education. Buckingham (2012) suggests that reading in English is more complex than languages such as Finnish in terms of orthography, syllabic structure, and morphology.

Although other major studies compare student academic performance, the “PISA results are anxiously awaited by governments, education ministers, and the editorial boards of newspapers, and are cited authoritatively in countless policy reports” (Andrews et al., 2014, para. 1). Another international study, the *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (*PIRLS) 2016* (Mullis et al., 2017), used a smaller research sample and focused on primary school rather than secondary school students. Compared with *PISA 2018* (Schleicher, 2019)—that examined the results of 14,273 students aged 15 years—the *PIRLS 2016* examined the results of 6,341 year four students (Thomson et al., 2017, p. viii).

PIRLS’ goal is to provide “the best policy-relevant information about how to improve teaching and learning and to help young students become accomplished and self-sufficient readers, by assisting countries to monitor and evaluate their teaching of reading across time” (Thomson et al., 2017, p. viii). The methods used in the study describe practices that erase students with disabilities including dyslexia from the data set.

2.4.4 International Systems and Dyslexia Organisations

In this section I introduce international stakeholder organisations and their contributions to dyslexia debates, exploring the role of the United Nations and specific dyslexia organisations from an international perspective. Firstly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities UNCRPD (UN General Assembly, 2006) is a negotiated treaty for the purposes of implementing and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. The 50 articles within the UNCRPD (UN General Assembly, 2006) contribute to wider human rights perspectives, although it is Article 24 that outlines rights within education. It states that:

> State parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to … the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity.

The UNCRPD (UN General Assembly, 2006) is sufficiently broad to align to the values inherent in Oliver’s (1983) *Social Model of Disability SMD* and Thomas’ *Social Relational Model of Disability* SR (1999, 2004) introduced earlier in the chapter. Both models place the onus on society to remove social barriers and further discredit the traditional and medical models of disability. Australia, is a signatory to the convention (2006), implying at least a theoretical obligation to align with the frameworks.

Article 24 (UN General Assembly, 2006) places obligations on education systems including government, principals and teachers to remove disabling barriers within schools. In summary, some of the most poignant phrases contained within Article 24 (UN General Assembly, 2006) include the right to participate in education “on an equal basis with others” and the right to access education and support “in the communities in which they live”. The UNCRPD advocates for inclusion not segregation. In addition, Article 24. *Education* (UN General Assembly, 2006) affirms the right to:

> (c) Reasonable accommodation of the individual’s requirements is provided; (d) Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education; (e) Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion. (p. 17)

The UNCRPD (UN General Assembly, 2006) provides detail to support the framework. Article 24 proposes that *reasonable accommodations* should be in place to enable access for students with disabilities. For instance, “training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative techniques and materials to support person with disabilities” (UN General Assembly, 2006, p. 17). However, statements can contain the caveat term reasonable accommodation. Poed and Keen’s (2009) research using forensic linguistic analysis of discrimination cases, found inconsistent interpretation of the term “reasonable accommodations” in education settings.

In choosing to highlight the role of major international organisations such as the *International Dyslexia Association (IDA)* and *The British Dyslexia Association (BDA)*, I recognise dyslexia as both a public and a private issue, occupying the realm of non-government organisations and business. This exploration re-contextualises the school environment within a wider global context, as argued by Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994).

Colebatch’s (2006) *Beyond the policy cycle: The policy process in Australia* (2006) argues that the influence of multiple stakeholders in public sector policies has been underestimated. “As the owners of community knowledge, indeed experts on their sphere of interest, NGOs have a long history of providing critical knowledge and evidence to government concerning social conditions” (p. 29).This account of the policy-making process challenges the assumption of government led authoritative power. Instead, the paradigm provides a lens on interactions between government and key actors who influence public debate, social justice outcomes, advocacy, and action. Indeed, Colebatch’s perspectives are important in considering the Australian policy context for dyslexia, particularly in highlighting unseen political *actors and actions.* He warns that policy modelling must be free from goal confusion, implementation problems, inconsistent rationale, and misalignment of government instruments.

Internationally, *The British Dyslexia Association* (BDA) has wide scope and influence (Rose, 2009)—with a focus on systemic issues and policy matters—and is an example of NGO influence as described by Colebatch (2006). Established as a charity in 1972, the BDA claims to have 62 affiliated organisations within its network (British Dyslexia Association, 2012, p. 8). It has a lobbyist agenda for change, with a mandate for disseminating research, providing advice on best practice, and advocating for people with dyslexia (British Dyslexia Association, 2012, 2022). Responsible for producing a host of free resources and *accessible* publications, researchers (Mather et al., 2020) have identified the BDA to be the most notable dyslexia organisation in the UK (including England), reinforced by social media presence. It claims to be the voice of people with dyslexia, with an agenda to “influence government and other institutions to promote a dyslexia friendly society that enables dyslexic people of all ages to reach their full potential” (British Dyslexia Association, 2022, para. 1).

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) is self-described as “the oldest organization dedicated to the study and treatment of dyslexia” (International Dyslexia Association, 2020, para. 1) and “an international organization that supports education and research on behalf of people who learn differently” (International Dyslexia Association, 2021, para. 1). It was founded in the 1920s with direct connection to the Samuel Orton (1925), mentioned earlier in this chapter, a psychologist and Science of Reading pioneer.

The reach of the IDA is demonstrated through a web of global partnerships and accreditation networks (International Dyslexia Association, 2021; Mather et al., 2020). Offering education resources, webinars, conferences, and certified courses, it can be assumed that the IDA and partners (2021) are *key players* in the *Australian policy cycle* described by Colebatch (2006). Based in the USA, the IDA lists its Australian global partners as the Australian Dyslexia Association (ADA) and Australian Federation of SPELD Associations (AUSPELD) who support IDA’s worldwide mission (International Dyslexia Association, 2021). The influence of the ADA in Australia is described in the next section.

2.5 The Australian and Victorian Literacy Context

Snyder’s (2008) *The literacy wars: Why teaching children to read and write is a battleground in Australia,* is an influential text that explored the politicisation of literacy practices in Australia. Using the metaphor of war, Snyder highlighted the role of the press in shaping the public agenda and literacy debate in Australia. The book argued that the popular press has historically attacked teachers and distorted issues surrounding literacy teaching for political gain. Contending that the literacy wars have repercussions for policy decisions and funding, it critiques neoliberal conservatism in the scholarly tradition of Ball (2012). While making an important contribution to charting Australian literacy debate, it is possible that the book added to popularising the notion of *literacy wars* within the Australian context.

Snyder’s (2008) *Literacy wars* identifies the phonic and whole language debate as a significant ongoing educational issue in Australia. While not addressing the research gap in the prevalence of specific literacy approaches or programs, it implies that the Reading Recovery program (Clay, 1985, 1994) was historically prominent before being challenged by *The National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* (Rowe, 2005).

Clay’s (1994a) Reading Recovery (RR) program has been used as an intervention for students with reading difficulties, although it was not specifically designed for students with dyslexia. The program focuses on six literacy behaviours: concepts of print, letter identification, word readings, writing vocabulary, hearing, and recording sounds in words and running records of text. Clay’s (1985) observational survey screening tool has been used to help schools determine who needs the support of Reading Recovery (1994a, 1994b), typically a 12 to 20-week intervention program.

According to Slavin et al. (2011) Reading Recovery has been used widely in Australia and across the world, a claim supported by the Reading Recovery

Council of Australia (2022). Recent research (Brooks, 2016; Chapman & Tunmer, 2016; Hammond, 2015) has challenged the efficacy of the program and its potential to support learners with dyslexia. What Works Clearinghouse (2013) fed into the *reading wars* their findings that of 202 studies evaluating the effectiveness of Reading Recovery, only three met the evidence standard to validate any positive effects for beginning readers (p. 3). Ultimately, evidence for specific intervention programs to support reading difficulties and dyslexia has tended to be limited, as demonstrated by Brooks (2007, 2016).

The Reading Recovery Council of Australia (2022) states that they have been responsive to research developments and evolving literacy theory including the "reciprocal gains of reading and writing, onset and rime, phonics, fluency, comprehension and oral language" (Marie Clay section, para. 6). Debate centres on aspects of the RR program that assume students should utilise language and contextual cues—including orthographic, visual and semantic features in texts to make predictions about words. Hence, the research perspective (Chapman & Tunmer, 2016) that the RR program is a whole language or constructivist approach to early literacy.

Although debate has centred on polarised perspectives of constructivist learning theories (whole language) and behaviourist theories (Science of Reading), theories are not delineated by one singular paradigm. For instance, both share aspects of teacher-led practices akin to behaviourism (Skinner, 1985) and the constructivist emphasis on broader language skills and reading comprehension (Bruner, 1991; Dewey, 1944; Piaget, 1976; Vygotsky, 1986).

Nonetheless, teaching approaches vary between learning theories with Cholewinski (2009) observing that constructivists claim their approaches provide authentic, transformative, student-centred, cooperative, and inquiry-based over behaviourist models of teaching reading skills. Within this debate (The Australian College of Educators & The Centre for Independent Studies, 2018), Ewing who may be viewed as a constructivist, challenges the view that "reading is a set of discrete hierarchical skills" claiming instead that reading skills are linear, although there is limited research on the interpretation of varying pedagogical approaches to support students with dyslexia in Victorian schools.

A continued emphasis on school improvement was evident in Quality *Schools, Quality Outcomes* (Australian Government, 2016b). This report provided a lens on the ideological assumptions and education priorities of the Australian Government. It argued that Australia’s future depends on developing the human capital of its population, with schooling systems driving economic growth and prosperity. Likewise, neoliberal perspectives underpin other examples of education evaluation and reform, such as the *National education evidence base Productivity Commission inquiry report: Overview and recommendations* (Australian Government, 2016a).

The Australian Government introduced the Disability Standards for Education (DSE) (Australian Government, 2005) under the Disability Discrimination Act (Australian Government, 1992) to clarify legal obligations for education and training providers and for students with a disability. The DSE is a critical policy framework for dyslexia rights in Australia. The standards reinforce the obligation to provide students with a disability “opportunities to realise their potential” (p. iii). The standards reflect the language of international human rights frameworks (UN General Assembly, 2006), reinforcing the need for teachers to make *reasonable* educational adjustments to ensure that students with a disability can participate on an equal basis with their peers. Adjustments are described in terms of modifications to the curriculum, teaching methods, accessible formats and “the provision of additional support, such as bridging or enabling courses, or the development of disability specific skills” (p. 25).

The same year as the DSE was published (Australian Government, 2005), *the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* NITL (Rowe, 2005) articulated literacy best practice. The report made recommendations for improving literacy of students in Australia, with the opening paragraphs positioning Australia’s literacy results within the OECD. In 2005, Rowe argued for explicit approaches to teaching literacy in Australia, opposing constructivist (whole language) pedagogical methods for reading instruction. Favoured for its Australian perspective, the inquiry relied on a synthesis of research evidence including the

American Report of the National Reading Panel NRP (National Reading Panel & National Institute of Child Health Human and Development, 2000). While the findings of the inquiry addressed issues of literacy best practice, they were skewed towards over-emphasising the issue of *quality teaching.* While the report did not focus on dyslexia specifically, it highlighted significant issues for literacy policy and implementing best practice, implying that teachers and initial teacher training courses were central to low standards of literacy practice, as opposed to highlighting other factors including the role of government.

In contrast to Rowe's (2005) lens on the Australian education system, *The Review of Funding for Schooling* (Gonski et al., 2011) focused on human rights imperatives and the need for social equity within education. The *Gonski Report*—as it became known—aimed to review school funding arrangements to develop a fairer system for all students. Gonski's panel recognised that the benefits of delivering equitable and inclusive education systems went beyond economic advantage to benefit individuals and communities. The panel recognised that current systems disadvantaged students with disability and those from lower socioeconomic, non-English speaking and Indigenous backgrounds. The report argued that schools should be appropriately resourced to "cater for the individual and collective needs of disadvantaged students and be empowered and enabled to use these resources effectively" (p. 111). The panel cited Auguste et al. (2010) who argued for investment to attract, develop and retain teachers, and to provide service (equity) to students of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Unlike Rowe's (2005) deficit view of teachers, the Gonski Report placed greater emphasis on positive and supportive systems for teachers.

The Gonski Report (2011) addressed disability in general terms, finding that students with disabilities faced systematic barriers and inequalities in access and inclusion. Although not focusing on dyslexia specifically, it raised key issues about the social democratic role of education in providing equitable education for all. The panel highlighted the need for strategic, systemic reform and innovation. They asserted that failing to maintain a fair and equitable education system results in long-term consequences for individuals. The report cited research from Field et al. (2007) that found “individuals that fail to acquire basic competencies early on are more likely to require additional (and potentially expensive) intervention in later years, and are also at higher risk of not attaining a Year 12 or equivalent qualification” (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 108). The report reinstated a rights-based view of the education system, where students were entitled to develop their capabilities aligned to full social participation.

Just prior to the Gonski review (2011) and specifically focusing on dyslexia in Australia, *Helping people with dyslexia: A national action agenda* (Bond et al., 2010) was published. Convened by an expert panel (including people with dyslexia), the report prompted the Australian Government to recognise some of the issues faced by people with dyslexia, although the government are yet to act on many of its recommendations. In its response, the Australian Government (n.d.) agreed to implement some of the recommendations including adopting a national working definition to promote a shared language of dyslexia. However, the government response lacked any timeframe for implementation and accountability measures, and rejected a call to fully recognise dyslexia as a disability, assigning responsibility to the state and territory governments.

In 2014, a *Policy roundtable on students with dyslexia* (Pyne, 2014b) was hosted by Education Minister Christopher Pyne on behalf of the Australian Government as a “constructive discussion around what is working in schools and what can be done better” (p. 1). The Australian Government acknowledged that as many as 10% of Australians experience dyslexia and that every Australian student was entitled to the best education possible, regardless of circumstances including disability. The Minister highlighted ways the education system could be improved to provide better support for students with dyslexia through improvements to early identification, teacher education, dyslexia-friendly schools and assessment and examination support (access to technology). However, he reinforced the need for school leaders to retain school autonomy and make decisions on professional learning and interventions for dyslexia. Although the roundtable included a declaration of the Australian Government’s commitment to dyslexia reform, the process for reviewing this agenda was only vaguely stated.

At federal and Victorian state level there is a dearth of research to suggest how schools are supporting learners with disabilities, including dyslexia. Nonetheless, national data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (ABS, 2016) revealed a trend towards education segregation in Australian schools, with increased numbers of students with disability attending special schools. However, national reporting from the ABS is less focused on the topic of educational segregation within mainstream schools. In response to the data (ABS, 2016), the Australian Government's Institute of Health and Welfare (2017) released a report *Disability in Australia: Changes over time in inclusion and participation in education* which stated that "many students had difficulties at school because of their disability" (p. 4). Hence, the Australian Government's approach has demonstrated a medical perspective, representing disability as the *problem* with less emphasis on social and systemic causation.

Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools (Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2012) identified significant oversights in educational provision for students with a disability in Victoria. The report gathered qualitative feedback from a broad range of education stakeholders—the government, independent and Catholic school sectors—through surveys, interviews, and case studies. Using a human rights lens, the report contrasted rights under human rights frameworks to the experiences reported by participants. The report was aimed at eliminating discrimination and promoting human rights in schools. It found that the rights of students with disabilities had been compromised, including the right to full participation and access to reasonable adjustments, programs designed to develop their skills, specialised services, professionals with specialist expertise and access to clear complaints procedures.

Another significant contribution to Victorian research on the inclusion of students with disability—although not dyslexia specifically—was a report from Jenkin et al. (2018), *Improving Educational Outcomes for Children with Disability in Victoria: Final Report.* The researchers acknowledged that while progress had been made, the scope of inclusive education reform required increased commitment to improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Jenkin et al. illustrated systemic issues, including the overarching challenges of implementing education policy imperatives in the context of school autonomy. They argued for a rights-based perspective to inclusive education and criticised systems of *social disablement.* More recently, Poed et al. (2020) highlighted national research into restrictive and gatekeeping practices for students with disability, maintaining that “all states and territories across Australia are failing to meet their legal and human rights obligations” (p. 11). Horsell (2020) has argued that ableist understandings of disability shape disability policy including funding initiatives.

Students’ lived experiences are often excluded from research, especially where youth and disability are intersectional issues (Commission for Children and Young People, 2021; Youth Disability Advocacy Service, 2011). The notion of a *child voice* in research—and the right participate in decision making on matters that affect them—originated from Article 12 of the *United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) (U.N. General Assembly, 1989). A select number of government inquiries have invited submissions from young people, although often children’s views are mediated through parents and gatekeepers. The Australian Productivity Commission’s (2011) Inquiry into *Disability and Support* received submissions that voiced lived experience of disability (Youth Disability Advocacy Service, 2011), although few examples focused on dyslexia specifically. Zhang’s (2015) systematic review into child voice in research found similar problems for early childhood education research in Australia and New Zealand.

Colebatch (2006) asserted that, aside from academics and government departments, non-government organisations play an influential role in the Australian policy making process. The impact of private dyslexia organisations on public policy including education policies is under-researched. The next section introduces private dyslexia organisations as stakeholders that contribute to dyslexia perspectives and systems in Victoria. Examples of private dyslexia organisations include the Australian Dyslexia Association (Australian Dyslexia Association, 2020a) and Victorian state peak bodies such as SPELD (2022a).

2.5.1 The Australian Dyslexia Association and SPELD Victoria

The *Australian Dyslexia Association* (ADA) plays a role in facilitating dyslexia services and disseminating information, adding to the dyslexia discourse. It argues that “dyslexia left unidentified and untreated in schools will disable a child’s reading, spelling and writing” (Australian Dyslexia Association, 2012, para. 6). In Australia, the *Australian Dyslexia Association* (ADA) provides accreditation to schools, using terms such as *dyslexia accredited, dyslexia aware* (Australian Dyslexia Association, 2020a) and dyslexia-friendly (Australian Dyslexia Association, 2012). The ADA (Australian Dyslexia Association, 2012) has suggested that “Australia has quite a way to go in establishing the required differentiated teaching and learning of students in mainstream schools with dyslexia” (p. 1). In establishing standards for accreditation, the ADA suggest that they should be realistic and attainable by schools, (Australian Dyslexia Association, 2012). Nonetheless the role of dyslexia peak bodies and private dyslexia organisations is complex and under-researched.

The ADA offers courses for teachers to gain an *Associate Membership with the Australian Dyslexia Association* (AMADA) accreditation (Australian Dyslexia Association, 2020b). Schools with one AMADA qualified teacher have benefited from dyslexia accreditation status. It is unclear from web-based literature how schools demonstrate the impact of the AMADA qualified teacher on whole school practices (Australian Dyslexia Association, 2012, 2020a). An overview of the ADA is available from their website, although due to their role as a training organisation, some content is not freely available. AMADA has similarities with its affiliated international partner IDA, including their preferred literacy approach based on Orton and Gillingham’s *Multisensory Structured Language* (MSL) approach (Orton, 1966; Orton & Gillingham, 1933).

SPELD Victoria as the peak body for dyslexia in Victoria plays a role in circulating dyslexia knowledge as a service provider and intermediary for parents accessing systemic support for dyslexia. Dyslexia organisations such as SPELD represent a systemic response to dyslexia in the state, alongside other stakeholders (Colebatch, 2006). The organisation aims to assist “Victorians of all ages with dyslexia and other Specific Learning Difficulties to reach their learning potential (SPELD Victoria, 2022a, para. 1). It offers diagnostic assessment services including consultations, events and workshops, advisory, advocacy, resources, research and membership services (SPELD Victoria, 2022a). The relationship between peak body organisations such as SPELD, is explored in the findings chapters of this thesis.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has explored significant contributions to knowledge on dyslexia best practice that are relevant to the Victorian Government school context. Systemic tensions arise from dyslexia competing domains of literacy, disability, medicine and psychology. Contested territory exists for dyslexia definitions, possible causes, treatments, teaching strategies and views that inform adopting systematic approaches. I have highlighted the dichotomy of special and inclusive education perspectives within the current context of neoliberalism, performativity cultures and standardisation. I presented the arguments for a less utilised paradigm that navigates between the two—the Social Relational Model of Disability. Previously, I described the global context as being in a state of *momentum* on the issue of dyslexia, yet juxtaposed by relatively few examples of research into dyslexia best practice in the Victorian context. This chapter has highlighted both the research gaps and the urgency of addressing school best practice for dyslexia in Victorian Government schools.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Methods

In this chapter I provide an account of the qualitative research methodology and my chosen methods before presenting findings in *Chapter Four* and *Chapter Five*. My research focus on policy document and teacher perspectives was guided by Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* and Merriam's (1998) earlier work, *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.*

The methodology and methods were underpinned by the overarching aim of the research—to shed light on Victorian Government policy and practice—thus representing two types of case study (a Victorian Government policy case study and multiple-case studies of three Victorian Government schools). The chapter presents the qualitative paradigm, case study methodology, sample selection, methods, data collection and storage, data analysis, trustworthiness, researcher positionality and ethics.

Specifically, the research methodology and methods are orientated towards answering research questions within research themes, as outlined in table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1

Research Questions and Themes for Multiple-Case Studies of the Victorian Education System

Research questions	Themes
1. How is dyslexia being approached in the Victorian education system?	*Teaching practices, assessment, diagnosis and learning support*
2 How are students with dyslexia being included in the Victorian education system?	*Inclusive education, learning support, student outcomes and equity*
3. How might dyslexia exemplar schools and practice from England further understanding of dyslexia policy and practice?	*Tensions with existing policy and practice exemplars. Opportunities to develop new models*

3.1 The Qualitative Paradigm

I have chosen to research issues of equity and social justice, centred within qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The intent of qualitative research is to infer deeper meaning, a nuanced process that differs from the lens of statistics and large-scale data (Walter, 2013). As discussed in *Chapter One*, my research addresses a gap in systems level research for dyslexia, concerned with issues of policy enactment at school level. I aim to produce insights into the phenomenon of the *dyslexia exemplar school*. My aims are linked to education rights, equity and social justice. Within qualitative research, a multi-method design can be utilised to “secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 7). Consistent with Denzin and Lincoln’s view of a qualitative research paradigm, my research incorporates multi-methods of data collection to add rigour, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to the inquiry.

3.1.1 Ontology and Epistemology

This qualitative research is underpinned by a *social constructionist* philosophy (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Berger & Luckmann, 1991), presupposing that knowledge is socially engineered and mediated, rather than being neutral. I recognise policy and discourses as powerful social constructs for dyslexia within a social constructionist paradigm. In turn, knowledge is politically driven with language being a central mechanism in shaping ideologies (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Social constructionism aligns with the aim of exploring the views of specialist teachers and principals in dyslexia exemplar schools, investigating issues that are political, subjective, and contextually based.

Table 3.2 (below) outlines how my research was designed with aligning ontological, epistemological and over-arching theoretical frameworks. It highlights the connection between ontology, epistemology, theoretical position, methodology and methods used in my research.

Table 3.2

Methodology and Methods Overview

Ontology	Epistemology	Theoretical position	Methodology	Methods	Sources of knowledge
What is reality?	What and how can I know reality/knowledge?	What approach can be used to acquire knowledge?	What procedure can be used to acquire knowledge?	What tools can be used to acquire knowledge?	What data can be collected?
Subjective Constructed	Social constructionism Relational	Disability theory Bioecological systems Feminist research practices	Case study methodology Comparative analysis Deductive-Inductive-Abductive (D-I-A) Approach	Document analysis Policy Semi-structured interviews	Artefacts Posters Media Newsletters Policy Interview Transcripts

Note. Based on the framework from Hay (2002).

In asking *what is reality?* (ontology), I acknowledge that it is subjective, contextual and related to one's own lens of the world. My research draws on the perspectives of Berger (1991), viewing knowledge as being situated within cultural and political contexts, questioning the existence of a singular view of reality. As described by Denzin and Lincoln (2008), "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible" (p. 4).

Through a social constructionist paradigm "knowledge must always be knowledge from a certain position" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 22). The theoretical approaches used to acquire knowledge and understanding are embedded in the research design, to guide the research at all stages, including data collection, analysis, dissemination of findings and ethical principles.

My ontological perspective, raises the epistemological question, *how can I know reality and acquire knowledge?* Social constructionism positions knowledge as being in a state of flux and influenced by personal experiences. As my research is concerned with policy document and teacher perspectives, my research paradigm signifies that perceptions are subjective realities, influenced by factors in the immediate environment and at higher systemic levels (Bronfenbrenner &

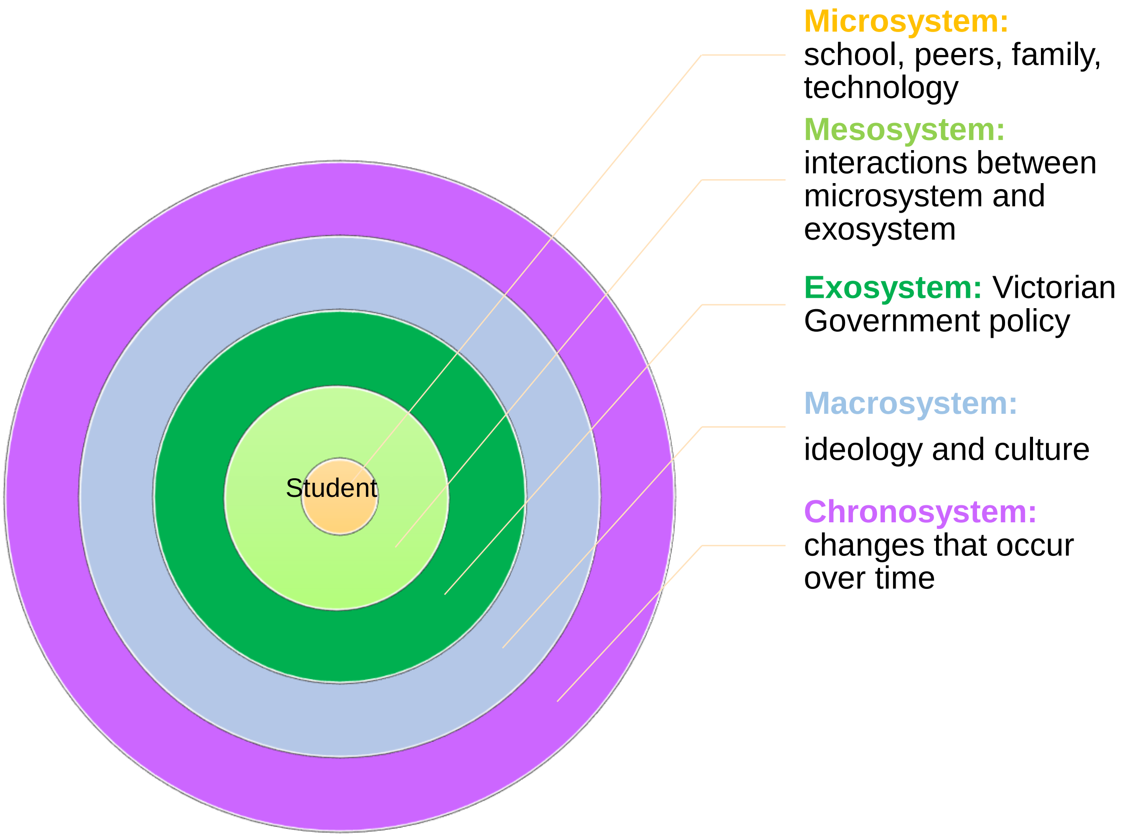
Ceci, 1994; McLeod & Chaffee, 2017).

3.1.2 Bioecological Systems Theory

Figure 3.1 (below) highlights how I have applied Bioecological Systems Theory (BEST) (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) to the research, as a lens for systemic issues impacting on the teaching of students with dyslexia. The paradigm locates the student at the centre of their environment *ecology,* surrounded by five systemic levels of developmental influence. Bioecological systems that have capacity to impact on the developing individual (student) are identified as the *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, *macrosystem* and *chronosystem*.

Figure 3.1

Dyslexia from a Bioecological Systems Perspective in the Victorian Education System


Student
Microsystem: school, peers, family, technology
Mesosystem: interactions between microsystem and exosystem
Exosystem: Victorian Government policy
Macrosystem: ideology and culture
Chronosystem: changes that occur over time

Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) provide an opportunity to explore *proximal processes* as a theoretical component of positive and rich educational experiences for children with dyslexia. Proximal processes are conceptualised as mechanisms “through which genetic potentials for *effective* psychological functioning are actualized” (p. 569), including encounters with others in the school, home and community settings. My research does not study proximal processes directly, although artefacts from the school setting (e.g., lesson plans, curriculum materials and classroom layouts) reveal aspects of teacher and learner interactions. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) posit that proximal processes can benefit child developmental outcomes with “actualization of potentials” for:

> (a) differentiated perception and response; (b) directing and controlling one’s own behaviour; (c) coping successfully under stress; (d) acquiring knowledge and skill; (e) establishing and maintaining mutually rewarding relationships; and (f) modifying and constructing one’s own physical, social, and symbolic environment. (p. 569)

According to Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) the immediate environment of the *microsystem* (home, family, peers, and school) yields significant influence on an individual’s development. Nonetheless, other systemic layers interact and collectively affect the experiences of a student (with dyslexia) in the home and school environment. The mesosystem that encompasses the connections between elements of the microsystem are dynamically linked and shaped by elements from the macrosystem. For instance, ideologies within the macrosystem—such as beliefs about dyslexia—and Victorian Government policies within the exosystem impact on factors such as parental resources and teaching practices, that may have a positive or negative impact on an individual’s development.

Bioecological systems theory further emphasises the interactions of systems beyond the child’s immediate environment (i.e., school boards, government agencies, policies, economic conditions, and attitudes) and considers bi-directional relationships between systemic structures, connecting learners to broad and dynamic systemic influence.

Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) suggest reciprocal interaction between people and their environment though the Process-Person-Context-Time element of their paradigm. From this theoretical perspective my research recognises the dynamic nature of policy and practice and the role of teachers, researchers, and students to affect change. Students are the key stakeholders in their education, as a justification for future studies that recognise their perspectives and lived experiences within the Victorian education system.

Table 3.3 (below) presents examples of how I have applied bioecological systems theory to researching dyslexia within the Victorian education system.

Table 3.3

Bioecological Systems Theory Applied to the Victorian Education System

Systems level	Bi-directional influences	Dyslexia Systems
Microsystem	The home environment Child's relationships with parents, siblings, teachers, and peers Parent's engagement with child's learning Encounters with health services	School policies Perspectives of school principals Teacher pedagogical approaches Inclusive education approaches
Mesosystem	The interactions between the child's microsystems	Considers how a student's education experiences are impacted by interactions between microsystems
Exosystem	Media School board Social services and health care Extended family and neighbours Government agencies (for education, disability and health) Parent's economic situation	Government systems for dyslexia Government media Government policy School governance Socio-economic issues for dyslexia
Macrosystem	Social attitudes and ideologies	Attitudes to dyslexia, disability, social inclusion
Chronosystem	Changes in the environment over time	Trends and changing policy and practice in education (literacy, dyslexia, and disability) School transition stages

Berger's accounts of reality and knowledge align with my qualitative research paradigm, research design, theoretical frameworks, and methods. As previously described, my research design draws on Merriam (2016) who argues that the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Likewise, Walter (2013) postulates that research in the qualitative tradition aims to “understand and interpret experiences by viewing the world through the eyes of the individuals being studied” (Walter, 2013, p. 20).

3.2 Case Study Methodology

The methodology and methods used in the research reflect Berger’s (1991) stance that “language objectifies the world, transforming the panta rhei of experience into a cohesive order. In the establishment of this order, language realizes a world, in the double sense of apprehending and producing it” (p. 173). Interviewing, discourse analysis and critical analysis seek contextualised knowledge, inviting participants to inform and co-produce these understandings. Within a qualitative social constructionist paradigm, interviewing is a craft that aligns to the social production of knowledge and social practice (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Kvale and Brinkmann argue that the *research interview* is structured and purposeful. It “goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views in everyday conversations and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach” (p. 3) to obtain specific knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon.

In the context of educational evaluation, (Merriam, 1998; Wolcott, 1992), case study reflects a desire to understand a complex social phenomenon. In this research, the phenomenon under investigation was *approaches to dyslexia in the Victorian education system*. Case study of government policy and exemplar schools presented a unique opportunity to sample rich and untapped data sources (Stake, 1995).

The two types of case study I utilised in the research, drawing on Merriam’s (1998) perspectives, recognise data as “ordinary bits and pieces of information found in the environment” and can include “concrete and measurable, or invisible and difficult measure, as in feelings” (p. 69). Merriam notes that the decision to include information as data in a research study rests with the interest and views of the researcher.

My research focused on systems level research, exploring processes, meanings and understandings, as expressed by teachers and school principals

(stakeholders) in the Victorian education system. Through case studies I targeted systemic issues of access and inclusion to explore the perspectives of government, policy-makers, school principals and specialist teachers for their role in the policy process for dyslexia (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Colebatch, 2006). Case boundaries were constructed to elicit new insights of policy and exemplar practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research targeted multiple schools for opportunities for case comparisons with multiple-case sampling increasing the trustworthiness of findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
Figure 3.2.(below) outlines how case studies were designed within two systemic levels of *exosystem* and *microsystem* through a bioecological perspective of policy and practice (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Firstly, I researched a Victorian Government policy case, sampling policy documents (representing dyslexia approaches) in the Victorian education system. Secondly, I researched multiple-case studies of policy and practice (representing dyslexia approaches) within Victorian Government dyslexia exemplar schools.

Figure 3.2

Two Types of Case study in the Research: The Victorian Government Policy Case and School Multiple-Case Studies

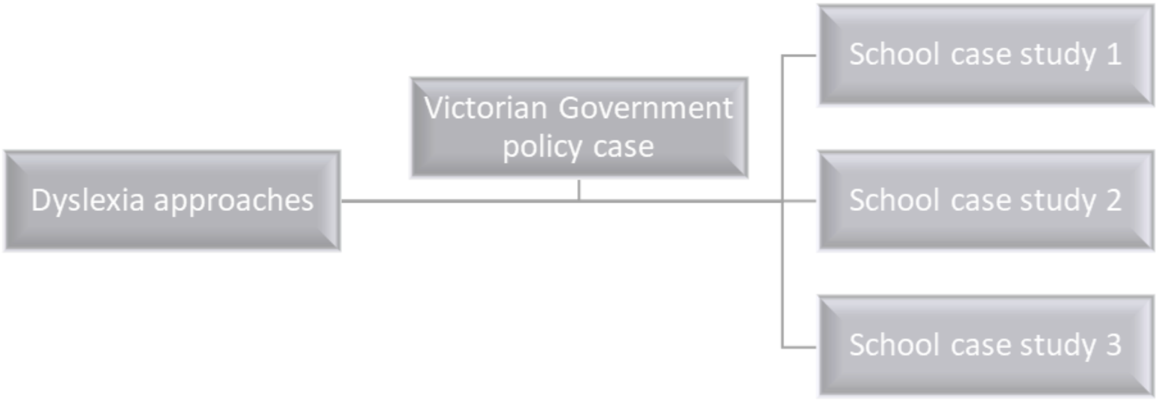


Table 3.4 (below) provides an overview of what is included and excluded in the Victorian Government policy case. The table outlines the policy documents and

government policy sources I was targeting, broad topics of interest to the Victoria Government policy case study and examples of document artefacts for sampling. I highlight the boundaries of the case, noting exclusions such as the fact that the research did not include content from social media.

Table 3.4

The Boundaries of the Victorian Government Policy Case: Documents Analysis

Sources of government policy	Broad topic	Specific focus related to area of study	Artefact: Sources of Knowledge	Not included
Victorian Government websites including The Department of Education and Training (DET)	Policy guiding systemic approaches to education	Literacy, dyslexia, learning support, disability, inclusion, and special education	Education policy intended for parents, teachers, and school leaders	Policy governing Catholic Schools and Independent Schools
Specific policies housed within these websites and government owned web-content web-documents	Examples: teaching, learning, funding, regulation allocation of resources and teacher professional learning		Policy artefacts including specific policies (typically attached in PDF or Word format) manuals, press releases, initiatives, glossaries, and images	Social Media such as Facebook Content not owned or distributed by the Victorian Government

Table 3.5. (on the following page) provides an overview of what is included and excluded in the dyslexia exemplar school multiple-case studies. The table outlines the examples of school level policies I was targeting and the thematic focus of my research interviews. It provides examples of policy and practice perspectives of interest to the dyslexia exemplar school multiple-case studies, with examples of document artefacts for sampling. I highlight the boundaries of the multiple-case studies, noting exclusions such as the fact that I did not directly research the perspectives of students or their parents.

Table 3.5

The Boundaries of Dyslexia Exemplar School Multiple-Case Studies: Interviews and Document Analysis

Examples of policy	Examples of practice described (school documents and interviews)	Examples of artefacts	Not included
School level policies relevant to those with dyslexia (key areas disability, literacy and dyslexia)	Descriptions of literacy assessment, dyslexia screening, learning support, literacy intervention	Assessment materials standardised tests, learning support programs and specialist dyslexia programs	Direct research on students
Policy guiding learning support, including funding, allocation of resources and teacher training	Descriptions of teaching pedagogy, differentiation for learners	Photographs of learning environment depicting features of learning space	Observing learning support sessions
Policy for recognising and valuing student achievement	Discourse for dyslexia, disability and inclusion	Literacy resources, curriculum materials (introduced by teachers)	Researching parental attitudes and experiences
Policy for access, inclusion, and diversity		School website and newsletter content related to inclusion, literacy, or dyslexia	Observing or interviewing students

3.2.1 Selective Sampling Techniques

Selective sampling enabled the sample population to be targeted, in alignment with the phenomenon of interest (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Robson, 2011; Simons, 2009). A small number of dyslexia exemplar schools and school professionals (school principals and specialist teachers) were identified through online sampling of school websites that stated an intent to address dyslexia. The criteria for research participation for dyslexia exemplar schools was connected to a stated intent to address dyslexia, evidenced systematically through the document analysis method and by cross-checking with the school. I assumed these schools would offer unique insights into dyslexia exemplar practices. A random sampling strategy was avoided as it would detour from eliciting knowledge of exemplar cases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Robson, 2011).

The first level of selective sampling was to identify *cases* of dyslexia exemplar schools, each representing a *case*. Selective sampling relied on establishing a participation criterion (Creswell, 2009), designed to reveal schools addressing dyslexia. The participation criteria targeted schools with emerging dyslexia systems and practices, defined as being exemplar if they met any of the following criteria:

- A stated intent to address dyslexia on the school website
- References to dyslexia on school websites
- Undertaking dyslexia training programs
- Dyslexia accreditation advertised on the school website
- Self-identified status such as “dyslexia friendly” or “dyslexia aware school”

Table 3.6 (on the following page) outlines the descriptors that I used to categorise dyslexia exemplar school practice development. Findings were orientated to understanding the establishment of pedagogical practices; all three dyslexia exemplar schools had transitioned towards exemplar practices in the last decade, with some adopting *whole school embedded practices* while others were *working towards* whole school approaches (e.g., ongoing efforts to develop teacher professional learning). Descriptors of practice development I defined as *consolidated*, *emerging,* or *variable*.

Table 3.6

Descriptors of Dyslexia Exemplar School Practice Development

Descriptors	Indicators
Consolidated	Consistently described by all participants Systematic procedures clearly articulated Practices described in interviews supported by documents and artefacts from the dyslexia exemplar school
Emerging	Early stages of becoming a dyslexia exemplar school Future actions often described alongside present actions Systematic procedures articulated by one or more participants Practices described in interviews supported by documents and artefacts from the dyslexia exemplar school Acknowledgement by participants of partial rather than implementation of whole school dyslexia approach
Variable	The school has less cohesive systems or irregularities in policies, practices, and approaches, as evidenced by participants, documents and artefacts from the setting

Table 3.7 (below) highlights search terms used to identify dyslexia exemplar schools in Victoria. The web-based search was broadened to include the above search terms after initial web-based *Google* searches using the terms "dyslexia schools Melbourne" and "dyslexia schools Victoria" produced limited results (particularly when non-Victorian and independent schools were removed from the data). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) note that computer technology offers opportunities for researchers to use data-mining procedures to extract meaning.

Table 3.7

Terms Used in Online Sampling to Identify Dyslexia Exemplar Schools

Terms:

dyslexia schools, dyslexia specialist schools, dyslexic schools, SPLD schools, Specific Learning Difficulty schools, dyslexia primary, dyslexia secondary, neurodiverse schools and inclusive schools

Through the process of online sampling, I utilised cross-checking procedures to determine if a school was or was not a dyslexia exemplar school. The first ten pages from each online search were analysed to create a list of *candidate dyslexia exemplar schools.* Searches identified school websites that mentioned dyslexia and schools who had received media attention for dyslexia practices. Schools misaligned to the research aims such as Catholic Schools, Independent schools and Pre-schools were excluded from candidate lists. I assumed that the topic of inclusion in government schools was best addressed through mainstream schools, not special schools that use segregated approaches (Slee, 2011; UN General Assembly, 2006), meaning that special schools were excluded from the sample.

Table 3.8 outlines the four categories of schools I determined were likely to be identified in the sample, with *School Type A* being the group targeted and the other school types (B-D) excluded.

Table 3.8

Selective Sampling of Schools: Included and Excluded Categories

School Type A ✓	School Type B **x**	School Type C **x**	School Type D **x**
Mainstream Victorian Government primary and secondary school *with an explicitly stated interest in dyslexia*	Mainstream Victorian Government primary and secondary school *without an explicitly stated interest in dyslexia*	Specialist or special development, segregated from mainstream schooling	Catholic Schools and Independent schools

A further stage of sampling employed a truncation technique *stemming*, using a placeholder asterisk in an internet search to include varied word endings and spellings (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2021). The search term *"site*vic.edu.au dyslexia"* was utilised to extract hidden data, based on Victorian Government schools having email and Uniform Resource Locater (URL) addresses that contain "vic.edu.au" (DET, 2022a). This technique revealed more potential dyslexia exemplar schools than a simple *Google* search and was a novel approach to sampling which made a contribution to research.

Once a school was identified as a candidate dyslexia exemplar school, the next stage involved contacting the school to confirm the accuracy of online data. This involved telephoning the school principal (or their representative) to confirm that policies and practices found online were current and reflected an intent to address dyslexia. This process eliminated several schools. Some search result (for dyslexia exemplar schools) associated with the term *dyslexia* were evaluated as non-representative of a school systems approach. For instance, some use of the term dyslexia in school websites included newsletter advertisements for private dyslexia tutors. See *Chapter Six*, findings and discussion, for elaboration.

The sampling techniques aimed to identify examples of the search term *dyslexia* being used in mainstream government schools in the following contexts:

- school mission statements
- descriptions of teaching and learning
- embedded in policy
- principals' messages
- school newsletters
- student achievement awards
- inclusive education frameworks

After initial web-based *Google* searches, the next stage was consulting with the Department of Education and Training (DET) and peak body dyslexia organisations to highlight any further dyslexia exemplar schools that may have been missed in sampling. Only a few schools were suggested, and these had been revealed through my initial sampling techniques (described above). Indeed, my sampling techniques identified new examples of a wider cohort of dyslexia exemplar schools than evident from basic internet searches and from systems-level inquiry (contact with dyslexia peak bodies and DET). See *Chapter Six*.

3.2.2 Individual Participant Selection

The second level of selective sampling involved the development of a criterion for participation. Eligibility for participation in the research relied on participants being *principals* or *specialist* teachers employed in a Victorian Government primary or secondary school. Teachers were defined by current registration with Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT, 2021). Principals were defined as being the principal or performing the role of principal in the school (as acting principal).

Principals were asked to nominate teachers with the most knowledge and responsibility for teaching and supporting students with dyslexia. It was anticipated that they may identify teachers within a learning support team, a literacy or dyslexia specialist, a literacy manager, or an inclusion manager. Conversations with principals suggested that *specialist dyslexia knowledge* was concentrated in a few selective teachers, rather than the broader staff body, reinforcing the notion of dyslexia *specialist teachers*. The views of the principal were assumed to be necessary to provide insights into the systemic approach to dyslexia and inclusion. Nonetheless, consent was negotiated with teachers to ensure voluntary consent and unobtrusive research practices.

There was flexibility to extend the total number of dyslexia exemplar schools and interview participants within the sample, contingent on there being eligible schools that met the participation criterion. As described in section 5.1, my research highlights potential limitations to researching dyslexia exemplar secondary schools. In my research sample of three schools, I evaluated the data saturation point to be reached within the model of three interviews per school (nine participant interviews).

In educational settings, gatekeepers are responsible for granting access to settings, people, and knowledge. The gatekeepers of school knowledge are the education department (DET), school boards, principals, teachers, and other less visible stakeholders in the education system (Colebatch, 2006; Creswell, 2009). Delamont (2016) argues that researchers can encounter access barriers that present opportunities to gain unique and valuable knowledge, and asserts that there are “vital lessons from failed access negotiation, probably more than from successful ones” (p. 81) and that site specific information has potential to yield knowledge about similar sites as social phenomena. Copies of correspondence and journals were kept to document these encounters as *sources of knowledge.* See *Chapter Six* where I describe knowledge gained from access negotiations.

3.2.3 Ethical Considerations of School Case Sampling

When school case sampling, I recognise that all schools are viewed as having a position whether it is made explicit or not. My analysis of schools with a stated dyslexia specialism exercised caution, noting schools may be subject to a dyslexia marketing agenda. I acknowledge that exemplar schools may be providing a particular view of dyslexia practice because of their positioning. A further consideration was that research places demands and time constraints on dyslexia exemplar schools, that requires flexibility and understanding of pressures within the school setting.

3.3 Ethical Issues of Research Participation

In this section, I present an overview of ethical issues of research participation, as the research was underpinned by the ethical principles from the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007). The NHMRC recognises the need to promote respect for human beings, research merit, integrity, justice, and beneficence. The research considered that participation could present risks and benefits for participants and was guided by the ethical principle of *non-maleficence* to avoid physical, psychological, social, economic, and/or legal harm (Sieber, 1998). In section 3.6.7, I outline additional layers of ethical consideration from a social justice perspective that values students and teachers within the Victorian education system.

A two-tiered process of research ethics approval was required before commencing the research. The first stage involved an application submitted to the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) underpinned by the principles contained in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007) and Commonwealth and Victorian state laws. Once ethics approval was received (Appendix B), I sought ethics approval from DET's *Research and*

Evaluation Branch (DET, 2015) in accordance with guidelines from *Conducting research in Victorian Government schools and early childhood settings* (DET, 2015). DET's guidelines consider the unique ethical issues and professional responsibilities connected to school settings for a wide group of stakeholders, including children.

Through a consideration of ethics associated with the research, I produced a statement of risk and benefits reflecting that the research was low risk, while acknowledging that all research involving human participants carries a degree of risk. In my research design, I mitigated risk in the planning stages by using the mechanisms of informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy (Creswell, 2009). These mechanisms were embedded at all stages of the research for sample selection, participation agreements, data collection, data analysis, storage, and dissemination of research.

Upon receiving approval from DET (2015) (Appendix C), I contacted nominated schools and sought approval to participate in the research. Principals and teachers were given separate information and consent forms, tailored to reflect their different contributions, risks and benefits to their participation in research (see Appendix D, E, F and G). Procedures were explained and opportunities provided to ask questions.

My conversations with teachers prior to school visits elicited positive responses; they were willing to share knowledge and perspectives on dyslexia. Before agreeing to participate, teachers and school principals were given a plain language statement to clarify the aims of the research, methods, potential risks, and benefits of participation (contained within the information for participants and consent forms).

Participants were advised of their right to withdraw from the research at any time, including withdrawing all data. Participation consent noted that any identifying information about participants, students or the school would not be included in resulting publications or reports. This agreement had implications for de-identification of data, discussed later in the research reporting and dissemination section.

My research considered the ethical principles of *co-collaboration*, *autonomy* and *self-determination* as being essential mechanisms of informed consent (Charlton, 2000). I acknowledge my identity as a teacher and researcher may have been a beneficial factor in access negotiations (Bridges, 2009; Delamont, 2016), alongside the positioning of schools as exemplars with unique insights to offer. However, the presence of researchers in schools can place additional burdens on teachers, principals and the school system (Creswell, 2009; DET, 2015).

3.3.1 Potential Risks and Benefits of Participation

My research was designed to value participant autonomy and to avoid obtrusion. Teachers and principals clarified their availability for interviews and school visits. Furthermore, the number of interviews was limited to three per school site, with one principal interview and two specialist teacher interviews. The research design aimed to target the key actors in each case (Simons, 2009). Schools had the option of increasing the number of school visits and the number of participant interviews. All three dyslexia exemplar principals chose to limit the interviews to three as part of the negotiated consent process.

The low risks associated with this research were managed and justified through the potential beneficence of the research and the potential to gain knowledge of inclusive policy and practice for dyslexia. While it was recognised there may be no direct benefit to the research participants, some teachers and principals might benefit from reflecting on the issue of inclusive policy and practice and sharing their knowledge and experiences. A summary of findings was shared with participating teachers, principals and DET. Teachers and principals who participated in the research were offered a seminar to showcase *good practice* and to highlight further points for development from teacher perspectives. The seminar will be conducted in 2023 as an online presentation, after the submission of my PhD thesis. Its design recognises that participant schools must remain anonymous from each other, thus separate (or recorded) seminars will be offered to avoid participants from different schools being able to identify each other.

A possible benefit of the research involved opportunities for teachers and principals to gain self-knowledge. During interviews there were occasions when participants reflected on my questions as novel questions and conversations. To this end, it may be suggested that reflective opportunities were presented for both participant and researcher. Participants may have considered their connections to broader systemic levels of policy and practice for dyslexia. Thus, participants were engaging in new forms of inquiry and emphasis on a systemic dyslexia response.

Another possible benefit for participants was the opportunity for teachers and principals to contribute their voice to a range of education stakeholders including DET, on the under-explored issue of dyslexia policy and practice. The research findings are shared with DET (2015) who “welcomes high-quality proposal for field research which are designed to contribute to its ‘learning for life’ agenda. It acknowledges the importance of research evidence which supports its priorities and informs policy development and practice” (p. 5).

3.4 Methods

Within case study methodology (Merriam, 1998), document analysis and interview methods are utilised to explore policy and practice. The exosystem policy case study explored a bounded system in the Victorian policy context using document analysis, while the microsystem case studies utilised both document analysis and interview methods. The microsystem multiple-case studies explored the phenomenon of dyslexia policy interpretation in a school setting at three Victorian Government schools.

Previously I presented an overview of the bounded systems of the Victorian Government Policy Case (table 3.4) and the bounded system school case studies (table 3.5). This section describes specific data sources and artefacts of interest in both types of case studies—the Victorian Government policy case and the school case studies—through a targeted data collection a process described by Miles and Huberman (1994).

3.4.1 Pilot Interviews

Prior to conducting the research interviews, the research questions were piloted with two of my education colleagues. Firstly, the interview was piloted with a teacher with specialist dyslexia experience and secondly with a teacher with a generalist primary teaching background. The pilot stage assisted in the refinement of questions, interview timings and tailored questions for the roles of teachers and principals. The pilot interviews provided insight into the probes needed to maintain focus and to refine questions to avoid overlapping responses. I sought feedback from participants in the pilot, to gauge their perspectives on the interview format and design. For instance, I was able to eliminate questions that elicited overlapping responses, to estimate possible interview timings, and to experiment with interview probes.

3.4.2 Interviews

The case studies included three semi-structured research interviews per school site, yielding nine interviews in total. To avoid obtrusive research practices (discussed in section 3.2.2), interviews were designed to be 45 minutes long for teachers and 30 minutes for school principals due to their time constraints and workload pressures (Heffernan et al., 2022). School sites were visited no more than twice, in negotiation with school principals and teachers. Consent was requested to follow up via email if required. Several participants emailed me in the first few weeks following the interview with additional information and documents they wished to share as part of the research.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews utilised an interview schedule with specific questions and probes (see Appendix H, *Semi-structured interview schedule for Principals and* Appendix I, *Semi-structured interview schedules for Teachers)*. Interviews were co-constructed with the research participants (Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview schedule provided a structure and focus for the interview. Questions were designed to introduce the topics and themes of the conversation with “active listening and following up answers codetermine[ing] the course of the conversation” (Kvale, 1996, p. 281).

The first stage of the interview focused on participant backgrounds, exploring their career pathways towards becoming dyslexia specialists. I was interested in gaining participant perspectives on factors that placed them in the unique position of holding a specialist role in a dyslexia exemplar school. Further interview questions probed how the participants responded to policy and systems, constructed understandings of dyslexia and how those perspectives informed practice. The research interview situated participants as *informants,* to shed light on systemic issues and to construct new knowledge of exemplar practices.

Research interviews were conducted in person and audio recorded in the dyslexia exemplar school setting. Through a process of negotiated consent, participants were offered the option to pause or stop the recording device at any time. Audio data files were transcribed using the automated encrypted software tool *Trint* (2021). Following automation, I manually checked transcripts for accuracy. All participants were invited to recheck the transcript, with the option of retracting or adding contextual data. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to protect confidentiality, and they were informed they could withdraw at any time, although none chose to do so.

Before visiting the dyslexia exemplar school setting, online document analysis was used to become familiar with the school setting and for preliminary data collection (online data collection and analysis is described later in this chapter). From this preliminary data collection, it was possible to glean information from documents such as school promotional videos, photo galleries and maps. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that before beginning research, there may be opportunities “to become familiar with the context, the people, and the activities” (p. 208) of the setting. In the research design, I considered issues of obtrusion in the setting, favouring online data gathering to gain as much background information about the school setting as possible. For instance, the MySchool website *www.myschool.edu.au* (ACARA, 2021) was used to collect demographical information as it aims to publish “nationally-consistent data about every school in Australia” (para. 3). Background information was confirmed through cross-checking during the interview, promoting rapport and familiarity, and enabling the interview to progress to a deeper level of inquiry.

My observations from case studies in the dyslexia exemplar school settings were recorded in a field work journal (Appendix J). Field notes included my impressions of the participants and the meaning I ascribed in context. While in the school setting, there were opportunities to observe teacher behaviour, body language, interactions with others, implied feelings, and reactions to happenings in the research context. Observations of students or their work were excluded from my research (see trustworthiness section). My research journal captured changes in my thinking and development of theory and understanding of the context along the way.

In addition to keeping a fieldwork journal, observations were recorded as photographs. Access to observe and take photographs was granted by school principals and by the participant in the context of the interview or observation. Observations were not always delineated from the interview. During the course of interviews, participants introduced artefacts of interest such as books, curriculum resources, planning documents, assessment tools, intervention/support materials, classroom displays, work and spaces. These artefacts were photographed during the interview or immediately afterwards. Teachers were informants with choices around how they responded to themes. For instance, visual stimulus was utilised to promote conversational exchange. Previous research has highlighted that participants can add richness to the research through sharing artefacts (Zhang, 2015) and anecdotes, or introducing visual narratives (Gilmore, 2017). For instance, participants walked me through their classrooms and identified books, resources, posters and displays, adding context to the perspectives shared in interviews.

As a form of co-collaboration, participants played a role in constructing the lens of observation. Following interviews, I provided opportunities for them to show me items in the classroom and school that illustrated *dyslexia approaches* (the phenomenon of interest). Using an open-ended invitation, I asked participants “what would you like to show me?”, encouraging a collaborative approach to the research, underpinned by Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

My role in gathering data from observations meant that I was a participant-observer (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Within this process, principals and teachers provided insight into their worldviews, experiences and perspectives

(Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Creswell, 2009). In addition, to a participant directed approach, I sought permission to observe and photograph additional items that aligned with the research aims and *dyslexia approaches,* the phenomenon of interest.

After taking photographs, I created an inventory of specific photographs for final approval from the school principal. Principals had the option to withdraw consent for specific photographs through a process of negotiated consent (see Appendix K *Photography permission supplement*). The process of general consent to photograph, followed by specific consent, was to ensure that school principals and teachers maintained a level of control of data collected. For instance, even if a principal had approved photography, the teacher could withdraw consent within their own classrooms. At all times, photography of students or their work was excluded from data collection.

3.4.3 Document Analysis

In table 3.9 (below), I outline specific examples of targeted data collection that demonstrate the focus of research inquiry. Alongside interviews, documents were a pivotal source of knowledge for the research. Merriam and Tisdell (1998) suggest that documents (artefacts) are “underused in qualitative research” (p. 124). In the previous section, I provided an overview of the data sources focusing on approaches to dyslexia in Victorian Government schools—with a bounded criteria for the two different types of case studies—for Victorian Government policy data (documents) and dyslexia exemplar school data (documents).

Table 3.9

Data Sources and Artefact Examples: From Victorian Government Policy and Multiple-Case Studies

Targeted Data Collection			
Victorian Government Policy Data *Exosystem*	Online	Multiple-Case Studies School Data *Microsystem*	Fieldwork
Policy	✓	Microsystem policy	✓
E-Resources	✓	Resources	✓
Discourse	✓	Discourse	✓
Training materials	✓	Training materials	✓
Glossaries and definitions	✓	Glossaries and definitions	✓
Research (commissioned)	✓	Research docs	✓
Curriculum documents	✓	Curriculum docs	✓
Teacher planning guides	✓	Teacher planning docs	✓
Information for parents	✓	Information for parents	✓
Assessment tools	✓	Assessment tools	✓
Images in policy	✓	Images on website	✓
Communication with DET	✓	School newsletters	✓
		Posters	✓
		Classroom displays	✓
		Participant artefacts	✓
		Interviews	✓

For Victorian Government policy, case data referred to data owned and/or disseminated on behalf of the Victorian Government and DET; for instance, an agency that performs a systemic role for DET such as Victoria Institute of Teachers (VIT, 2021), overseeing teacher compliance. The central point for Victorian Government policy data collection was the DET Victorian Government website (2022a). The DET website demonstrated examples of how learners with dyslexia were included and viewed within the education system. Alternatively, dyslexia exemplar school case studies data collection relied on online searches of exemplar school websites as a source of documents, in addition to documents from fieldwork in the school setting.

Mather et al. (2020) acknowledge the limitations of online searches including the depth of information provided, the possibility of not detecting all available data, and information on the web changing rapidly. To increase the trustworthiness of the data collection it was refreshed at monthly intervals (over the period of a year) to cross-check for new searchable data.

As described in the *Data Collection* section of this chapter, certain data sources were already available as documents, while others were translated into documents for analysis. Data collected from interviews, field observations and photographs were translated into documents and analysed. These documents were rich artefacts, providing layers of observable phenomena within the school setting. In translating them into documents, attention was paid to interpreting cues in the environment that helped to construct meaning. Much could be inferred from the classroom setting, from students' work on the walls, classroom displays, books, nearby sounds, the layout of desks, spaces, presentation, order, timetables, instructions to students, visual cues, and colours in context.

Table 3.10 (on the following page) outlines the phases of data collection for the two types of case studies. It highlights that through the two phases of data collection, the research focus became narrower and targeted in the second phase. The first phase focused on online data gathering from dyslexia exemplar schools, whereas the second phase took place in the school setting.

Table 3.10

Phases of Data Collection in the Two Types of Case Studies

	Phases of data collection	
	The Victorian Government Policy Case	Multiple-case studies of dyslexia exemplar schools
First phase	Data collection involved gathering relevant policy to address research themes using search terms: *literacy, dyslexia, inclusion, special education, and disability.* Data collection utilised DET's website, including links and attachments relevant to the phenomenon of interest. Initial results generated hundreds of pages of data that were analysed through the conceptual frameworks of the research (see data analysis section).	Data collection involved gathering documents from online searches of dyslexia exemplar schools' own websites, government data on the dyslexia exemplar school, job advertisements from the school, education bulletins, online reports and articles it co-produced. (Social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook were excluded).
Second phase	Specific policy documents were identified to address research questions and themes (e.g., literacy, dyslexia, inclusion, special education, and disability). Four areas of Victorian Government policy were identified as: Improving Early Years Screening for Learning Difficulties (Victorian Government, 2016), The English Online Interview (DET, 2022b), The Program for Students with Disabilities (DET, 2022c), and over-arching guidance from The Department of Education and Training Victoria's website (DET, 2022a).	Data gathering occurred in the school setting, guided by research themes (literacy, dyslexia, inclusion, special education, and disability). Participants assisted in the collection of documents, including school handbooks, policy, curriculum planning materials, teaching manuals, guidance notes, assessment materials, learning support materials and teaching schedules. Documents targeted policies, practices and discourses for dyslexia and inclusion. Photographs were considered documents and included images of posters, books, classroom displays, teaching tools, learning spaces and artefacts introduced by participants.

3.5 Ethics of Data Collection, Storage and Dissemination

As a confidentiality mechanism, participant interviews are reported using an alphanumeric code to de-identify participants documents and private dyslexia organisations. In some instances, sensitive interview data has been redacted or a participant code is omitted. Additionally, key terminology for reporting findings arising from the views and experiences of participants is signposted in *Chapter Five* (see glossary for keywords *explicit instruction*, *multisensory*, *decodable*, *morphology* and *etymology*).

Research data was uploaded to the privacy protected university owned storage drive, accessed through a password-protected computer and double-authenticated intranet system. Data was stored securely for long-term retention for a minimum period of five years. These procedures followed the university protocols as specified by Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC), underpinned by the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007). Data storage procedures were guided by *The Privacy and Data Protection Act* (Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner, 2014) and *The Research Data Management Plan* (Victoria University & The University of Queensland, 2014).

My de-identification of data utilised mechanisms of confidentiality. As the cases are unique exemplars, additional measures have been taken to aggregate data and remove identifying information. Enrolment statistics for participant schools were not reported in findings; instead demographical data was indicated using a numerical range to enhance anonymity. Documents were de-identified using a document coding system for referencing documents within a securely stored research archive.

To de-identify data, dyslexia exemplar school locations were all reported to be in the greater Melbourne region, an area covering approximately 9900 km ^{2} (City of Melbourne, 2022). Victorian Government (2022a) census data indicates that the total number of mainstream government schools in Victoria is 1,458 (see Appendix L, Summary Statistics for Victorian Schools 2022). DET data on schools by region, delineates schools using a zoning system of *Northern*, *Eastern*, *Southern* and *Western*. These demographical parameters were not used to describe schools, as I deemed this data to be more identifiable. Instead, the research reported whether the school was considered to be in an advantaged position based on ICSEA *The Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage* (ICSEA) (ACARA, 2021) and whether it was based in a rural or city (greater Melbourne) location.

The census data for Victorian Government Schools (Victorian Government, 2022a) does not include reference to schools with exemplar practices for dyslexia. My novel research process for revealing dyslexia exemplar schools utilised multiple stages to reveal hidden data. Identifying and finalising the participant sample list took several months of intensive research, (described in the participation section of this chapter) making the three schools in the sample difficult to identify.

I considered Punch's (1994) perspective that "the cloak of anonymity for the characters may not work with insiders" (p. 92) who may be locate individuals involved in research. Measures were taken to cloak participants from each other, including redacting identifying information from quotes, using pseudonyms (for participants and key stakeholders) and aggregating some findings.

Table 3.11 (below) outlines my coding system to enhance anonymity for participants, documents and private dyslexia organisations reported in findings from multiple-case studies of dyslexia exemplar schools. I have taken additional steps to de-identify interview data on sensitive matters, such as instances where participants have critiqued government policy or systems. In addition, while I refer to participants by pseudonym code (P1, P2, P3 etc.), there are some examples where a participant quote is further de-identified by reporting without a pseudonym code. When referring to participants, I use the personal pronoun *they* instead of *he* or *she*. My rationale assumes the importance of participant control and the subsequent use of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Table 3.11

Coding System for Anonymity of Participants, Documents and Private Dyslexia Organisations

Chapter Five Coding System

Participants	Documents	Private dyslexia organisations
P1, P2, etc.	D1, D2, etc.	Org1, Org2, etc.

Who then were the exemplars? School demographic data was presented through de-identified data from document analysis and case studies. Demographic information from the research sample was presented collectively in terms of numerical ranges and rounded numerical scores as a technique of de-identification. *The Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage* (ICSEA) was used as a demographic measurement tool (ACARA, 2021). The scale allows for “reasonable comparisons among schools with similar students” (ACARA, 2016, p. 1) and considers geographical location, parents’ occupation, parents’ education, and the proportion of Indigenous students (but disregards factors within the school including teaching staff, facilities or programs). The ICSEA scale uses a benchmark score of 1000 when tallying average levels of socio-educational advantage. Through a qualitative paradigm, participant perspectives were considered alongside the ICSEA measurement.

While both primary schools rated highly on the ICSEA scale with scores above 1100 (ACARA, 2021), case study findings suggest that participant narrative accounts paint a more intricate picture. For instance, one school maintained a high ICSEA rating, yet participants reported educational disadvantage and challenges, particularly due to language and educational barriers for non-English-Speaking Background (NESB) students. Alternatively, the secondary school had an ICSEA score in the mid-900s in alignment with participant perspectives on the socio-economic demographic of the school. The participants described socio-economic disadvantage, although there were few students from NESB backgrounds.

The three dyslexia exemplar schools were co-educational government schools. All were in the broader Melbourne region; (within 100km of the Central Business District). Only one school had consistent measures of socio-economic advantage. Schools had varying levels of students from a NESB Background. The school population size ranged from approximately 300 to 600 students.

I conducted nine research interviews with principals and experienced specialist teachers. None were considered junior teachers. The research does not report on age or gender, but notes that there were more females than males interviewed. The findings were orientated towards understanding the pathways to becoming a specialist dyslexia teacher and include de-identified (aggregated) details of experience and influences gained from outside Victoria and Australia.

When assigning pseudonyms to participant schools, words of Indigenous origin were nominated for cultural significance, through the ethics of Indigenous language revival and decolonisation in research (Giacon, 2020). The final selection of pseudonyms utilised a resource from the VACCA (2022) aimed at increasing knowledge of the Woiwurrung language of the Wurundjeri People. Selecting pseudonyms without implying reference to any existing schools required consideration of all schools, including those not connected to the research. Originally, I had considered themes from nature such as flora and geographical formations like rivers and mountains. Ultimately, I decided to shift towards an Australian fauna theme due to having less association with school naming traditions.

Table 3.12 (below) presents the pseudonyms for schools in multiple-case studies. I conducted an online *Google* search to avoid using pseudonyms that imply actual schools. At the time of writing the thesis, no schools in Victoria were found to be named *Marram School*, *Gawan School* or *Walert School*.

Table 3.12

Pseudonyms for Schools in Multiple-Case Studies

	Pseudonym	Woiwurrung meaning
School One	Marram	*Kangaroo*
School Two	Gawan	*Echidna*
School Three	Walert	*Possum*

A case study can position the researcher as a miner, "knowledge is understood as buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths the valuable metal" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 48). Feminist perspectives of interviewing (Punch, 2009) avoid hierarchical and paternalistic research relationships to enable "greater openness and insight, a greater range of responses and therefore richer data" (p. 149). They are linked to an ethical position to redefine the interview situation that has potential to transform interviewers and participants into "co-equals, who are carrying on a conversation about mutually relevant, often biographical critical" matters (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 354). However, I acknowledge that I had a position of power as a researcher with control of the data.

3.6 Ethics of Data Analysis

Research interviews require systematic design with planned stages including thematising, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying and reporting findings. As suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitive research is not a linear process; rather; stages of research can occur simultaneously. For instance, through my D-I-A approach, I analysed and thematised the data deductively, inductively, and abductively (see section 3.6.3).

The data were analysed using thematic analysis to investigate approaches to dyslexia, which can range from utilising special and segregated systems to views that align more closely with inclusive education approaches. The data was further analysed to provide insight into pedagogies and discourses and to explore how dyslexia is viewed systemically at the government level. I also sampled and evaluated the wealth of data in the public domain originating from

Victorian Government school websites. Sampling this rich data enabled access to school documents which highlighted pedagogical approaches, school priorities, discourses, and ideological assumptions for literacy acquisition and dyslexia.

Table 3.13 (below) highlights how the theoretical frameworks applied to the two types of case studies. Data were analysed holistically as a single Victorian Government policy case and multiple-case studies of dyslexia exemplar schools, considering policy document and teacher perspectives. In this section, procedures for data analysis are described, including the ways data is filtered through the theoretical frameworks of analysis (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Kvale, 1996; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Table 3.13

Theoretical Frameworks Applied to Two Types of Case Studies

Theoretical framework	**Type 1 Case Study Victorian Government Policy**	**Type 2 Multiple-Case Studies of Dyslexia Exemplar Schools**
Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994)	A lens on policy from five systemic levels, from the global to the local with the child/student at the centre. The policy context focuses on the Exosystem	To view school level practices within the context of five systemic levels, with the child/student at the centre. The practice context focuses on the Microsystem
The Rose Review (Rose, 2009)	Comparison to Victorian Government Policy. An exemplar operational guide for dyslexia service provision	A lens to view school practices for dyslexia
Disability theory: The Social Relational Model of Disability (Thomas, 1999)	To highlight government policy assumptions in constructing dyslexia To frame issues of access and inclusion for dyslexia policy	A lens to view dyslexia practices in the school setting. To frame issues of access and inclusion for dyslexia within school settings
The WPR Policy Analysis Framework (Bacchi, 2009)	To problematise government policy assumptions for dyslexia through a structured questioning approach	To problematise examples of Microsystem policy assumptions for dyslexia through a structured questioning approach
The Australian Policy cycle (Colebatch, 2006)	A lens on the policy making processes and stakeholders	To view the policy making processes and stakeholders

Bioecological Systems Theory (BEST) (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) has broad theoretical application for critically viewing social systems. The individual student is positioned at the centre of a complex interplay of genetic and environmental factors (Goodley et al., 2016) that shape human development and experience of the world. Personal experiences within the school environment *microsystem* are considered to be inextricably connected to broader contexts, events and social systems across time. BEST (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) contextualises bio-social views of functionality and impairment (Thomas, 2004) and can be applied to evaluating how school systems and government policy may restrict or empower learners with dyslexia.

In addition to BEST (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), Thomas' (2004) *Social Relational Model of Disability* (SRMD) is a complementary theoretical framework, recognising that students with a disability (including dyslexia) have a right to be valued, to have agency, access, and inclusion. Dyslexia is a developmental issue that affects text-based literacy learning and is a disability primarily due to socially disabling practices that occur across systemic levels. The SRMD paradigm has greater scope for considering education rights for dyslexia, including the right to receive learning support, assessment, diagnosis and learning accommodations.

3.6.1 Thematic Analysis of Interviews

Data analysis of interviews was informed by Kvale's (1996) work, *The 1000-page question* which argues that the interview is a living conversation that cannot merely be reduced to the written text of the transcript. Thus, my data analysis relied on the sum of the contextual clues, meanings and inter-subjectivities during interviews (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Kvale, 1996; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This raises the issue of the importance of analysing interview data alongside field notes, observations, and journal entries. Kvale (1996) asserts that there are advantages in analysing *as you go* during interviews as a strategy that makes the final analysis "easier and more amenable but will also rest on more secure ground" (p. 277). It is therefore acknowledged that analysis during the interview is merely the first but an important stage of analysis. The interviews were layered with nuance; meaning could be ascribed to facial expressions, body language and the tones of voice and social interaction. In section 3.6.3, I detailed my approach to data analysis and building themes from the interview data.

I analysed the data using thematic analysis to investigate approaches to dyslexia—from special to segregated systems—to views that align more closely to inclusive education approaches (as described by Booth and Ainscow, 2002). The data were further analysed to provide insight into pedagogies and discourses to explore how dyslexia is viewed at government systems level (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). A wealth of data in the public domain were sampled and evaluated from Victorian Government school websites. Sampling of this rich data source enabled access to school documents that I analysed for pedagogical approaches, school priorities, discourses and ideological assumptions used in relation to literacy acquisition and dyslexia.

3.6.2 Bacchi's WPR Approach

This policy data were analysed using Bacchi's (2009) *What's the Problem to be presented? (WPR) approach.* WPR (Bacchi, 2009) allowed the interrogation of the taken for granted aspects of policy, including highlighting oppressive practices. Underpinning a critical approach are principles identified in de-colonialist methodologies (Manning, 2018; Meekosha, 2011).

Bacchi's model has application to explore issues of politics and governance in specific case studies (Ball, 2016; Bletsas & Beasley, 2012). Bacchi's problematisation framework values "how policy solutions are constituted by the assumptions entailed in the problematising process, rather than being self-evidently responsive to objective social problems" (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012, p. 2). The policy analysis paradigm employed six key questions as a critical framework.

The WPR (Bacchi, 2009, p. 2) considers the following questions:

1. What’s the problem represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the ‘problem’?
3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?
6. How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

The WPR approach highlights assumptions within state education policy including barriers to access and inclusion. The WPR’s six key questions offer a framework to unpack discourses, identify exclusionary paradigms and develop new perspectives for inclusion in the Victorian education system. As previously introduced, the Social Relational Framework (Thomas, 1999) is used to view disability, while Bioecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) locates education policy within a wider context. The utilisation of Bacchi (2009), alongside comparative education research (from England), problematises both local and global policy frameworks.

3.6.3 The Deductive-Inductive-Abductive (D-I-A) Approach

The Deductive-Inductive-Abductive (D-I-A) is a multi-dimensional approach (described in the research design section) that was used to explore the relationship between theory, empirical data, and insights arising from inquiry (Åsvoll, 2014; Cooper, 2018).

A qualitative paradigm encourages the researcher to inductively construct understanding and knowledge that emerge from the data. A strictly inductive approach is broad with loose parameters that can be problematic when targeting knowledge related to a phenomenon of interest (approaches to dyslexia in exemplar schools). My research employs a *Deductive-Inductive-Abductive (D-I-A) analytical approach* in alignment with Åsvoll (2014) who argues the strengths of this under-utilised paradigm. Åsvoll asserts that from the outset the researcher may articulate pre-defined theoretical terms and theories before field observation. Such a methodological approach brings structure and focus to fieldwork.

The research design utilised initial deductive theories built upon synthesis of research literature. Engaging with disability theory and marginalised voices (Levi, 2017; Macdonald, 2010; Riddick & Fawcett, 2009; Zephaniah, 2015) led to deductively theorising that dyslexia policy and practice may be inconsistent in Victoria (Åsvoll, 2014). Miles and Huberman (1994) make a case for "tight, restructured qualitative designs and for loose, emergent ones" (p. 17)". I constructed analytic categories for thematic analysis beginning deductively and working towards refinement inductively, utilising the *D-I-A* methodological approach to coding and theme development described by Åsvoll.

The research design recognised that case study interpretations (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) are dependent on the continuous application of theories, supporting a D-I-A approach (Åsvoll, 2014; Cooper, 2018). The data were analysed in three layers; deductively, using the social relational model of disability (SRMD) (Thomas, 2004); inductively for further insights; and abductively to further theorise policy and practice within principles of the SRMD.

The following procedures were used through a DIA approach:

1. Data were coded alongside the principles of disability theory (deductive).
2. Analysis focused on findings within those principles to promote new insights (inductive), with a social relational analytical lens to bring new knowledge and meaning.
3. Principles were refined "with insights that were stated explicitly at the outset of the research and were identified as a result of the study (abduction)" (Cooper, 2018, p. 113).

Table 3.14 (below) demonstrates the application of the Deductive-Inductive-Abductive (D-I-A) approach (Åsvoll, 2014) to thematic analysis. Interviews were initially deductive thematised broadly as policy, philosophy, and practice. Afterwards, themes were condensed inductively and abductively to reflect new theoretical interpretations of the data. In analysing themes and sub-themes, categories that failed to produce meaningful insights into systemic issues were revised based on case data and research insights. *S*ubsequently, the dynamic construction of research themes created a new delineation into two refined categories: dyslexia specific best practice themes and equity-based themes for access and inclusion.

Table 3.14

An illustration of the D-I-A approach to data analysis

First iteration: Thematic analysis protocol		
Policy themes	**Theoretical themes**	**Practice themes**
Inclusive education	Inclusive education	Inclusive education
Special education	Special education	Special education
Dyslexia	Dyslexia	Dyslexia
Issues of equity	Issues of equity	Issues of equity
Assessment	Assessment	Assessment
Learning support	Learning support	Learning support
Resources	Resources	Resources
Outcomes	Outcomes	Outcomes

Revised second iteration: Thematic analysis protocol	
Dyslexia best practice themes	**Access and inclusion themes**
Dyslexia definitions and approaches	Inclusive and special education approaches
Dyslexia teaching practices and resources	Learning support
Dyslexia assessment and diagnosis	Outcomes and equity
Dyslexia policy and problematisation	Inclusive education policy and problematisation

A Deductive-Inductive-Abductive (D-I-A) methodological approach (Åsvoll, 2014; Cooper, 2018) was used within the research design including selective sampling of schools and participants, data collection and data analysis. For instance, it was necessary to use clarification techniques such as contacting schools directly to confirm or challenge a hypothesis arising from online data. Walter (2013) asserts that the trajectory of the research process does not always follow pre-constructed models. Instead, a hybrid approach may support emergent findings, with sequencing often “neither definitively inductive nor deductive, tending to a more circular process. Theory development leads to empirical data collection, which in turn leads to a redefinition or refinement of the original theory” (p. 41) followed by more data collection. Indeed, the D-I-A methodological approach (Åsvoll, 2014) led to a theoretical paradigm shift from the *Social Model of Disability* (Oliver, 1983) to the *Social Relational Model of Disability* (Thomas, 1999).

Table 3.15 (below) outlines procedures for interview analysis and reporting. When analysing interviews, data was polished to consider disfluencies. In this table, I provide examples of speech that were identified as being habitual or repetitive and not included in reported data (Fox Tree, 2007).

Table 3.15

Procedures for Interview Analysis and Reporting

Example of speech	Data analysed and *polished*
"Um" "uh" "you know", "um" um and uh, you know, and like.	Researcher judgement used to determine if habitual (repetitive). For instance, if same utterance over-used throughout the interview "you know" it was removed. Utterance of "um" consistently removed.
"Sort of", "kind of", "like",	"Sort of", "kind of" and "like" were judged to indicate the strength of a statement and therefore included in data analysis and reporting *except* for when one phrase was judged to be habitually overused throughout the interview (5-10 times might indicate habitual use alongside other conversational cues).
Names of businesses, organisations, or identifying information	Used in place of certain businesses, organisations or names of people mentioned in interviews was [a description]. This was for confidentiality and de-identification purposes. Descriptive labels of a business are beneficial to avoid the research reporting becoming engaged in the promotional work of a certain business.

This chapter focuses on document analysis of under-researched Victorian Government policies for dyslexia. The first area of interest was the Department of Education and Training's website education.vic.gov.au (DET, 2022a). Document analysis used key search terms including *literacy, dyslexia, inclusion, special education,* and *disability.* Secondly, document analysis focused on specific policy from The Department of Education and Training. The documents under review are referred to as the *policy archive* and include: (1) *Improving Early Years Screening for Learning Difficulties* (Victorian Government, 2016) (2) *The English Online Interview* (DET, 2022b) (3) *The Program for Students with*

Disabilities (DET, 2022c) and the Victorian Government education website (DET, 2022a).

3.6.4 Trustworthiness

This section digresses from Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) use of the terms *validity* and *reliability* in preference to *trustworthiness* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The research has been designed with strategies to promote trustworthiness, focusing on ethical principles in research conduct, alignment of philosophical paradigms and explicit statements of research positionality (Creswell, 2009). Table 3.16 (below) presents an overview of research procedures implemented to enhance trustworthiness. These are listed by research stage from research sampling, case study design, conducting interviews, data storage, dissemination to overarching protocols.

Table 3.16

Research Integrity and Trustworthiness

Research Stage	**Procedures**
Sampling	Cross-checking accuracy of online information with school Cross checking with DET & dyslexia peak bodies for missed dyslexia exemplar schools in sampling stage Document analysis to confirm schools meet participation criteria
Case studies	Multiple-case studies Case boundaries defined Exclusion criteria defined
Interviews	Pilot interview Multiple participants Interview schedule from outset Manual checking of transcripts Field work journal
Data storage	The Privacy and Data Protection Act (Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner, 2014) Research Data Management Plan (Victoria University & The University of Queensland, 2014) Secure storage on privacy protected university owned research drive and double-authenticated intranet system
Dissemination	De-identification of data Summary of findings produced for DET and research participants
Overarching protocols	Participatory design Two-tiers of ethics approval and compliance

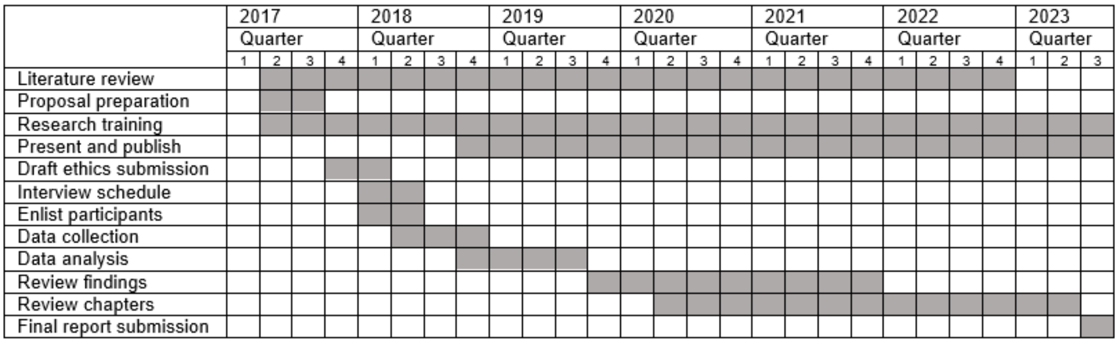
In a social constructionist qualitative paradigm, the research is not seeking *generalisability* per se (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Rather, it seeks understanding of unique cases to bring knowledge of the phenomenon of interest, *approaches to dyslexia in Victorian Government schools*. Each dyslexia exemplar school case study sheds light on the possibilities of interpretative responses to government policy, including the potential to discover unique and innovative exemplar practices.

The chosen sample size aimed to produce meaningful findings directed at producing new insights into approaches to dyslexia. The sample needed to enable *data saturation* at the data analysis stage (Robson, 2011) and be appropriate and operational for the scope of a PhD.

Figure 3.3 (below) is a representation of my research timeline, reflecting various stages of research completed part-time from 2017 to 2023. These stages include data analysis, review of findings, writing thesis chapters, and presenting at conferences and publishing in peer reviewed journals and texts. My understanding of a research timeline reflected Walter's (2013) observation that operationalising research involves setting realistic parameters within a tightly organised and feasible time frame. Fortunately, my data collection was completed prior to Covid-19.

Figure 3.3

Timeline for the Research



	2017				2018				2019				2020				2021				2022				2023		
	Quarter				Quarter				Quarter				Quarter				Quarter				Quarter				Quarter		
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3
Literature review		▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨			
Proposal preparation		▨	▨																								
Research training		▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
Present and publish								▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
Draft ethics submission				▨	▨																						
Interview schedule					▨	▨																					
Enlist participants					▨	▨																					
Data collection						▨	▨	▨																			
Data analysis								▨	▨	▨	▨																
Review findings												▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨							
Review chapters														▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	
Final report submission																											▨

The research design relied on self-reporting from participants within the multiple-case studies of dyslexia exemplar schools. I acknowledged that the researcher's presence can interfere with data collection and the act of observing may distort the subject (or object) of observation, making it *atypical* (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To enhance the trustworthiness of research findings, data from each case was evaluated holistically to observe whether there was evidence within the fieldwork setting to corroborate participant perspectives. The research design aimed to increase rigour, through a D-I-A multi-dimensional approach (Åsvoll, 2014) to draw explanatory inferences from multiple participant perspectives which added to the richness of findings, producing greater insights rather than proving a confirmatory explanation.

Given my experience as a teacher, I chose to focus on teacher and principal perspectives of teaching and support for students with dyslexia. I excluded observations of students or explorations of student owned data. The research design acknowledges that research findings and insights are situated within the knowledge and views of the participants (specialist teachers and school principals). To increase trustworthiness a disability theoretical lens was applied, reflecting research that identifies ableism (Goodley, 2014) and systemic barriers for people with disabilities (Bond et al., 2010; Jenkin et al., 2018; Macdonald, 2009; Riddick & Fawcett, 2009; Thomas, 2004; Youth Disability Advocacy Service, 2011). *Chapter Two* described the ways these perspectives informed the research.

My research questions related to the ways in which dyslexia is approached within the Victorian education system, using documents from the school setting as evidential examples. Expressions of informal policy provided insights into internal school-level practices, recognising that policy enactment may vary between teachers. Documents provided opportunities to explore knowledge that had been circulated at various systemic levels. My analysis considered that documents published by a school imply authenticity, as they had been circulated prior to the research interview.

3.6.5 Researcher Positionality

In *Chapter One* I addressed my background, introducing my positionality within the research. Although my research was guided by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), I digress from the use of the term *researcher bias* in favour of *positionality*

(Bourke, 2014; Manning, 2018; Mellor et al., 2014; Rivera, 2017). Research is a situated and contextual activity. My social position as a researcher is framed by my subjective experiences (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Wolf, 1993). I reflexively question and reflect upon assumptions used in the research, bringing a worldview informed by a privileged position (Creswell, 2009; Robson, 2011) and embedded in my cultural milieu (Walter, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) advise that prior to data interpretation, researchers should self-interrogate to identify paradoxical positions they may hold.

My experience of growing up and attending a government school in the suburbs of Melbourne shapes my education perspectives and ethical views. My positionality has also been constructed by the experience of teaching in international contexts including England and as a dyslexia specialist teacher (described in *Chapter One*). These layers reinforce a social constructionist and relational ontology, within global contexts, to underscore international comparative education (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014).

3.6.6 Comparative Education

As noted in *Chapter Two*, Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014) describe comparative education as a research discipline supported by exemplars of policy and practice to inform emerging ideas and innovation. In my research, policy and practice examplars from England offered opportunities to problematise existing models of practice. International comparative study relies on engagement in critical policy analysis, with policy borrowing a growing phenomenon (Comparative International Education Society, 2021). My research engages with the following: Bacchi's (2009) policy analysis framework *What's the Problem Represented to be?* to unpack discourses and identify exclusionary paradigms; Ball (2012) as a key contributor to theorising *policy problems* with an emphasis on England and comparative education; and Colebatch (2006) and Althaus et al. (2020) who highlighted both the potential and limitations of comparative education research applied to the Australian policy context.

3.6.7 Disability Theory and Social Relational Model of Disability

Other layers of positionality arise from an academic background in the disciplines of psychology, sociology, and feminist theory. I have previously leaned towards feminist, queer, and de-colonialist theories to explore socio-political contexts (Bunda & Phillips, 2018; Butler, 2002; Hughes, 1997; Sherry, 2004). I have applied a social constructionist worldview to dyslexia, disability, and disablement (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Therefore, in the words of Alcoff (1993) "feminist epistemology should not be taken as involving a commitment to gender as the primary axis of oppression, in any sense of "primary", or positing that gender is a theoretical variable separable from either axes of oppression and susceptible to a unique analysis" (p. 3).

Alongside a bioecological systems theory, disability theory was applied to identify possible education reforms for students with dyslexia. Specifically, the Social Relational Model of Disability SRMD (Thomas, 2004) provides a strength-based model that values the unique skills and abilities of students with dyslexia.

The suitability of the SRMD, over the traditional Social Model of Disability from Oliver (1983, 1990b), is the increased capacity to consider access issues including learning support (intervention). Disability theory problematises dominant perspectives of dyslexia, challenging socially constructed views of disability (Armstrong, 2017; Jolly, 2009; Oliver, 1983; Shakespeare, 2006; Young, 2014). In alignment with bioecological systems theory, the SRMD was applied to my case studies using document analysis and interview methods to interrogate perceptions of the conceptions of dyslexia, disability and inclusive education.

In developing relational understandings of the world, Berger and Luckmann (1991) argue:

> ideolizing influences, while they could not be eradicated completely, could be mitigated by the systematic analysis of as many as possible of the varying socially grounded positions. In other words, the object of thought becomes progressively clearer with this accumulation of different perspectives on it. This is to be the task of the sociology of knowledge, which thus is to become an important aid in the quest of any correct understanding of human events. (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 22)

According to Codd (2005), education is about "more than producing human capital or other economic outcomes; it is about creating democratic, open and reflective communities of learners and upholding every person's right to learn" (p. 205). Education research has the exciting potential to highlight inequities and negative practices, promote inclusive pedagogies and further our understanding around best practice. Notably, a critical interrogation of what is meant by evidence-based practice like the concept of inclusive education is contested territory with its own subjectivities (Cook & Odom, 2013).

In alignment with Codd (2005), The Social Relational Model of Disability (Thomas, 2004) is a conceptual framework for viewing dyslexia within a social constructionist ontology. Specifically, the SR perspective offers a powerful model for conceptualising dyslexia policy and practice in Victoria, in contrast to alternative ethical frameworks such as the Medical Model of Disability (Goswami, 2011; Hulme & Snowling, 2014).

Ethical considerations underpinning the research embedded questions within a disabilities theory approach. For instance, how is the concept of equity and inclusion framed? What rights are students with dyslexia assumed to have? Is the goal of access and inclusion about equality or equity? What does it mean for students with dyslexia when Shapiro et al. (2016) acknowledge that equal treatment for all groups might not adequately address the social barriers experienced by some individuals?

My background as a classroom teacher may provide special understanding as an *insider* (Helps, 2017) who can relate to some of the challenges experienced by the teacher participants. Bridges (2009) considers that there are "ethics and politics of outsider attempts to inquire into, to interpret and in a sense to gain possession of and take credit for insider understanding" (p. 106). He suggests that the multi-faceted nature of individual identities means that the researcher is never truly an insider or outsider. Even when the researcher brings experience as a teacher, the role is only one dimension of identity, and they still enter from the *outside*.

While I am not claiming to have insider status per se, aspects of identity can have implications for the research. One ethical consideration is the importance of co-collaboration in research and approaching participants in their professional settings as *expert partners* (Terrell & Kirkness, 2011) who become informants with opportunities to shape and direct the information that they share.

Further ethical considerations arise from the context of education in the global North and Australia with a climate of managerialism, economic rationalism, and commercialisation (Ball, 2016; Colebatch, 2006; Snyder, 2008). Codd (2005) suggests that because managerialism has resulted in an erosion of trust and degraded teaching as a profession, education research should value accountability which enhances teacher professionalism. Codd supports an ethical obligation aligned to professionals as a form of moral agency.

> It is a form of professional accountability in which the moral agency of the professional is fully acknowledged. This implies an internal (high trust) form of accountability that differs significantly from the external (low trust) form of accountability that belongs within the various discourses of managerialism (p. 203).

Psychological theories of learning are useful to this research and approaches to classroom practice. Nevertheless, Ozga (1987) argues that sociological enquiry allows us to approach complex socially constructed *realities* with attention to political factors. Liasidou and Symeou (2018) suggest that research can interrogate issues of equity and social justice to reveal hidden or unchallenged views. From this standpoint, I examine perspectives that underpin the education system; notions of literacy, participation, education rights and dyslexia can be viewed relative to the subjectivities of the socio-political context of the Victorian educational system.

Education research is orientated towards socially responsive, democratic, and equitable practice. The research of Ball (2012), Best et. al (2018), Gilmore (2012) Margrain and Farrugia (2018) suggest that education researchers have opportunities to explore issues of inclusion, social justice, and ethical practice, particularly in relation to marginalised students. Levi (2017) asserts that students with dyslexia are marginalised within the Victorian education system. Likewise, Nalavany et al. (2013) maintain that learners with dyslexia are by definition an invisible group with an invisible disability. When analysing data and reporting findings, I considered Burns and Miller’s (2017) claim that “despite the fact that social justice is fundamental to teacher education [there are] likely multiple and varied pedagogical responses” (p. 11).

3.7 Summary

In this chapter I have outlined how a qualitative research paradigm correlates with my research aims—that have a social justice lens—to bring about new knowledge of best practice and an inclusive education response for students with dyslexia. Ethical considerations were embedded in all stages of the research design and were paramount to my decision-making processes. Informed by theories within a social constructionist paradigm, the *Social Relational Model of Disability* and *Bioecological Systems Theory* are two of the overarching frameworks that guided the research. Developing new understanding from key Victorian Government policies and examples of dyslexia policy and enactment from multiple-case study analysis were objectives of the research.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion of the Victorian Government Policy Case

Victoria Government education policy informs practice at over 15,550 Victorian Government schools (Victorian Government, 2022a) representing 648,000 students, including students with dyslexia. The issue of dyslexia transcends the overlapping policy domains of literacy and disability, embedding challenges that reflect elements of Rittel and Webber’s (1973) original conception of the *wicked problem.* Grewatsch (2022) argues for *systems thinking* for complex policy issues to innovate solutions that promote positive social outcomes. In the context of my research, systems levels thinking aims to identify opportunities to increase access and inclusion for students with dyslexia; this may include considering policy frameworks that have been implemented in England.

My research recognises that Victorian education policy is situated within the broader national and international context and draws upon bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and Bacchi’s (2009) framework for policy problematisation. In this chapter, I aim to identify how the Victorian Government is meeting its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Disability Standards for Education (2005). In alignment with Article 29 of *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (U.N. General Assembly, 1989), the Victorian Government is responsible for education that develops the personality, talents, and abilities of all children.

In this chapter, I present findings from the Victorian Government education policy context—a systemic layer known as the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994)—as a foundation for *Chapter Five* where school level enactment is explored. My analysis includes illustrative examples of policy, researching the ways that the state has constructed views of dyslexia, literacy, disability, and inclusive education. Through a social constructionist lens, I unpack policy document perspectives of best practice that guide teaching pedagogy, assessment, and support.

My initial findings of descriptions in Victorian Government policy documents from this PhD research were published as a book chapter "Reading rights: Dyslexia policy enactment and challenges for inclusion" in *Inclusive Education is a right, right?* (Marland, 2021). This chapter focused on *reading rights* (education rights within international human rights frameworks) and explored conflicting approaches to dyslexia within Victorian Government education policy. While I draw upon some of the original literature cited in the publication, this chapter extends the scope of my findings of policy document perspectives of access, inclusion, assessment, teaching, and support for students with dyslexia.

Previously in this thesis, I utilise a definition of policy aligning to Colebatch's (2006) account from *Beyond the policy cycle: The policy process in Australia*. Colebatch considers that policy is constructed in a complex cycle shaped by government and non-government stakeholder groups. Therefore, *policy* encompasses more than just the official creation of legislation and acts of parliaments; it encapsulates the response to parliamentary committees, government commissioned inquiries, statements of policy intent and content published on government education department websites (DET, 2022a).

My research draws upon Yates' (2004) work, through the assumption that interactions between government policy, schools, and broader stakeholders represent a systemic response to an educational issue (dyslexia). Policy is problematised to address the central research questions for this thesis: (1) How is dyslexia being approached in the Victorian education system; and (2) How are students with dyslexia being included in the Victorian education system?

Table 4.1 (below) highlights specific Victorian Government policies that are the focus of my research. Through the Victorian Government policy case study, I sampled policies that frame dyslexia, highlighting policy document framing of best practice for teaching students with dyslexia.

Table 4.1

The Policy Archive: Dyslexia Related Policies in Focus

Title	Purpose and relevance of policy document
Improving Early Years Screening for Learning Difficulties (Victorian Government, 2016)	Press release Agenda setting Discourse and definitions for dyslexia
The English Online Interview Guide (DET, 2022e)	Dyslexia screening tool Discourse and definitions for dyslexia
The Program for Students with Disabilities (DET, 2022c)	Discourse and definitions for dyslexia and disability Provides guidance to teachers and school principals
Victorian Government education websites (DET, 2022a; Victorian Government, 2022e)	Discourse and definitions Provides guidance to teachers and school principals Constructs understanding of dyslexia

Note: All four policies have implications for access and inclusion for students with dyslexia

Expressions of Victorian Government policy include The Department of Education and Training’s (DET) website and specific policies housed within it (*education.vic.gov.au*). When identifying policies of interest, I recognised that the intersecting policy domains for dyslexia include policy for literacy, dyslexia, inclusion, special education and disability. Guided by central research questions, my analysis interrogated how Victoria Government policy documents construct best practice for teaching students with dyslexia.

Four policy domains are explored, beginning with the statement of dyslexia policy intent (Victorian Government, 2016) (see Appendix M). I progress to an analysis of DET policies including the dyslexia screening tool (2022d), the Program for Students with Disabilities (DET, 2022c) and overarching guidance for teaching and supporting students with dyslexia from the Department of Education and Training website and the Victorian Government website (DET, 2022a; Victorian Government, 2022e).

4.1 Policy one: Improving Early Years Screening for Learning Difficulties

The first policy explored was the Victorian Government’s policy statement *Improving Early Years Screening for Learning Difficulties* (Victorian Government, 2016). Although a mere two-pages in length—unlike the more detailed policies reviewed in this chapter—this document plays a pivotal role in constructing education rights for dyslexia. Originating at Victorian state government level, it demonstrates a systemic response to broader national policies (Australian Government, 1992, 2005) and agenda setting for its Department of Education and Training (DET, 2022a).

The *Improving Early Years Screening for Learning Difficulties* (Victorian Government, 2016) policy statement, frames dyslexia as being of significant interest to the Victorian public. Dyslexia is constructed as a crucial issue—with concern for early identification—an idea that is broadly supported by research (Buckingham, 2018; Jha, 2016; Snowling, 2013). The Victorian Government (2016) states that:

> The early years of schooling are crucial to building lifelong learning, wellbeing and success, and the improved process will be the first step in the early detection of learning difficulties, so that children could get the support they need sooner. (p. 1)

It introduced the *English Online Interview* (EOI) (DET, 2022e) as a central tool for recognising the issue of dyslexia. The Victorian Government (2016) calls literacy the *foundation of learning*, with the implication that literacy refers to traditional text-based literacy involved in reading and spelling. The policy is foregrounded by an intent of continuing improvement and development:

> New resources for teachers to support the English Online Interview are also being developed, containing information on additional assessment options and further steps in screening processes to recognise learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. The revised and improved English Online Interview and supporting resources will be part of a suite of tools for teachers to assess and monitor learning in the early years of school. (para. 6)

In the statement (Victorian Government, 2016) dyslexia in Victoria is represented in multiple ways as:

- an urgent issue for the early years
- a learning difficulty, an additional need, a special need, a disability, and a disorder
- a problem of under-identification of learning difficulties, including dyslexia
- a lack of screening protocols to identify learning difficulties, including dyslexia
- dyslexia screening as a teacher responsibility

The policy statement (Victorian Government, 2016) represents an unclear dyslexia paradigm that does not fully articulate education rights for students with dyslexia. Embedded in the policy statement is conflicting terminology and deficit discourse that construct dyslexia as an additional need, a special need, and a disorder.

The Victorian Government (2016) embeds teacher responsibility and capacity to administer dyslexia screening. The screening tool is implied as a solution to under-identification of dyslexia, although it is unclear how teachers enact broader measures of support following screening. Screening students is described as the “first step in the early detection of learning difficulties, so that children could get the support they need sooner” (para. 3). Post-identification protocols including assessment, support, monitoring and planning are left unexplained. For instance, following screening should proactive support begin immediately if dyslexia is suspected? Beyond implementing screening measures, education rights for dyslexia are not assured by the statement.

Within the *Improving Early Years Screening for Learning Difficulties* (Victorian Government, 2016) policy statement, the Victorian Government utilises the notion of global best practice to validate its framework, without explaining how perspectives on international best practice have been constructed. It is unclear whether consultation included dyslexia and disability specifically or if the government was aligned to broader global literacy agendas such as the OECD’s Programme of International Student Achievement (Thomson et al., 2019) and The *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS) (Mullis et al., 2017):

> To improve our English Online Interview tool [dyslexia screener], we examined the latest thinking and best practices from around the world to ensure our kids get access to the best assessment tools as possible as part of a screening process for learning difficulties and disorders. (para. 10)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (UN General Assembly, 2006) provides an enhanced version of education rights by emphasising detailed standards designed to promote access and inclusion. The UNCRPD embeds the right for students with disabilities to receive individual learning accommodation, effective support measures and environments that maximise academic and social development. In contrast, Victorian Government policy implies discretionary teaching and support practices for students with disabilities such as dyslexia rather than mandated standards of practice (examples are presented throughout this chapter).

The *Improving Early Years Screening for Learning Difficulties* (Victorian Government, 2016) does not adequately define dyslexia or address issues of equity and resource provision. For instance, the following questions arise in relation to dyslexia support: Is support intended to happen primarily within the education setting, or within privatised/medicalised settings? Is there an assumption of parental resources of time and money being required? What issues are presented for schools in relation to resourcing and funding? What issues are presented for enactment of this policy? Are schools adequately resourced to meet the needs of learners with dyslexia? How will this initiative be reviewed and improved within a monitoring cycle? These are clearly unanswered questions within policy.

The implication is that the policy statement (Victorian Government, 2016) is an equity initiative to offer students with disabilities the same educational opportunities as their peers. Represented as a proactive policy initiative and solution to a problem, it has been disseminated by the Victorian State Government's *Office of the Premier* (Victorian Government, 2016) to engage a broader audience through a range of publicly accessible formats including online, print and audio-visual from the Victoria news media channels. Media reporting of the government's policy agenda further highlighted the ambiguity of the Victoria Government's dyslexia screening initiative (Victorian Government, 2016) (see Appendix N).

The policy statement (Victorian Government, 2016) embeds caveats and the promise of ongoing improvement. It contains a series of endorsements as a testament to its legitimacy. The Australian Council of Education Research Chief Executive is quoted as saying that the policy statement by, "improving the

English Online Interview will provide additional important evidence, which used among other data, can help teachers identify students with potential learning difficulties" (Victorian Government, 2016, para. 9). My analysis of stakeholder endorsements embedded within the policy suggest support for the intent of the dyslexia policy rather than endorsement of the tool itself.

4.2 Policy Two: The English Online Interview (Dyslexia Screening Tool)

The second policy under focus is *The English Online Interview* (EOI) introduced in the Victorian Government's policy statement discussed in the previous section (Victorian Government, 2016). The EOI comprises policy guidance, including *The English Online Interview Guide* (DET, 2022e) *The English Online Interview and related assessment tasks* DET (2022d) and guidance from the DET Website (DET, 2022b). The EOI has been constructed as a school-based solution to identifying learning difficulties and dyslexia for students in their first year of school (Victorian Government, 2016). The EOI is facilitated by teachers on a one-to-one basis with a student where "data is used to generate reports that provide an overview of student achievement and diagnostic information" (DET, 2022b, para. 2).

The 34-page English Online Interview Guide (2022d) explains that school principals have responsibility for professional learning and that "teachers should familiarise themselves with the EOI and how to conduct an assessment" (p. 5). The EOI promotes teacher discretion in determining who should be exempt from undertaking the dyslexia screening, including some EAL learners and students with cognitive impairment: "teachers should apply their judgement whether it is appropriate for individual students" (p. 6). While an alternative assessment is proposed for students with cognitive impairment (the Abilities Based Learning and Education Support), there is limited detail to suggest the process for ongoing monitoring and assessment for exempt students (including EAL).

The English Online Interview (DET, 2022b) is presented in conflicting ways, both as a specialist tool to address dyslexia and fulfilling other purposes. Guidance for school-based implementation states that the EOI is an online tool for assessing the English skills of students up to level 2 “across the three modes of English in the Victorian Curriculum F-10 – reading and viewing, writing and speaking and listening” (DET, 2022b, para. 1). The EOI therefore assumes a role as a multi-purpose tool, both providing generalist assessment data and fulfilling a need for specialist assessment services.

Policy guidance for *The English Online Interview* (EOI) (DET, 2022e) does not provide a clear rationale for its use as a multi-purpose literacy tool, rather than being a specific screening assessment. Furthermore, there is limited rationale about how it might align to best practice within the Victorian education system in the context of other widely used dyslexia assessments. For instance, organisations such as the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) (2022) endorse screening tests used globally, such as the Predictive Assessment of Reading (PAR) (Wood et al., 2005) and The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) from the University of Oregon (2018). This question links to my conception of the research puzzle from Gustafsson and Hagström (2018) and Hopman (2017), querying the reason for the current approach to dyslexia in the Victorian education system despite other possible approaches?

Rather than articulating best practice for dyslexia, the EOI policy framework constructs an ambiguous paradigm that enables multiple pedagogical approaches and reinstates traditional assessment tools that have been subject to significant debate for their application in supporting students with dyslexia. Implementation guidance endorses the use of “assessments already used in schools to assess English, including Running Records, [and] Clay’s Observational [sic] Survey,” (DET, 2022e, para. 1).

The EOI policy relies on discretionary systems when enacting inclusive education. The policy framework does not galvanise education rights for students with dyslexia following the enactment of the EOI.

> Following the English Online Interview, teachers should use their professional judgement to determine whether further in-depth assessment on particular aspects of English is required for students of concern. In such cases, teachers may choose to administer additional assessments to

> provide further information in order to assist teaching. However, it is not envisaged that additional assessment would be routinely necessary. (DET, 2022e, para. 2)

In the context of limited teacher training for dyslexia, it is unclear how teachers might interpret their next steps in supporting students with dyslexia. Furthermore, the guidance to support the EOI lacks details to address how teachers respond to the subsequent data that arises from screening. The EOI policy outlines that teachers use an overview of student achievement and diagnostic information "to inform program planning and resource allocation" (DET, 2022b, para. 2), demonstrating that the interpretation of dyslexia screening measures through the EOI impacts on access to support.

The EOI (DET, 2022e) embeds the paradox that dyslexia screening is both a school-based education and a psycho-medical issue. Guidance accompanying the dyslexia screening tool endorses a medical model of disability approach, placing reduced emphasis on the education system to provide accessible and inclusive education. The purpose of the English Online Interview is described as providing teachers with data to identify students with literacy learning difficulties, hence "the teacher can then focus on supporting these students to build on their skills and knowledge, and where necessary, collaborate with Allied Health professionals, who may undertake further diagnostic assessment and provide advice on teaching strategies" (Victorian Government, n.d., video transcript, para. 4).

4.3 Policy Three: The Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD)

The third policy under focus is *The Program for Students with Disabilities* (PSD) (DET, 2022c) that governs supplementary funding for students with disabilities in Victorian Government schools. The PSD is central to constructing education rights and understanding of dyslexia teaching policy and practice, and provides operational guidelines for schools to meet their obligations within the Disability Discrimination Act (Australian Government, 1992). The PSD supports "the provision of school-based educational programs for a defined population of eligible students with disability, with high needs" (DET, 2022c, p. 2). Paradoxically, it (DET, 2022c) excludes dyslexia from the seven eligibility categories within the policy. The PSD program categories are described on page 4 of the policy as:

1. Physical disability
2. Visual impairment
3. Hearing impairment
4. Severe behaviour disorder
5. Intellectual disability (based on IQ scores)
6. Autism spectrum disorder
7. Severe language disorder with critical education needs

The policy embeds a justification for exclusionary criteria, attributed to international influence as “the eligibility criteria were developed from guidelines set by the World Health Organisation (WHO)” (DET, 2022c, p. 1). In the absence of a full reference and supporting explanation, it is unclear how such influence was derived. It is unclear whether historical guidance such as *A manual of classification relating to the consequence of disease* (World Health Organization, 1980) has influenced policy modelling in Victoria.

More recent publications from the WHO (2013) *How to use the ICF: A practical manual for using the international classification of functioning, disability and Health (ICF)* state that “all information derived from [the ICF’s] use, should not be employed to deny established rights or otherwise restrict legitimate entitlements to benefits for individuals or groups” (p. 10). My research underpins the assumptions of the Disability Discrimination Act (Australian Government, 1992) and the Disability Standards for Education (Australian Government, 2005) that learning to read and access to support are *education rights,* with the onus on the education system to cater to all students.

In 2016, the Victorian Government engaged in a review process (DET 2016a, 2016b) to meet strategic policy challenges related to the PSD. The review stated that the “Government has committed to inclusive education through the Special Needs Plan” (DET 2016b, p. 9). The review process forms part of the existing PSD policy, when the review process embeds a contradiction between inclusive education and deficit models of disability. In addition, throughout the review there was an assumption that dyslexia and autism could be discussed as one category. For instance, the report considers “the capacity and capability of the current school system to support students on the autism spectrum and students with dyslexia” (DET, 2016b, p.20).

4.4 Policy Four: The Victorian Government Education Websites

Traditionally the *Department of Education and Training website education.vic.gov.au* (2022a) was the primary location of Victorian Government education policy. More recently, the Victorian Government website *vic.gov.au* has begun to include content from Victorian Government departments, supplementing DET’s role in publicising education policy. Both websites represent key expressions of Victorian Government dyslexia policy, including the specific policies housed within the websites*.* Both websites disseminate policies for dyslexia, providing guidance to education stakeholders including teachers, principals, parents, and students. Broad sampling of the website suggests the following themes: (1) dyslexia definitions; (2) discourse; (3) a dyslexia paradigm (guidance for teachers) teaching, accommodations, and support and; (4) a systemic response including allied health and stakeholder (5) and teacher training.

4.4.1 Dyslexia Definitions

A dyslexia paradigm—built on discourses and guidance from the Victorian Government—informs education rights for students with dyslexia and clarifies school-level practices. Althaus (2020) notes that there can be significant challenges delivering cohesive policy models with the coordination of complex and competing priorities. Ideally, the Victorian Government education websites (DET, 2022a; Victorian Government, 2022e) should achieve relative consistency through policy alignment and setting consistent definitions.

My sampling of documents from *education.vic.gov.au* (DET, 2022a) and *vic.gov.au* (Victorian Government, 2022e) suggests an absence of an over-arching framework to guide understandings of dyslexia. Dyslexia is framed inconsistently as an *additional need,* a *learning difficulty*, *a disorder* and as a *disability* (see Appendix M and appendix O).

Primarily, understanding of dyslexia is presented through psychological research perspectives and psychological discourse, with embedded medical deficit framing. *The Learning Difficulties Information Guide* on the DET website, cites Odegard (2019) as stating “dyslexia, the most common form of specific learning disability, is characterised by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word decoding and poor spelling” (DET, 2019, p. 14). Under *the Learning difficulties and dyslexia guidance* section (DET, 2022a), teachers are guided with the following advice:

> A reading difficulty may be indicated where there is a discrepancy between a student's actual reading ability and what might be expected of their age-cohort peers. For example, when a student's achievement level in the Victorian curriculum is more than one year below their peers. Students are also seen as having a reading difficulty when causal features cannot be explained by the following factors: visual or auditory perceptual difficulties, emotional adjustment problems, severe attention issues, behavioural difficulties, neurological disorders such as acquired brain injury, autism, childhood schizophrenia, physical or motor problems, ongoing health, school attendance. (para. 1)

4.4.2 A Dyslexia Paradigm Informing Teacher Practice

Best practice approaches for teaching students with dyslexia, remain equivocal within Victorian Government education websites (DET, 2022a; Victorian Government, 2022e). In the context of literacy debates and the so-called *reading wars* (Snyder, 2008), the Victorian Government is obliged to articulate best practice for literacy teaching.

My results identified that multiple approaches are endorsed by the Victorian Government. For instance, *explicit teaching* is promoted as a high impact teaching strategy where teachers “clearly show students what to do and how to do it” (DET, 2022f, para. 6). Explicit teaching is described as a broad pedagogical approach with application across the curriculum. Similarly, guidance for teaching phonics is suggested by examples rather than being offered as a complete structured syllabus (DET, 2022i):

> In English, phonics is the teaching of introductory, basic, intermediate, and advanced sound-letter patterns (graphemes). Awareness and recall of these patterns is relevant for the development of both reading and spelling … The lesson sequences are examples and not intended to cover all aspects of phonics. (para. 9)

The DET (2022a) website affirms a broad spectrum of tools, resources and pedagogies from the Literacy Tool Kit to the High Intensity Teaching Strategies (HITS). The broad base of tools is intended to promote best practice for teaching and supporting students in literacy. DET (2022d) cites Running Records and Clay's (1985) Observation Survey as resources to support teaching students with dyslexia. Policy documents indicate that DET constructs best practice of teaching students with dyslexia through multiple rather than one singular paradigm, including paradigms regarded as being on opposing sides of Synder's (2008) *reading wars*.

In a guide produced by DET (2018b) under the section *Helping your child to read,* advice is given that is designed to "help your child develop excellent reading and writing skills" (p. 4). The guide endorses the idea that reading proficiency can be promoted by rehearsal and memorisation, through "the opportunity to re-read books" (p. 13). Strategies in opposition to phonological decoding are proposed including guessing words by using picture cues—a strategy known as multi-cueing, another example of how policy documents indicate best practice through multiple paradigms. The following advice appears under the heading of *Helping your child with difficult words*:

> When your child begins to read to you, they will often have difficulty with long or tricky words. It is important to give your child time to work out difficult words themselves. This helps develop their reading skills. You might, however, help them if they are stuck by asking questions like these: Look at the picture. What word makes sense? Look at the picture. What object can you see in the picture that might start with that letter? (DET, 2018a, p. 14)

4.4.3 Assessment

Four of the eight search results using the search term dyslexia (in the search box) on the DET website (DET, 2022a) related to the topic of assessment (see Appendix O). Each search result correlated with a description of assessment considerations relevant for three age categories: ages 5-8 (year prep-2), ages 9-12 (grade 3-6) and ages 13-16 (grade 7-10). Each age category was accompanied by a link to further guidance.

My analysis of results indicates that policy document perspectives of best practice for assessing dyslexia for students aged 9-12 (year 3-6) include an informal assessment comprised of phonological knowledge, word reading and comprehension tasks. DET states “assessing [those three] aspects of knowledge in reading development will support in the identification of students with reading difficulties and dyslexia” (para. 3) and provides supplementary assessment tasks. For instance, in the ‘Manipulating sounds in words’ section of the assessment for students aged 9 to12 (year 3-6) the first step in the phonological knowledge assessment is the following:

> Say to the student: ‘I am going to say a word. Then I am going to make a sound out of the word and say the word that’s left. Listen to how I do it. “Camp”. I take out the “m” and I have the word “cap”. (para. 5)

In the next age category described as being assessment of years 7 to10 (age 13-16) DET states that students “may require continued opportunities to practice and learn foundational reading skills, including drawing on their oral language and experiential knowledge to support them when reading” (DET, 2022g, para .1). DET guidance redirects teachers to the assessment tasks for younger students, stating that for the students in year 7-10 (age 13-16) the assessment of phonological knowledge for years 3-6 can be used to provide a comprehensive overview as they are “presented in a developmental sequence and are still appropriate for students within this age range” (para. 3).

My results indicated that supplementary dyslexia assessments described above function as a multipurpose tool similar to the English Online Interview. For instance, DET states that the assessment tool can be improvised as a learning support resource for intervention “if the student requires additional support, the focused teaching strategies in this resource can be used to support their development of knowledge”.

Results indicate limited explanation of how secondary schools might balance their obligations of the core curriculum from the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (2022) with their role in ensuring that students develop competencies needed for lifelong learning, including reading and spelling skills.

4.4.4 Educational Adjustments

Victorian Government (DET) policy requires teachers to make *reasonable* educational adjustments (accommodations) to curriculum, teaching methods, and accessible formats and provide additional support in alignment with the Disability Standards for Education (Australian Government, 2005). The UN General Assembly (2006) has identified that accommodations may include “display of text, braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, plain language, human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including accessible information and communication technology” (p. 4). Accommodations are outlines in policy to clarify ways to provide access for students with disabilities, including removing access barriers to text-based literacies for students with dyslexia.

DET (2022a) calls on teachers and schools to make reasonable adjustments “if it balances the interests of everyone affected. This includes the education provider, staff and other students” (para. 1), and describes the entitlement of schools to refuse to provide educational adjustments on the broad grounds of *unjustifiable hardship,* including “a very high cost of providing an adjustment” (DET, 2022j, para. 7).

> To determine what is reasonable, the education provider should consider:
>
> - the student’s disability
> - what effect the adjustment will have on the students’ participation, learning outcomes and independence
> - how the adjustment will affect other students and staff
> - the costs and benefits of making the adjustment
>   (para 6)

4.4.5 Inclusive and Special Systems

As I have argued elsewhere (Marland, 2021), the Victorian Government education websites (DET, 2022a; Victorian Government, 2022e) employ inclusive education discourse, while simultaneously positioning dyslexia within a special education (segregated) system. Moreover, they describe dyslexia through both deficit discourse and strength-based views. A strengths-based perspective is suggested within the learning difficulties section of the DET website (2020):

> To be inclusive of all children and young people with learning difficulties, educators need to understand the policies and practices around inclusive education. They also need to understand the strengths and needs of each student, and adopt strategies to support(s) students that are part of a whole-school approach to teaching, learning and support (para. 4)

Alternatively, *the Learning difficulties information guide: School leaders* (DET, 2022h) discusses dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties using terminology that includes *cognitive problems*, *delays*, *deficits* and *disorders*. The guide refers to underpinnings from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-5* (American Psychiatric Association, 2022), known for its medicalised and deficit framing of individuals. Allied health professionals—psychologists and speech therapists—are implied to have expertise on students with disabilities including dyslexia. Victorian Government guidance (DET, 2022j) for making reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities states:

> An education provider may also get expert opinions from allied health professionals, for example, if necessary. As the student's needs change over time, consultations should take place regularly. The principal makes the final decision on adjustments to meet the student's learning needs (para. 2)

Throughout the Victorian Government education websites (DET, 2022a; Victorian Government, 2022e) the role of allied health suggests privatised services to support students with dyslexia, as access rights and pathways for these services are unclear. Through a privatised medical model there is the onus on students and families to self-advocate, with embedded assumptions about the resources available to students and their families. The following is a statement to guide school operations in response to disabilities including dyslexia. It implies privatisation and practices that are encouraged rather than mandated:

> School policy and practice should reflect collaboration between the school leaders and teachers, parent/guardian/carer(s), specialist education, or allied health staff to develop agreed understanding and responses to students' needs. Including students with autism, dyslexia, language, or other learning disabilities (Victorian Government, 2022d, para. 3)

My results indicate that inclusion for students with disabilities is additional and on the periphery of everyday regular practice. Policy documents prompt the school principals and teachers within the education system to react to disabilities such as dyslexia through adopting measures outside the education system.

The Victorian Government (2022d) describes how, based on eligibility criterion, schools can access "resources to support the delivery of teaching and learning programs for students with autism, dyslexia, language or other learning disabilities" (para. 1). Possible supports are listed as teaching staff, specialist education or allied health staff, consultancy or professional development, specialist equipment or materials and education support staff (para. 1). Policy is unclear about funding to operationalise espoused support and whether student needs can be met locally within their regular schools.

In chapter two, I illustrated that private dyslexia organisations play a role in disseminating information on dyslexia and informing the national agenda. My analysis of the DET website identified that private dyslexia organisations are assumed to supplement the responsibilities of the Victorian Government. For instance, the peak-body for dyslexia in Victoria (SPELD Victoria, 2022a) and their governing body (AUSPELD, 2022) are referred to as part of a systemic response for dyslexia. The following extract from the Victorian Government, (2022c) can be found under the title 'Information and advice about learning difficulties':

- SPELD Victoria offers information and services to support Victorians with learning difficulties including advice, advocacy, diagnostic assessments, consultations, events, and workshops for parents, teachers, and allied health professionals.
- AUSPELD is the nation body that governs the state-run SPELD organisations in Australia. They have resources, such as the

> ‘Understanding Learning Difficulties: A Guide For Parents’. This guide explains the nature of learning difficulties and offers practice information about identification, interventions and support. (para. 3)

Victorian Government policy descriptions (DET, 2016b) embed the notion that capacity building in schools occurs in partnership with private dyslexia organisations who hold expert status. Descriptions of partnerships are broad and in this example from DET (2016a) suggest future actions:

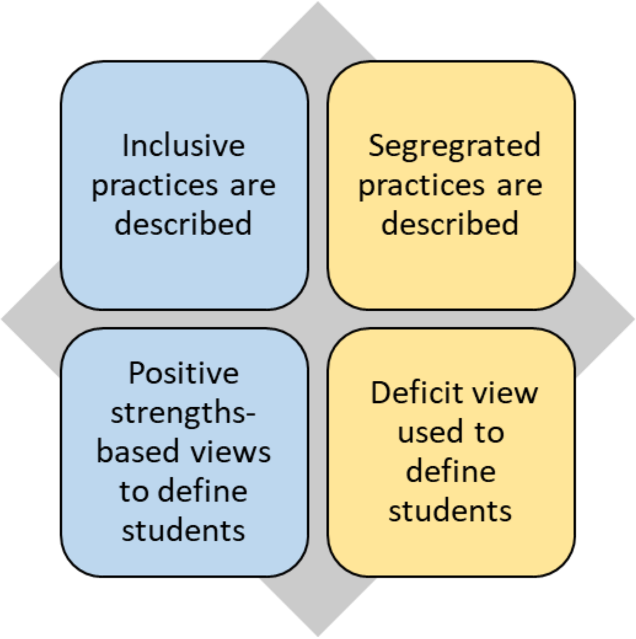
> We will assess how to improve access and participation by teachers [in professional learning]. This will include strengthening our partnership with SPELD Victoria to increase access for schools to high-level expertise and advice around students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties. (p. 23)

The Victorian Government (2022b) claims that it has “a strong and vibrant education system that celebrates diversity, and is committed to supporting the achievement and participation of all students”, para. 3). Yet there were limited examples from Victorian Government education websites (DET, 2022a; Victorian Government, 2022e) that present an inclusive education paradigm aligned to international protocols (UN General Assembly, 2006) where students have the right to full participation rights alongside their peers in regular classrooms.

Figure 4.1 (on the following page) highlights that Victorian Government education websites (DET, 2022a; Victorian Government, 2022e) present an unclear paradigm for teaching students with dyslexia, by framing best practice through contradictory approaches and discourses. A range of issues have been identified including ambiguity for the rights of students with dyslexia and the responsibilities of the principals and teachers within the education system.

Figure 4.1

Various Dyslexia Approaches from Analysis of Victorian Government Policy (previously published in Marland, 2021)


Inclusive practices are described
Segregrated practices are described
Positive strengths-based views to define students
Deficit view used to define students

Descriptions of best practice in policy documents lacked clear pathways of support for students with dyslexia; the lack of accountability measures implied that inclusive practices may be voluntary. Policy documents shifted responsibility for expertise from within the Victorian education system to *outside others* including allied health professionals and private dyslexia organisations.

The call to recognise students' strengths is positive, although undermined by a lack of tools to support strengths-based practices. In the context of conflicting terminology and approaches, it is difficult to decipher best practice for dyslexia and inclusive education from policy documents housed within Victorian Government education websites.

4.4.6 Teacher Professional Learning for Dyslexia

The Disability Standards for Education DSE (Australian Government, 2005) outline the right to adjustments or accommodations, delivered in a timely manner with access to specialist expertise (the term expert or expertise appears eight times in the standards). It is unclear how dyslexia *expertise* might be defined within the Victorian education context and what might professional knowledge entail. The Victorian Government has recognised the need for specialist dyslexia training by creating the *Learning difficulties including dyslexia professional learning program* (DET, 2018b) to compensate for gaps in foundational understanding of literacy teacher knowledge missed at the initial teacher education stage.

Delivered in partnership with La Trobe University, the *Learning difficulties including dyslexia professional learning program* (DET, 2018b) was designed to offer professional learning to a limited number of eligible teachers and school leaders.

> Newly developed workshops are running to focus on implementing appropriate interventions and whole-of-school approaches to high quality differentiated practice. Aiming to up-skill, inspire and engage, every school to nominate two 'champions' to learn and cascade refined techniques. A full-day workshop will run for teachers, whilst a three-hour workshop will run for staff in leadership, coordination and specialist support positions. (para. 1)

The professional learning program embeds the Science of Reading approach and was supported by a five-part webinar series. The topics covered in the five webinars include 'delving into systematic synthetic phonics', 'analysing spelling errors', 'decodable, authentic, predictable texts', 'transitioning from oral language to becoming literate' and 'delving into explicit instruction' (DET, 2018c).

From Victorian Government education websites (DET, 2022a; Victorian Government, 2022e) the process of monitoring and evaluating the impact of dyslexia training initiatives remains unclear. The Victorian Government has demonstrated a preference for not mandating dyslexia training and using limited training initiatives to address best practice. While the initiative responds to gaps in professional knowledge of dyslexia, there is limited detail of how the uptake of the initiative will be measured and how potential benefits may be sustained over the long-term.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, findings from the Victorian Government education policy context explore representations of dyslexia, best practice and inclusion. Building on my previously published work that focused on education rights in the Victorian education policy context (Marland, 2021), this chapter broadened the scope of these findings. I examined four key dyslexia policy domains to explore dyslexia definitions, discourses, the notion of a Victorian Government dyslexia paradigm, systems of support and teacher training. Recognising Colebatch's (2006) view that policy encompasses more than just the official creation of legislation and acts of parliament, my research considered broad expressions of policy ranging from parliamentary committees, government commissioned inquiries, statements of policy intent, to content published on the Victorian Government's education websites.

Highlighting that the issue of dyslexia transcends the intersecting policy domains of literacy and disability and multi-disciplines, my results indicate that policy document construct unclear frameworks for best practice for teaching students with dyslexia.

Policy issues that I identified included contradictions in dyslexia definitions, discourses, exclusionary systems, and limited use of strengths-based perspectives. All four policy examples reviewed in this chapter understated the responsibilities of government to support students with dyslexia. Providing them with education access was described as a responsibility shared with stakeholders outside the education system, including allied health professionals and private dyslexia organisations. My results indicated that there was limited explanation of the policy review cycle to support dyslexia policy development.

The results of examining perspectives in Victorian Policy documents uncovered paradoxes in the literature for including students with disabilities such as dyslexia. The literature weighs into debates on how students choose to identify, without creating the view that they have additional needs or deficits. There is a debate in the literature about how to recognise students with a disability. Normalising disability is often proposed to advance educational inclusion, yet discussion of disability and differences can further reinforce the view of *otherness* for dyslexia. Similar paradoxes have been identified in Victorian Government policy, adding to the research puzzle woven throughout the thesis (see *Chapter Six)*.

In the next chapter, I present the results from multiple-case studies of three Victorian Government schools to identify examples of policy enactment in dyslexia exemplar school settings. Findings from document analysis and interviews aim to develop new insights into and problematisation of teacher and policy document perspectives of best practice for teaching students with dyslexia.

Chapter 5

Findings and Discussion from Multiple-Case Studies of Dyslexia Exemplar Schools

Figure 5.1

'A Ship in Harbor' Wall Poster

"A ship in harbor is safe,
but that is not what
ships are built for"
John A. Shedd

I begin this chapter with the above quote "A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for" (Shedd, 1928, p. 63), derived from the case study of Marram Primary School (pseudonym). Displayed as a quote on a classroom wall poster—the artefact known as document one (D1)—signals to students to take risks with their learning and not to fear failure. The message hints at approaches and philosophies to teaching and learning within the dyslexia exemplar school. Alongside interviews with school principals and specialist teachers, documents added to the richness of data in the school setting and provided insights into school-level interpretation of Victorian Government policy.

In this chapter, I present findings from policy documents and teacher perspectives of best practice from dyslexia exemplar schools. I begin with findings from the sampling stage of the research, followed by my perceptions of best practice, dyslexia definitions, screening, assessment, and pedagogical assumptions. Next, I examine inclusive education approaches, discourses, understandings of access issues including learning support, accommodations and interactions with allied health professionals. I identify whether teachers in dyslexia exemplar school make connections in practice to policy and practices from England. Finally, I identify perceptions of outcomes and equity, and a systemic response to teaching students with dyslexia.

Keywords: terminology in this chapter arises from the views of participants. See glossary for *explicit instruction*, *multisensory*, *decodable*, *morphology* and *etymology*.

Data collection was guided by pre-established research themes that refined Åsvoll's (2014) Deductive-Inductive-Abductive (see table 3.13). Findings were orientated towards identifying policy interpretation of best practice for teaching and supporting students with dyslexia and built upon *Chapter Four*, where best practice for teaching and supporting students with dyslexia in policy documents were unclear. This chapter continues to add understanding to the research puzzle and the paradoxes within best practice and inclusion for students with dyslexia.

I sampled policy documents of interest to the research including school policies, handbooks, curriculum plans, teaching manuals, assessment materials, learning support programs, teaching schedules, classroom displays, teaching tools and artefacts introduced by participants (see table 3.9) (interview and document extracts from schools are included in the chapter). Policy documents and interviews with teachers and principals addressed the research questions: *how is dyslexia being approached in the Victorian education system?* and *how are students with dyslexia being included in the Victorian education system?*

Building on the Victorian Government policy findings, these exemplar schools provide a more in-depth view but are not representative of the Victorian education system. I report on three Victorian Government dyslexia exemplar school case studies, which include nine participant interviews in total.

I utilise a coding system in this chapter not used elsewhere in the thesis (see table 3.11). When reporting findings from interviews an alphanumeric code has been used to de-identify participants (P1, P2, etc) documents (D1, D2, etc) and private dyslexia organisations (Org1, Org2, etc). Where required, sensitive interview data has been redacted and/or a participant code is omitted.

5.1 Dyslexia exemplar schools were hard to find

One finding that began to emerge during my analysis of data in the sampling stage, was a lack of visibility of the dyslexia exemplar schools, hidden from online searches of school websites. In this section, I explore the finding of the hidden status of dyslexia exemplar schools and suggest possible factors: firstly, that few schools may be expressing an intent to address dyslexia and secondly, that exemplar schools are not easily identifiable within regular government systems.

I identified dyslexia exemplar schools through the use of the term *dyslexia* within school websites. The research sample revealed that relatively few schools in Victoria used the term dyslexia on section of their website that included homepages, about us, school newsletters, initiatives, programs, resources and school policies. My novel approach to sampling (described in *section 3.2.1*) revealed a small but wider sample of dyslexia exemplar schools than was accessible from initial online searches and systems-level inquiry.

Findings revealed:

- The term dyslexia was rarely used on school websites
- Dyslexia was least likely to be mentioned in secondary school websites
- There were a lack of government DET systems to identify dyslexia exemplar schools

The rare and hidden status of the dyslexia exemplar school was supported by examples from fieldwork within the multiple-case study schools. Participants demonstrated limited knowledge of other dyslexia exemplar schools and were unable to shed light on the scope of exemplar practice. P4 from Gawan Primary School stated "I believe there's two or three others [dyslexia exemplar schools] but I couldn't tell you who they are ... so there's not much knowledge out there about who does it and how to access it".

While there was no reliable data to indicate the number of students with dyslexia applying to each educational setting, participants consistently reported that their schools were over-subscribed due to implementing a response to dyslexia, a further indictor of the possible rare status of dyslexia exemplar schools. Participants from all three schools alluded to a shortage of such schools, with some suggesting that families of students with dyslexia were prepared to travel great distances to attend their dyslexia exemplar schools. Participant four (P4) thought that local schools were not offering adequate support for students with dyslexia.

Participants at both primary schools observed that enacting a response to dyslexia created a niche and increased demand for enrolment. School documents indicated that both primary schools advertised their niche, including Gawan Primary School (D10) which identified itself as having "a high number of dyslexic children at our school". While participants commented that increased demand reflected their school as a place of which they were proud, it was also problematic because the school had limited capacity to accept new students.

The context of the rare and hidden dyslexia exemplar school contrasts with countries such as England that have routinely used the term dyslexia-friendly school and dyslexia specialist school to denote exemplar practice (Coffield et al., 2008; Fairley House School, 2022; MacKay, 2005; Pavey, 2007). The term *dyslexia-friendly schools* has been identified in Australian political discourse (Pyne, 2014a), although my findings suggest these schools are rare within the state of Victoria. My results indicated gaps in Victorian Government systems in highlighting dyslexia exemplar schools, a situation that contrasts with England (as discussed in section 6.2).

Interviews and documents from fieldwork highlighted that terminology such as *dyslexia aware* and *dyslexia accredited* are linked to schools in the Victorian context, although poorly defined. The variety of approaches and terminology for dyslexia creates barriers for identifying dyslexia exemplar schools. Online data demonstrated that the two primary schools were defined as *dyslexia accredited*, in contrast to the secondary school that identified as *dyslexia aware* and *Irlen aware* (interchangeably). The use of interchangeable terms and definitions are discussed and problematised throughout this thesis, including in *Chapter Two*. For instance, Walert Secondary School identified an approach to dyslexia in alignment to Irlen (2005) while also categorising dyslexia as a language-based learning difficulty.

> [Walert Secondary School is] taking steps to become a Dyslexia and Irlen Syndrome aware school… Our staff are working with various professionals in the field of Dyslexia to understand how best to assist children with this learning difficulty in our classrooms… we welcome students with these language-based learning difficulties. (Walert Secondary School, D2)

Although my novel approach to sampling enhanced the possibility of identifying dyslexia exemplar schools, they remained rare and hidden in among the 1,458 mainstream government schools in Victoria recorded in Victorian Government (2022a) census data. I found a lack of systems to locate dyslexia exemplar schools within the Victoria Government context. This situation was even more pronounced in secondary school settings, that were least likely to use the term dyslexia on their school websites. Furthermore, inconsistent use of terminology for dyslexia added barriers to identifying dyslexia exemplar schools. The issues unpinning the rare and hidden status of dyslexia exemplar schools are explored throughout the chapter and supported by insights from interviews and documents from fieldwork.

5.2 Dyslexia exemplar schools adopt contrasting dyslexia approaches

My findings from the case studies indicate that dyslexia approaches vary markedly across the three schools. Findings are presented by theme, including definitions for dyslexia, assessment, teaching pedagogies and intervention practices. I examine how dyslexia approaches in the case study schools align with or detour from ministerial statements and government policy (Victorian Government, 2016). For instance, I interrogate the adoption of the dyslexia screening tool (DET, 2022e) within the three schools.

This section explores how schools connected their practices to external systemic influences including research studies. Interviews and documents demonstrated how schools were grappling with best practice for dyslexia and the assumptions being made, in the context of dyslexia debates. Table 5.1 (below) presents a comparison of the approaches of the three schools.

Table 5.1

An Overview of Dyslexia Approaches in the Exemplar Schools

Marram Primary School	**Gawan Primary School**	**Walert Secondary School**
Dyslexia Accredited School	Dyslexia Accredited School	Self-identifies as *Dyslexia Aware*
Consolidated practices	Emerging practices	Variable practices
Dyslexia definition aligns to Rose (2009)	Dyslexia definition aligns to Rose (2009)	Dyslexia definition aligns to Irlen (2005)
The Explicit Direct Instruction method (EDI)	The Explicit Direct Instruction method (EDI)	Multiple approaches
Training provided by dyslexia organisation 1	Training provided by dyslexia organisation 1	Training provided by dyslexia organisation 2
Universal Design “We teach everybody as if they have dyslexia”	Universal Design “it’s good for everyone as well as the dyslexic students”	Individualised student-centred “it is really about going back to basics with someone”
Tiered support/ interventions. Emphasis on early intervention & pre-school entry	Tiered support/interventions Some pre-school entry screening	Less emphasis on testing Support at point of need
Multisensory Language approaches (MSL)	Multisensory Language approaches (MSL)	Adapted learning materials Strengths-based Well-being
“It is a catch them before they fail policy” Whole school approach	“you can suddenly help everybody” Whole school approach	“we celebrate anything that is going well” Multiple approaches Whole school inclusive focus

The three schools defined themselves as either *dyslexia accredited* or *dyslexia* *aware* in self-promotional materials such as school website and school newsletters. The meaning of such terms is unclear and ambiguous to outsiders, particularly as the terminology originates outside Victorian Government policy. In the next section, I address dyslexia definitions and views of best practice for teaching pedagogies, screening, and assessment. Due to the similarities between the two primary schools, they have been discussed collectively and then compared to the secondary school.

5.2.1 Dyslexia definitions from dyslexia exemplar schools

Dyslexia definitions: Insights from the primary schools

- Broad definitions of dyslexia were preferred by participants
- Participants used accessible everyday language to discuss dyslexia
- Perspectives aligned to the Science of Reading research
- Definitions of dyslexia were shaped by specialist teachers
- Training providers influenced dyslexia definitions
- Evidence of strengths-based perspectives emerging in dyslexia definitions

From the dyslexia exemplar school case studies, I identified that dyslexia was described through contrasting discourses, a finding that mirrored analysis of Victorian Government policy in the previous chapter. Documents and interviews highlighted examples of dyslexia being described as a *learning difference* (Gawan Primary School, D10, Marram Primary School, D12), *learning issue*, (Gawan Primary School, D10), *literacy issue* (P6) *learning difficulty* (P2, P3), *and specific learning difficulty* (P2). The word disability tended to be more closely associated with dyslexia in Victorian Government policy, than in school settings; for instance, *The Program for Students with Disabilities* (DET, 2022c).

Insights from the two primary schools demonstrated alignment in dyslexia definitions and approaches reinforced by having the same dyslexia training and accreditation provider. Interviews and documents from fieldwork demonstrated that the training provider Org1 played a key role in defining dyslexia, and shaping pedagogies and practices within the school. School documents from Gawan Primary School reflected an intent to recruit teaching candidates that had undertaken training with Org1. “It is important that the successful applicant has [Org1] training” (Gawan Primary School, D9). Furthermore, P3 (Marram Primary School) indicated that the training provider played a key role in influencing knowledge and decision making for dyslexia provision.

Participant interviews and documents from both primary schools typically favoured broad definitions of dyslexia, reflecting the view that dyslexia exists on a continuum with no clear cut-off points (Rose, 2009). Participants articulated broad definitions of dyslexia, stressing the need for students to access appropriate teaching and support. They observed that in non-exemplar schools and across the allied health system, dyslexia was not consistently recognised. For example, “Teachers don’t understand what [dyslexia] is and even there are professionals that say it doesn’t exist” (P2).

Participants argued that inconsistent systemic approaches to supporting students with dyslexia meant that many could remain undiagnosed and unsupported in non-exemplar schools. Within their schools there was a perception that best practice enabled access for all learners, regardless of whether they had a dyslexia diagnosis. “We teach everybody as if they have dyslexia. It is the best practice for reading, spelling and writing and the students get more out of us”. (Marram Primary School, P2).

Despite similarities in dyslexia definitions and pedagogical perspectives, there were notable differences (see table 5.1) in the way that participants described a whole school approach. This variance was partially attributed to Marram Primary School having consolidated practices (descriptors are provided in table 3.14) over several years, while Gawan Primary School described emerging practices and were relatively new to adopting a response to dyslexia (described in *Chapter Three*). Moreover, interviews and documents from the primary school settings indicated perceptions that broad factors led to the development of school level practices, discussed throughout this chapter.

Documents from the dyslexia training provider Org1 gathered from fieldwork reflect synergy in the participant perspectives. Unlike the perspectives sampled in the secondary school case (discussed later in this section), Org1 consistently constructed dyslexia as a brain-based learning difference, requiring appropriate instruction to overcome literacy difficulties associated with reading, spelling, and language learning. It offered the following account of student challenges and strengths:

> Individuals with dyslexia have trouble with reading and spelling despite having the ability to learn. Individuals with dyslexia can learn, they just learn in a different way. Often these individuals, who have talented and productive minds, are said to have a language learning difference (Org1, D8)

Primary schools positioned training providers as key actors in the construction of dyslexia definitions and school identity. A principal noted “we will allow certain tutors to come into our school, who we know have the accreditation from [Org1]” (Marram Primary School, P1). Documents from Org1 connected to both primary schools and defined dyslexia within strengths-based language, accentuating a capabilities approach. Participants often reflected strengths-based perspectives, although there were inconsistencies (the implications are discussed throughout *Chapter Six*).

During the interviews, primary school participants used accessible everyday language to articulate dyslexia definitions. “[Dyslexia] we say is issues with reading, writing, spelling, letter reversal. Struggles with decoding words. Struggles with hearing sound” (Gawan Primary School, P6). While a Gawan Primary School participant (P5) defined dyslexia as “the way you process letter to sound understanding, so graphemic understanding, takes a more convoluted path to be embedded in the language side of your brain”.

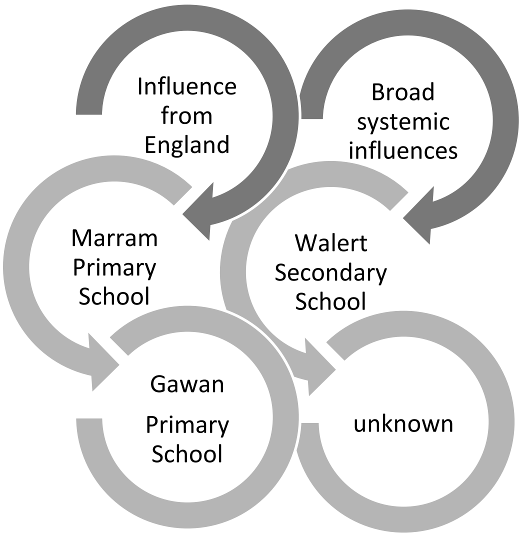
Dyslexia was described in multiple ways, synonymously with students having reading difficulties and those who learn *differently*. Participants recognised that not all students who have reading and spelling difficulties have dyslexia, yet all students have an entitlement to appropriate teaching and support. They consistently argued for the needs (rights) of students with persistent reading difficulties—regardless of a dyslexia diagnosis—approaching best practice for students with reading difficulties and dyslexia in much the same way. This Marram Primary School participant (P1) defined dyslexia in the following terms:

> Students have trouble with the printed word, when it comes to reading, decoding or encoding, with their writing and their spelling and basically having those issues isolated to that particular area, was my initial understanding of dyslexia. Looking into how we define it from an education point of view, it is basically any student that is not picking up how to read or spell. From an education point of view, we say that's our issue and that's the symptom.

Figure 5.2 (below) highlights influences identified from participant interviews. Influences on the school are identified at the top, with the school's possible influence on other schools at the bottom.

Figure 5.2

Dyslexia Exemplar School Influence: Cycle Identified from Participant Perspectives



From participant perspectives I identified that dyslexia exemplar schools were subject to different systemic influences that led them to becoming an exemplar school. Marram Primary School was identified as a leader (influenced by policy and practice from England) and described as initiating exemplar practice prior to other schools, and influencing practice as Gawan Primary School. Walert Secondary School was identified as not belonging to the same cycle of influence.

Participants from both primary schools explicitly linked their perspectives to dyslexia research, otherwise known as the Science of Reading. This finding was strongly associated with Marram Primary where all three participants cited SoR research which suggested that their deeper knowledge of this research was acquired prior to enlisting the training provider (Org1). This was a unique finding, not replicated by Gawan Primary School participants (who relied more heavily on Org1).

Marriam Primary School participants described consolidated practices for dyslexia, with P2 being a catalyst for becoming a dyslexia exemplar school. P2 self-identified and was identified by other participants as having extensive training and experience in the field of dyslexia teaching and support (discussed later in section 5.8 as non-typical specialist training initially from England). The prior knowledge and experience of P2 was described as a mechanism for evaluating suitable dyslexia training providers to facilitate teacher professional learning.

Interviews with Gawan Primary School participants suggested one-directional influence where participants perceived benefit from replicating practices from from Marram Primary School. Gawan Primary School participants described how they benefited from the training and experience of specialist teacher P2 and ultimately enlisted the same training provider (Org1).

Walert Secondary School was identified as having a broader range of systemic influences, rather than modelling practices from other exemplars. Participants described encouragemet from within the school community (parental) and engaging more directly with private dyslexia organisations, rather than collaboration with other dyslexia exemplar schools. Secondary school participants had limited awareness of other dyslexia exemplar secondary schools.

Two Marram Primary School participants (P1 and P2) demonstrated their knowledge to SoR research, citing academic authors and peer-reviewed studies. Indeed, this was another remarkable and distinguishing feature of school. The participants exhibited engagement with academic research in the construction of dyslexia knowledge and pedagogies. Participants at Marram Primary School suggested that peer-reviewed research was required to establish an evidence-base and moved the discussion between policy, teaching and assessment practices and gave examples of current research. They introduced concepts such as longitudinal studies as important barometers for evaluating reading research. In the following statement P2 is referring to other teachers in the field at non-exemplar schools:

> Teachers don't know how to unpack research, they'll say *this is research-based* but it's not independent or peer-reviewed. They'll say *look it's got research behind it*. And they'll just do what they have been doing or what the teacher next door is doing (Marram Primary School, P2).

Dyslexia definitions: Insights from the secondary school

- Perspectives not linked to Science of Reading (SoR) definitions of dyslexia
- Irlen definitions of dyslexia were preferred by participants
- Training providers influenced dyslexia definitions
- Some evidence of strengths-based perspectives in dyslexia definitions

It was anticipated that primary and secondary schools may differentiate their dyslexia approaches to reflect an emphasis on foundational skills, compared to broad curriculum content related to the secondary curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022), although sharp differences in dyslexia definitions from interviews and fieldwork documents was an unexpected finding of the research. Walert Secondary School described itself as Dyslexia Aware and Irlen Syndrome Aware (Walert Secondary School, D2), connecting with visual theories of dyslexia (Irlen, 2005) rather than emphasising phonological perspectives of dyslexia (Seidenberg, 2017;

Seidenberg et al., 2020; Snowling et al., 2020) as favoured by the two primary schools.

In *Chapter Two*, I highlighted that Irlen (2005) approaches are grounded in visual theories of dyslexia and have been broadly challenged (Cotton & Evans, 1990; Ritchie et al., 2011; The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists, 2018). Like the primary school cases, the influence of a training provider (Org2) was evident in constructing dyslexia definitions. Walert Secondary School described dyslexia as *Irlen* and *dyslexia* (P7) and *Irlen dyslexia* interchangeably (P8, P9).

A Walert Secondary School participant (P7) articulated that understanding dyslexia through an Irlen perspective had been beneficial in equipping teachers and the broader school community with dyslexia knowledge. P7 stated that teachers can "just be straight. Right, this is [dyslexia] and just be really open and educate the parents about it, kids and then everyone is okay". P7 described how training from Org2 was translated into classroom practice:

> The [Org2] presenter said this will work really well for kids that have got dyslexia. So, these days obviously blackboards are a thing of the past but you can easily change the background. You can easily if it's Irlen centred. We can have incandescent lighting, you can move away from the fluorescent lighting, you have natural lighting wherever possible. (Walert Secondary School, P7)

The concept of dyslexia and Irlen Syndrome was used interchangeably, at times with blurred conceptual boundaries. The following is an excerpt from Walert Secondary School's documents (D2) to introduce its perspective on dyslexia:

> Does your child have problems learning? Are they easily frustrated or embarrassed? Do they have lowered self-esteem and/or emotional difficulties? Do they feel they are facing a life-long sentence of under achievement with their learning, despite working hard and doing their best? Would they rather give up? They may have dyslexia… dyslexia affects the ability of otherwise bright people to process printed language. They usually display a strong mismatch between oral skills and literacy skills, like a breakdown in the processing of written language. (Walert Secondary School, D2)

This excerpt might imply that dyslexia resulted from difficulties decoding written language in alignment with the Science of Reading's (SoR) emphasis on phoneme to grapheme correspondence (as described in *Chapter Two*) (Rose, 2009; Snowling & Hulme, 2005). It demonstrated that visual theories of dyslexia were used to explain difficulties with deciphering the printed word. Alternative documents represented contrasting perspectives, such as the document (D19) *Preliminary Irlen (Dyslexia) Questionnaire* (See Appendix P, para. 1) which asked the following questions of students:

1. Do you get a headache?
2. Do you feel sick in your stomach?
3. Do words wriggle, move or change places?
4. Do words ever look blurry or faded?
5. Do words ever change shape or play tricks on you?

It was anticipated that secondary schools may have additional challenges with widening achievement gaps between students. P8 reported "it is like playing catch up". Although a dyslexia specific teaching pedagogy was unclear in the context of a whole school approach, I identified that learning accommodations were a component of its dyslexia pedagogical approach (discussed later in the chapter).

Dyslexia definitions varied between the primary and secondary schools. Both primary schools explicitly connected their approaches to research from the Science of Reading, while the secondary school mostly used an Irlen dyslexia paradigm, with participants describing fewer pedagogical applications to support learners.

All three schools highlighted that training providers had influenced dyslexia definitions and approaches, particularly in schools with fewer specialist teachers. Interviews and documents identified that only one school described capacity to critically evaluate the methods used by training providers. Across the three schools, participants broadly supported adopting pedagogical approaches to address the functional needs of students without waiting for a dyslexia diagnosis. Further findings on the equity and outcomes are presented in section 5.9 of this chapter and are discussed in section 6.5.

5.2.2 Screening and assessment from dyslexia exemplar schools

Screening and assessment: Insights from the primary schools

- Proactive screening and assessment beyond Victorian Government mandates
- Schools developed their own interpretations of dyslexia screening protocols
- Primary schools favoured dyslexia screening in pre-school, up to a year ahead of Victorian Government time frames
- Primary schools favoured ongoing dyslexia screening

I aimed to clarify how schools responded to Victorian Government mandated assessments (discussed in *Chapter Four*, Policy Findings), including The English Online Interview (EOI) dyslexia screening tool (DET, 2022e). Evidence from both primary school case studies suggested that the government mandated dyslexia screening tool was not relied upon to identify students with dyslexia. As one participant explained: “it’s announced somewhere as an initiative… you don’t even hear about it. I wouldn’t know where to go to access it, to be honest” (de-identified quote). Instead, participants from both primary schools reported the need for enhanced screening measures beyond the mandated dyslexia screening tool (DET, 2022e). They described supplementing the dyslexia screening tool with an alternative selection of assessment tools, to address perceived gaps in the efficacy of the tool.

Participants from Marram Primary School provided the most detailed perspectives of assessment and screening practices. While there was synergy in the dyslexia approaches in both primary schools, Gawan Primary School described being at an earlier stage of enactment than Marram Primary School (see table 3.14). Among participants at both primary schools there was a theme of early intervention and proactive screening measures—with a strong emphasis on comprehensive assessments, regular screening, and monitoring to dyslexia—beyond Victorian Government mandates. Participants from both primary schools favoured rigorous screening protocols for pre-school students, although only Marram Primary School described full enactment of their assessment objectives. One participant reflected that specialist training of teachers allowed the school to facilitate more comprehensive screening:

> We tend to use our more all-encompassing one [dyslexia screener]. We've got the [named standardised test] and we've got our own phonological screener and I think it is more depth… what I've found is we know more than that. We have more skills that we can pull off with the assessments that *we've* got. (Marram Primary School, P2)

The same participant (P2) described introducing a plethora of assessment tools ranging from those used in education systems internationally to those designed by universities and psychometric testing organisations. Access to these tools is irregular and outside the scope of government frameworks, an issue that is discussed later in the chapter. Marram Primary School participants consistently described a whole school approach to assessment, a pattern supported by school documents. To reinforce a whole school approach the school published a teaching and learning handbook (Marram Primary School, D3), which I observed was readily available for school visitors in the foyer.

Marram Primary School participants (P1, P2, P3) and school documents (D3) described introducing the following initiatives to pro-actively identify students with dyslexic type difficulties:

- enhanced student assessment across year levels and pre-school entry
- ongoing assessment and student monitoring (response to intervention)
- international assessment tools (primarily from England and the USA)
- enhanced access to diagnostic services from allied health professionals
- proactive approach to co-occurring issues with sight, hearing and speech

> Since we started training with [Org1] we have a diagnostic tool which is not necessarily to screen for dyslexia, but we'll screen for [gaps] and often the children who have the [gaps] are the ones that have the dyslexia tendencies anyway. It goes through rhyming, phonetic awareness, spelling [and broader skills]. (Gawan Primary School, P4)

P4 described plans to adopt non-mandated literacy assessments for students prior to school entry, like their counterpart dyslexia exemplar school, Marram Primary School. P4 acknowledged an invaluable collaborative relationship with Marram Primary School, to enable replication of practice. "I can email them and say, what do you do about this?".

P4 perceived that Marram Primary School had provided an exemplar model for screening and assessment. Like Marram Primary School, "we would like to do a diagnostic test on each child and target already who we think is going to have the issues and that is in the plan. But I'm not quite sure whether we're ready for that next year”. This participant described the partnership and influence between the two primary schools:

> They have [enhanced pre-school literacy screening] in place already and we've done a fair bit of work back and forth with them. Visiting each other's schools to keep things going. So [named teacher] came here and did some work with our prep teachers last year ... Then we sent some staff there too… certainly the testing is something we are very interested in doing but it's not quite come to fruition yet. (Gawan Primary School, P4).

Participants across the primary schools described the importance of being timely and proactive with screening and assessment and consistently conveyed a sense of urgency about giving students the appropriate supports at the earliest possible stage. P1 explained that:

> We screen every prep that comes. We let the parents know about what the results are. We don’t alarm them. We say look this is just some of the things you can work with. We say is there a family history? We ask those basics questions. It is amazing what comes out of that. We will flag [family history and other risk factors]. The likelihood might be, that they will be slower to pick up some of those basic skills, so we give it to them earlier, quicker and repetitive as much as we can. (Marram Primary School, P1)

Screening and assessment: Insights from the secondary school

- The secondary school had access to Irlen dyslexia screening
- Participants reported limited access to alternative screening
- Unlike the primary schools, secondary settings did not have Victorian Government mandated dyslexia screeners
- The terms screening, assessment and diagnosis were used interchangeably (although they have different meanings)

Unlike primary schools, secondary schools were not required to use a Victorian Government dyslexia screening tool. I learned from interviews that it was gaps in dyslexia screening and assessment that were the catalyst for Walert Secondary School becoming a dyslexia exemplar school. When a student named *Julio* (pseudonym), a year seven student, enrolled at the school, his parents raised concerns about a lack of systems to identify dyslexia. Julio was experiencing challenges with reading and spelling although the causes of the difficulties were unknown. This situation led the school to engage with a dyslexia specialist who worked under an Irlen (2005) framework. The principal at Walert Secondary School recalled:

> When I started here as principal, we had a child that had … it wasn't dyslexia as such … The child had been to a dyslexia specialist at [Org2]. She did screening and work with those kids, and I suppose what we were listening to is this parent that had done all this [advocacy] work… Obviously you have got to listen… It was Irlen [diagnosis] as it turned out.

The principal reported that Org2 enabled students like Julio to be screened for Irlen dyslexia. Following Org2 conducting screening at the school, P7 noted that the school had more than 30 children across year seven and eight who were identified as having Irlen dyslexia (shortly after implementing the screening protocol). Interviews and school documents suggested a tendency towards the Irlen sub-type of dyslexia diagnosis rather than dyslexia as a language-based learning difficulty, as described by Seidenberg (2017). The school demonstrated that Org2 supported their capacity to offer a dyslexia screening service when the school's resources were limited. The breadth of influence of Org2 was enhanced by training teachers to become Irlen dyslexia Screeners. As discussed in *Chapter Two*, the Irlen visual hypothesis for dyslexia has been broadly challenged, including by The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (2018).

Participant interviews and documents suggested that the school did not have the capacity or resources to identify dyslexia as a language-based learning difficulty. For instance, it was unclear if there were appropriate resources to target broader reading skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. The referral system for students with dyslexia as a language-based learning (phonological) issue to access support was unclear:

> It's just more identifying that they have Irlen and then I would refer them on. Because I'm just a screener… Through the testing I do. It takes about an hour to do the test… if there is an issue but then I would say to the parents I'd refer them to [Org2] for further advice and further tests. (Walert Secondary School, P9)

The differences in dyslexia screening and assessment practices varied significantly between the primary and secondary schools. Participants from the primary schools described evaluating screening and assessment tools and had a rationale for their protocols (particularly Marram Primary School) that connected to research studies. Both primary schools described internal capacity building, with the drive towards a specialist dyslexia response shaped from within the primary schools. While the primary schools demonstrated influence from training providers, participants described growing autonomy over screening and assessment protocols that had been implemented (particularly at Marram Primary School). In contrast, secondary school participants described being more responsive to external influences including to the directives of the training provider.

5.3 Best practice teaching pedagogies from dyslexia exemplar schools

Best practice teaching pedagogies: Insights from the primary schools
Best practice dyslexia pedagogy connected to:

- Explicit instruction
- The 3 Tiers Model
- Universal Design
- Research (including peer-reviewed journals and longitudinal studies)

Dyslexia exemplar schools favoured contrasting pedagogical approaches to teach and support students with dyslexia. Participants from both primary schools consistently demonstrated the view that best practice teaching for dyslexia is underpinned by the Science of Reading (SoR). Specific pedagogical decisions including the choice of reading and spelling programs were evaluated through a SoR framework. Alternatively, interviews and school documents from the secondary school demonstrated multiple approaches rather than a unified whole school approach. Within the secondary school there was an emphasis on addressing critical education needs and student engagement, rather than implementing a specific dyslexia pedagogy (this is discussed further in the inclusive education section (5.5) of this chapter).

Table 5.2. (below) highlights word frequency derived from research interviews (e.g., how many times a word was used by participants from a school site), providing a lens on approaches to teaching and supporting students with dyslexia. Word frequencies are reported by school for comparison.

Table 5.2

Word Frequency for Dyslexia Approaches from Interviews for Each Exemplar School Setting

Term/s	Marram Primary	Gawan Primary	Walert Secondary
Anxiety	6	1	6
Celebrate	3	-	2
Confidence	5	3	8
Decodable	3	11	-
Deficit	-	-	-
Difficulty	6	4	1
Disorder	2	-	-
Explicit	14	14	1
Evidence	22	7	3
Fail	7	-	1
Irlen	-	-	24
Morphology	5	3	-
Multi-sensory	11	40	-
Phonics*	42	20	12
Research	20	6	-
Rights	-	-	-
Strengths	-	2	-
Success	5	2	1
Visual	1	1	5

Note. * Phonological, phoneme, phonetic

Table 5.2 illustrates that participants in all three schools had concerns about students with dyslexia experiencing *anxiety* and issues of student *confidence*. All three schools discussed *evidence*, although it was a minor theme for the secondary school. Moreover, *research* was not raised by secondary school participants. *Phonics* was a more prominent theme for the primary schools, as was the idea of *success*. The primary schools favoured themes of *morphology*, *decodable* texts and *multi-sensory* learning. *Irlen* was a dominant theme for the secondary school. The term *deficit* was not used by any of the three schools, with *disorder only* used on two occasions by one primary school. All three schools either discussed *celebrating* dyslexia or recognising *strengths*. The notion of student *rights* was alluded to (usually described as needs) but not directly mentioned by participants in any of the three schools.

Primary schools connected their dyslexia pedagogies to pedagogies that targets all students, referred to by participants as a “catch all” approach. P1 explained that “we know if we are using evidence-based practice, students will all learn how to read”, and cited research from Snow et al. that describes a “school-to-prison-pipeline” which reflects the disproportionately high rates of incarceration of people who have difficulties with reading. Snow et al. produced a cross-sectional study of 100 young people serving custodial sentences in the Australian state of New South Wales, and found that only a quarter of the sample had core language scores in the expected range when evaluated by standardised testing.

P2 considered that their exemplar school contrasted with other schools where teachers have a lack of time to critically evaluate dyslexia research:

> Research is a big [issue]. Teachers are not trained in research. They’re not trained like the medical field where you look at research and they [say] *let’s try this* and *well no* - we won’t try anything. We know what works! (Marram Primary School, P2)

In the next section, I analyse policy document and teacher perspectives of best practice that highlight four pedagogical assumptions which shed light on approaches to dyslexia through the overlapping domains of literacy, disability and inclusive education.

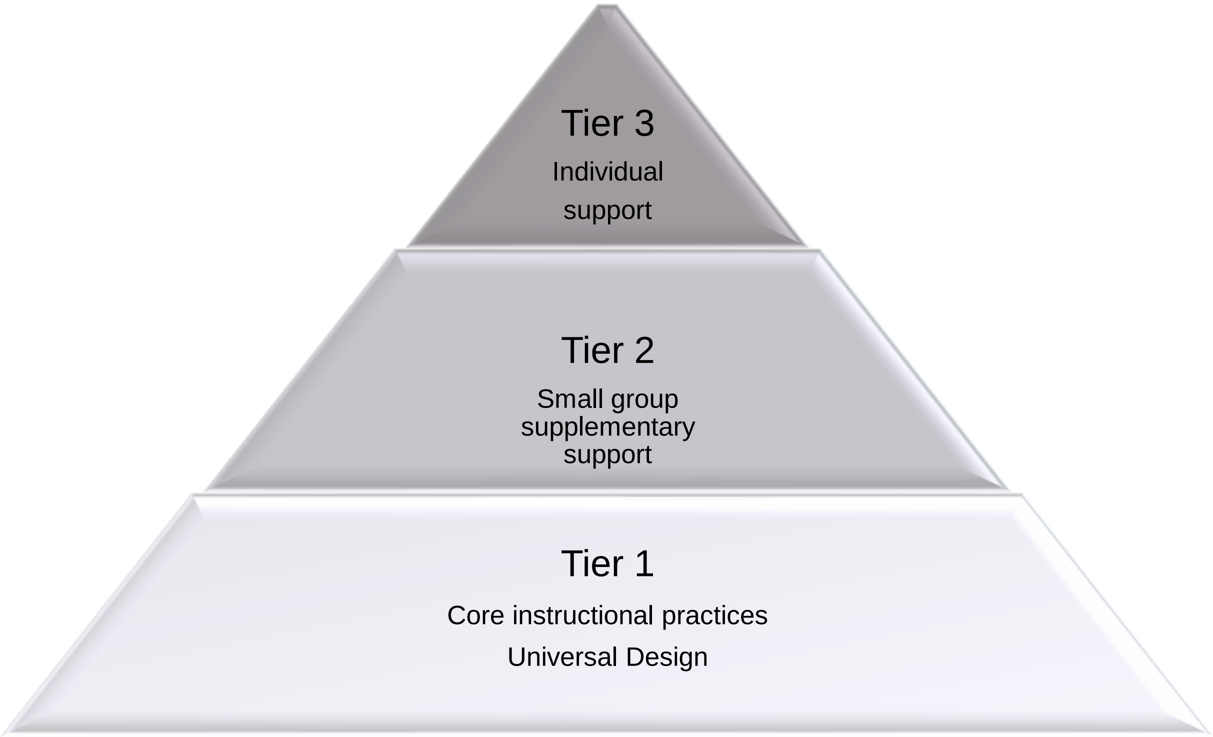
5.3.1 Pedagogical Assumption 1

Universal design can be conceived through explicit instruction (Rappolt-Schlichtmann et al., 2018).

Figure 5.3 (on the following page) highlights that best practice for dyslexia in the primary schools was connected to the concept of universal design (see glossary). Both primary schools situated their understanding of universal design within the three tiers of support teaching paradigms (Burns et al., 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Figure 5.3

The Three Tiers of Learning Support Model


Tier 3
Individual support
Tier 2
Small group supplementary support
Tier 1
Core instructional practices
Universal Design

Source. Tiers of support model adapted from Fuchs and Fuchs (2006)

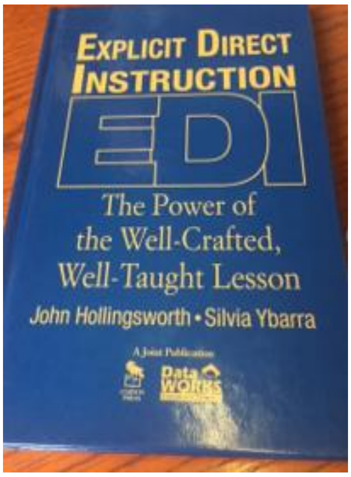
One Marram participant (P1) perceived that "evidence-based practice will work for everyone. It is the way our brains learn how to read". Universal design principles were reflected in the reoccurring theme that best practice pedagogies including systematic phonics instruction was necessary for all learners, whether or not they had dyslexia. Participants raised the three tiers of support to suggest that exemplar practice means maximising opportunities to improve learning at tier one level teaching (participants believed this to be a point of difference from non-exemplar schools).

Research interviews and documents from primary schools favoured an explicit instruction pedagogy (also known as explicit teaching and fully guided practice). With explicit instruction open to interpretation, I was interested in participants' definitions. In an interview with Marram Primary School Principal, my questions about explicit instruction were met with examples of tools and resources that underpin a whole school pedagogical approach.

Participant P1 introduced a text that underpinned classroom practices at Marram Primary—*Explicit Direct Instruction EDI: The power of a well-crafted, well-taught lesson* by Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2017)—from the Dataworks Education company. See figure 5.4 (below).

Figure 5.4

Primary School Handbook for an Explicit Pedagogical Approach to Dyslexia


EXPLICIT DIRECT INSTRUCTION
EDI
The Power of the Well-Crafted, Well-Taught Lesson
John Hollingsworth • Silvia Ybarra
A Joint Publication
Data WORKS

Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2017) weave between simple guidance for teachers (including the importance of introducing learning objectives and activating prior knowledge) to detailed explanatory and process-orientated advice. The authors argue that traditional pedagogical approaches are reactive, with teachers checking for understanding at the end of the lesson or after some students have fallen behind. They contend that teachers should explicitly share their own thinking and metacognitive processes with students, and that “the instructional skills presented in this book are not all new techniques” (p.5) bringing together the works of Gagne (1977), Gagne and Briggs (1979), Good (1979), Hunter (1982), Rosenshine (1995) and Slavin (1994).

Participants described an explicit teaching pedagogy as best practice for the development of reading and spelling competencies, including reading comprehension. Hammond (2019) was cited by several participants (P2, P3 and P4) to argue for the efficacy of explicit teaching pedagogies over inquiry-based approaches to teaching literacy including reading. Research participants cautioned that non-explicit pedagogical approaches wasted valuable opportunities to equip students with necessary reading skills. Tensions arising from participant perspectives are addressed in section 2.5 through a discussion of the broader implications of competing pedagogical approaches for dyslexia. P2 explained that:

> You've also got schools that will do a play-based curriculum from prep to two, where they'll be investigating [through] a play-based approach from 9 to 11[am]… which is your prime literacy time, when kids are fresh, awake and ready to learn. And that's the time when they'll be wandering around the classroom doing play-based stuff in grade two. And then they sit NAPLAN [national assessment] the year after. (Marram Primary School, P2)

This view reflects the assumption that 'formal learning' has greater value than play based learning for acquiring text-based literacy skills, particularly those skills that are assessed by NAPLAN (e.g., national curriculum testing of reading and spelling). P2's observation is just one of many perspectives in the field of literacy learning, and implied that in a learning sequence, 'formal learning' should come before play or student inquiry. There was a further suggestion that assessment preparation appeared to be a factor in driving classroom practice.

5.3.2 Pedagogical Assumption 2

Explicit teaching follows a clearly defined teaching formula. Primary school participants equated best practice with an explicit teaching approach through systematic implementation. In this section, I explain the broader assumptions of an explicit teaching approach, highlighting examples from teacher interviews and classroom documents.

Explicit instruction was described in documents (Gawan Primary School, D4) and by a participant (P3) as the "I do, we do, you do" pedagogical approach. The specific research cited was unclear since a source was not provided. Nonetheless, the scaffolded explicit teaching approach described by P3 reflects Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) Gradual Release of Responsibility Model in the tradition of a Vygotskian (1978) scaffolding approach.

> Explicit teaching has been highlighted as an effective approach to literacy pedagogy that directly influences literacy learning. Opportunities for

> learning are enhanced when classroom talk is clearly focused on learning about aspects of literacy and directly responds to the learning needs of the students… it *enables* students to know what is of primary relevance… to [apply] to new learning situations. (Gawan Primary School, D4)

The prominence of an explicit teaching pedagogy was demonstrated by Marram Primary School, with six pages of their 31-page teaching and learning handbook (D3) dedicated to a step-by-step guide. It mandated spaced practice to promote reading fluency in school policy (D14). In the document, key principles of explicit teaching are described as:

1. Optimal use of instruction time - Students engaged and on task at all times
2. High level of success at all stages
3. Focused on critical content matched to students' instructional needs
4. Sequenced logically - break down complex skills and strategies into smaller steps
5. Supported practice
6. Timely feedback - immediate and affirmative

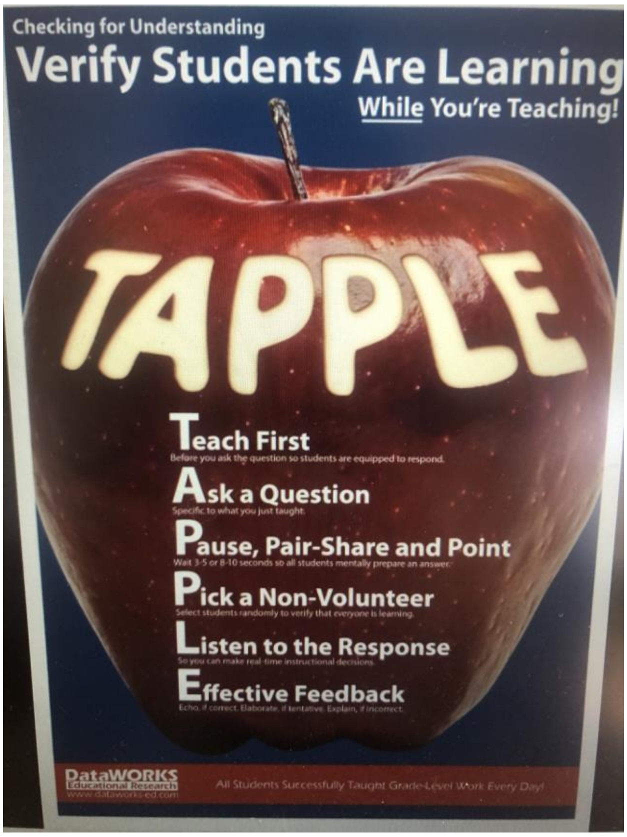
Gawan Primary School defined explicit instruction as being a highly structured systematic approach with "content broken into small parts" (D4). The pedagogy entailed stages of teacher modelling, explanation, demonstration, and practice (D4). It enabled students "to develop metacognitive strategies for knowing that learning has taken place. It is an approach that clearly explicates and maintains the what, the how, and the why of any given lesson".

> Explicit teaching involves modelling skills and behaviours and modelling thinking. This involves the teacher thinking out loud when working through problems and demonstrating processes for students. The attention of students is important and listening and observation are key to success. (Gawan Primary School, D4)
>
> [students] get reinforcement pre-teaching and post teaching…and pre-empting what's about to come… Then revision, repetition and over-learning back in our intervention sessions. It's not discreet, stand-alone like it was five years ago ... we only get the impact we are getting because they are getting, revision, revision, revision! (Marram Primary School, P2)

Figure 5.5 (on the following page) highlights a classroom wallposter in Marram Primary School. The wall poster bears the acronym TAPPLE inside an apple illustration as a mnemonic device.

Figure 5.5

Classroom Poster ‘TAPPLE’



Checking for Understanding

Verify Students Are Learning

While You’re Teaching!

TAPPLE

Teach First
Before you ask the question so students are equipped to respond.

Ask a Question
Specific to what you just taught.

Pause, Pair-Share and Point
Wait 3-5 or 8-10 seconds so all students mentally prepare an answer.

Pick a Non-Volunteer
Select students randomly to verify that everyone is learning.

Listen to the Response
So you can make real-time instructional decisions.

Effective Feedback
Echo, if correct. Elaborate, if tentative. Explain, if incorrect.

DataWORKS
Educational Research
www.dataworks-ed.com

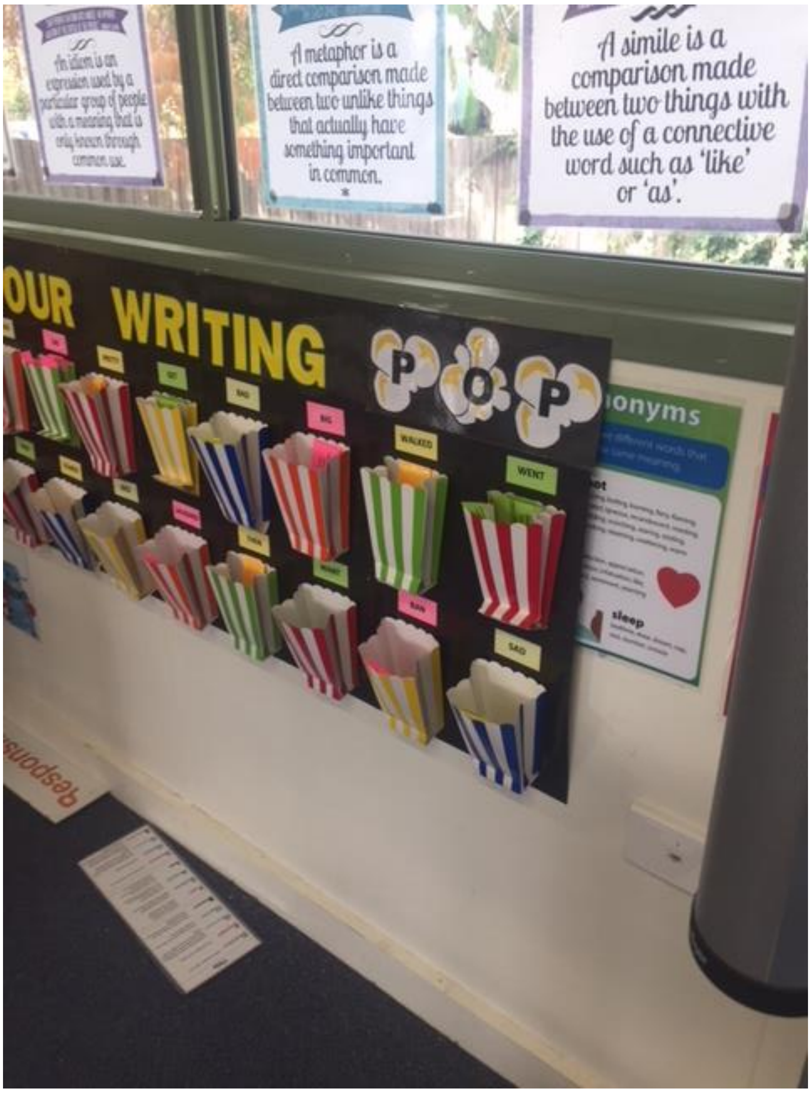
All Students Successfully Taught Grade-Level Work Every Day!

I recognised the TAPPLE classroom wall poster had come directly from the Hollingsworth and Ybarra’s (2017) text (p. 23) and was presented to me at the beginning of the research interview. The TAPPLE-apple mnemonic was a visible reminder to teachers and students of the explicit instruction lesson elements. The directives of TAPPLE outline procedures (explained in depth in the book) to verify student learning. The procedural stages for teachers are described in order: ‘teach first’, ‘ask a question’, ‘pause, pair-share and point’, ‘pick a non-volunteer’, ‘listen’ and provide ‘effective feedback’. Participants perceived that explicit teaching could be fun and engaging for students and was best utilised for short periods of time (alongside other pedagogical approaches).

Figure 5.6 (below) depicting a colourful classroom display ‘Make your writing pop’ was an example of an explicit pedagogical approach to teaching writing skills alongside vocabulary development. It was designed to enable students to add interesting synonyms to the display pockets to enrich their writing and as a resource to support peer collaboration. The display has elements of clear teaching and co-design principles.

Figure 5.6

Classroom Display – Make Your Writing Pop


An idiom is an expression used by a particular group of people with a meaning that is only known through common use.
A metaphor is a direct comparison made between two unlike things that actually have something important in common.
A simile is a comparison made between two things with the use of a connective word such as 'like' or 'as'.
OUR WRITING
POP
BIG
WALKED
WENT
SAD
onyms
sleep
esponse

Participants perceived that an explicit pedagogical approach was required to enable student success. The themes of success and failure were prevalent in the interviews and connected to ongoing debates about how success is measured in literacy classrooms. Primary school participants indicated that fundamental literacy skills were a priority, highlighting tensions between dyslexia pedagogies and engagement in so-called *authentic* texts and *authentic* learning (Herrington et al., 2014). These tensions are addressed further in *Chapter Six*.

5.3.3 Pedagogical Assumption 3

*Phonics alone is not enough to address the opaqueness of the English language***.** A recurrent theme expressed by primary school participants was the complexity of the alphabetic code and the opaqueness of the English language. As described in *Chapter Two*, this view contrasts with whole language theory that suggests reading and spelling skills can be acquired innately. An explicit teaching pedagogy was consistently justified as being appropriate to address the complexity of learning to read.

Both primary schools engaged families in an explicit teaching collaborative partnership. They used metacognitive strategies—teaching students an awareness of their own learning and thought processes for self-development—to support reading and spelling mastery. Participants considered that students and their families developed agency though collaborative processes. Documents revealed that glossaries containing terminology traditionally reserved for teachers were shared with students and families. For instance, the glossary at one school defined the following terms: syllable, closed syllable, CVC syllable, CV syllable, split digraph, phoneme, grapheme, digraph, trigraph, vowel team, digraph, suffix, prefix, consonants, short vowels, long vowels, and blends (Gawan Primary School, D4).

All primary school participants thought that developing phonological skills for students including those with dyslexia was essential. Although the literature (*Chapter Two*) indicated there were only two positions in the so-called reading wars—systematic phonics and whole language (also known as balanced literacy)—evidence from exemplar schools introduced a third position to inform pedagogy. The interviews suggested that systematic phonics was embedded as part of a broader toolkit incorporating metacognitive strategies and a suite of specialist tools to address the problem of the opaqueness of the English language. Interviews and documents demonstrated that the primary schools interpreted the challenges of learning to decipher the English code as being less innate than those expressed in Victorian Government policy.

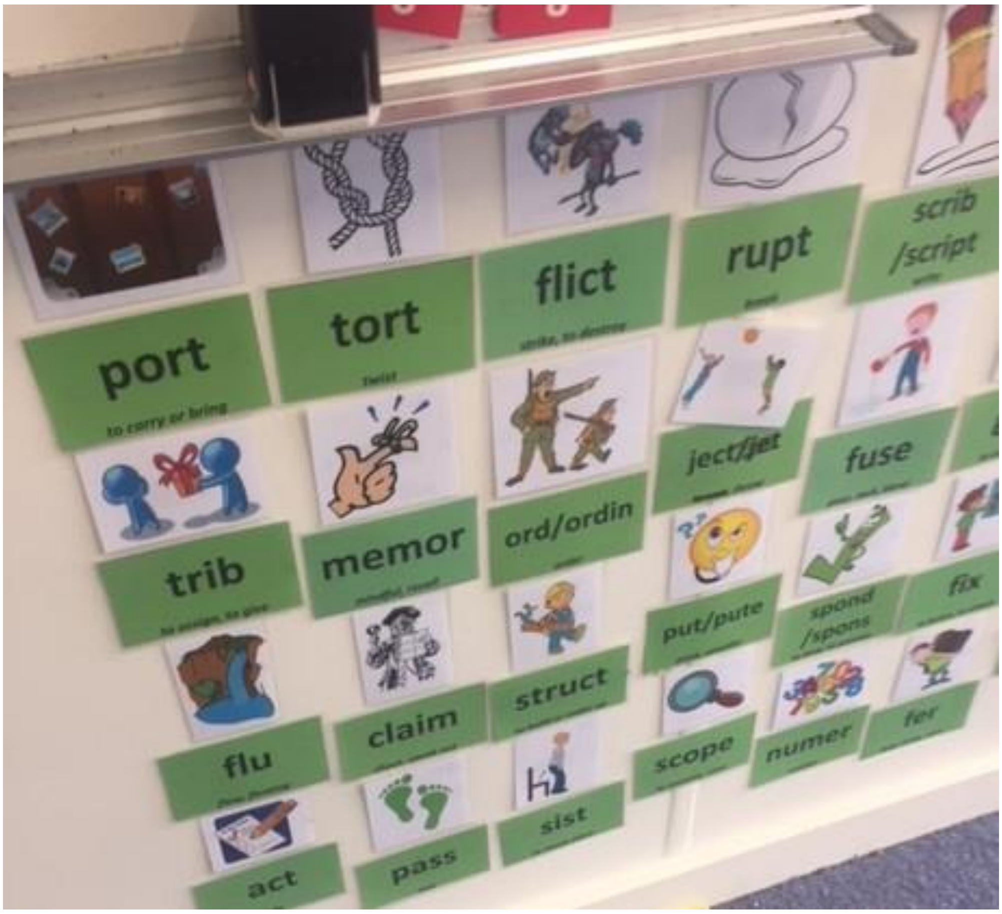
Participants perceived that specialist training enabled teachers to unpack English language conventions including spelling patterns to bring order and predictability to the task of learning to read. Posters on classroom walls in both primary schools—positioned near student desks and writing corners—emphasised spelling patterns, and phonological and grammar rules.

As described in the previous chapter, the structured and systemic elements of phonics teaching is not clearly demonstrated in Victorian Government policy. The resources from the exemplar schools were attributed to external stakeholder influences, from knowledge gained at overseas universities, from private dyslexia organisations and from speech and language therapists.

Figure 5.7 (on the following page) is an example of an explicit teaching pedagogy at the two exemplar primary schools that placed new emphasis on teaching word origins (etymology) and morphological patterns which are underpinned by metacognition. These schools suggested embedding metacognitive strategies beyond the scope of Victorian Government policy. P2 showed me the school timetable with morphology blocked into literacy teaching time as a core element of Marram Primary School’s explicit teaching approach; the first 10 minutes of a two-hour literacy block comprised a combination of phonological awareness, phonics and morphology.

Figure 5.7

Classroom Display – Etymology to Support Learning


port
to carry or bring
tort
twist
flict
strike, to destroy
rupt
scrib
/script
trib
memor
ord/ordin
ject/jet
fuse
flu
claim
struct
put/pute
spond
/spons
fix
scope
numer
fer
act
pass
sist

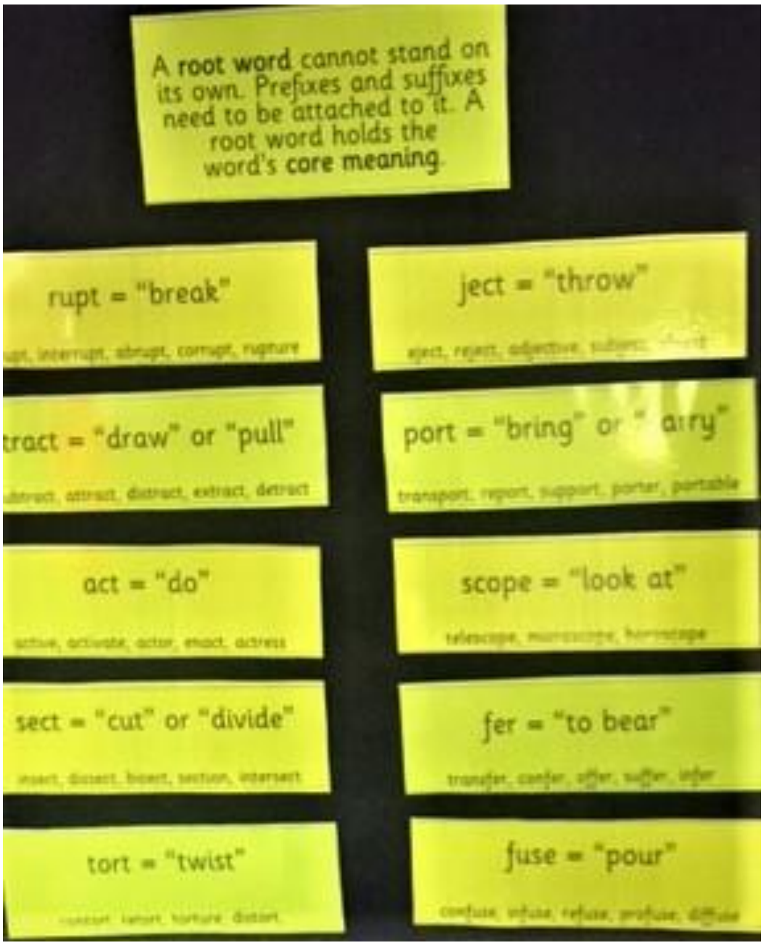
The participant explained that:

> The other part of explicit teaching is the morphology which we have really seen helps once the students have some decoding skills and some syllabification skills. Students with dyslexia are really able to see the prefix and suffix roots. It has given them another tool to decode. (P2)

Figure 5.8 (below) depicts a classroom display entitled ‘prefixes and suffixes’ and contains morphological and etymological information for students. The display has been designed to demystify reading and spelling complex words.

Figure 5.8

Classroom Wall poster – Prefixes and Suffixes



A **root word** cannot stand on its own. Prefixes and suffixes need to be attached to it. A root word holds the word's **core meaning**.

rupt = "break"

ject = "throw"

tract = "draw" or "pull"

port = "bring" or "carry"

act = "do"

scope = "look at"

sect = "cut" or "divide"

fer = "to bear"

tort = "twist"

fuse = "pour"

Primary school participants believed that a dyslexia pedagogical approach placed renewed emphasis on the interdependence of reading and spelling skills from the findings of Report of the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000). Marram participants noted that the NRP has been influential in presenting five key elements critical to reading acquisition, including phonological (phonemic) awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. P1 made a case for Konza's (2014) *big six* key elements as a more complete model; Konza emphasises oral language and early literacy experiences as underestimated foundational elements contributing to reading acquisition.

5.3.4 Pedagogical Assumption 4

Multi-sensory Structured Language (MSL) is an effective dyslexia approach.

Both primary schools supported Multi-sensory Structured Language, embedded and promoted in the training by Org1, as a tier one pedagogical approach for all students. Gawan documents explained that the school “began training teachers from 2017 onwards in “MSL multi-sensory [sic] learning” (Gawan Primary School, D5). Interviews and fieldwork demonstrated that an MSL approach aimed to engage students to learn through sight, hearing and tactile sensory perception; for instance, crafting letters from materials such as sand and glitter as tactile practice.

Participant interviewees demonstrated that MSL was connected to perceptions of a best practice pedagogy for all students including those with dyslexia. MSL was referred to 11 times by Marram Primary School participants and 40 times by Gawan Primary School participants (see table 5.2). One document encouraged teachers to:

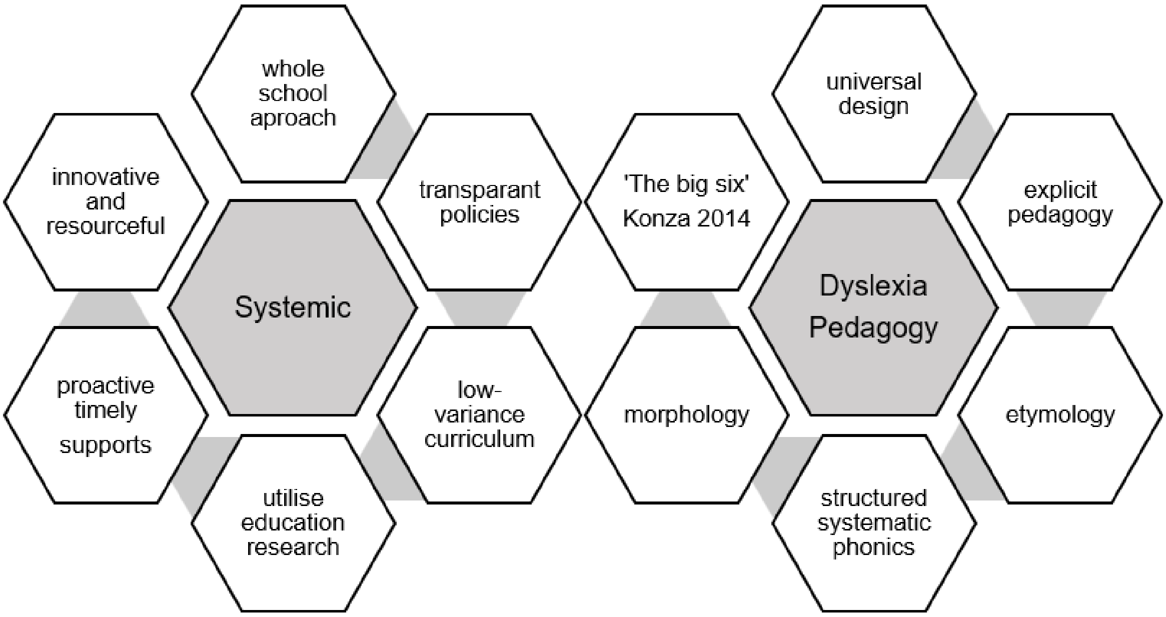
> Start making teaching more multisensory. When they are using all their senses to learn, students will be more likely to remember something new. Get the students jumping for the phonemes (sounds) they can hear in words, writing them in the sandpit, stamping them out and singing songs. (D16)

Descriptions of MSL centred on the process rather than the efficacy of the approach. I interpreted this as some participants perceiving MSL as a complementary rather than a foundational element of best practice. They consistently described how learning to read and spell ought to involve over-learning and repetition as an aspect of MSL. One participant (de-identified) suggested that, despite being trained in MSL, “we probably don’t look into the multi-sensory side as much, we do finger spelling, writing and all that sort of [thing]”. Participants generally did not share evidence or artefacts from MSL training materials with me. This situation is addressed in the discussion in *Chapter Six*.

In figure 5.9 (on the following page) I have identified the beliefs of primary school participants about best practice for teaching students with dyslexia. They offered insights into addressing systemic approaches–aligned with improving access to support for students with dyslexia–such as developing transparent policies, a low variance curriculum, proactive timely support, being innovative and resourceful, and using education research. In the domain of dyslexia pedagogy, participants identified features of best practice that included explicit pedagogy, universal design, morphology, etymology, structured systematic phonics, and the importance of Konza's (2014) 'Big six' interconnected skills of phonological (phonemic) awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and oral language.

Figure 5.9

An Exemplar Approach to Teaching Students with Dyslexia According to Primary Schools


whole school aproach
innovative and resourceful
transparant policies
Systemic
proactive timely supports
low-variance curriculum
utilise education research
universal design
'The big six' Konza 2014
explicit pedagogy
Dyslexia Pedagogy
morphology
etymology
structured systematic phonics

5.4 A Dyslexia Pedagogy for Secondary Schools?

In contrast to a universal design approach (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006) and specific pedagogies for dyslexia (as described by participants from the primary schools), the secondary school favoured an individualised approach. I anticipated that secondary schools may have additional challenges with widening achievement gaps of older students. Interviews with participants from Walert Secondary School described students who had already *fallen through the cracks* once they reached secondary school. They emphasised the unique challenges of the secondary school setting which presented a barrier to utilising a dyslexia specific approach. For example, "A lot of children that come into this school, many if not most of them, are two years behind their point of need of where they should be" (Walert Secondary School, P7).

While primary school participants had argued for an explicit teaching pedagogy this was not demonstrated within the secondary school. The term explicit was used only once in participant interviews and did not feature prominently in school documents connected to my sampling of dyslexia approaches. P7 described how *inclusive teaching* for students with dyslexia can involve breaking content down into smaller achievable parts. “Try and do some writing columns and if there is a different paragraph … chunk it down and be explicit … if it's a different paragraph, use a different colour … What could hurt or be the harm?” (Walert Secondary School, P7).

Even though the term explicit was used here, the approach described suggested an adjustment to accommodate students who could not access regular teaching and curriculum content. Furthermore, a variety of pedagogical approaches were described by participants (P7, P8 and P9), including the way an Irlen approach might enhance teaching “a few simple changes can make a big difference” (Walert Secondary School, P7).

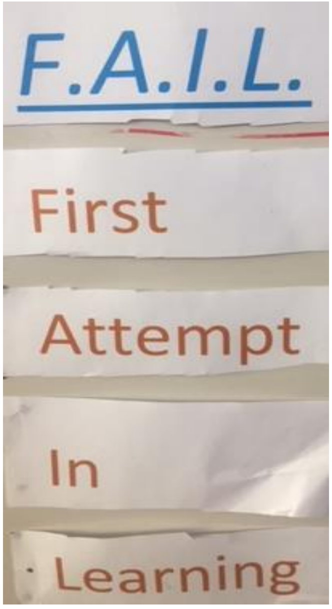
There was an intent towards a universal design whole school approach, that had not yet been realised. “The main goal for me now is to integrate what we’re doing in support intervention, into the mainstream class” (Walert Secondary School, P8). Secondary school participants acknowledged the barriers to targeting reading skills, when reading and spelling skills were “seen as something you already know”. They identified limited flexibility in the senior curriculum as a major challenge in supporting students with their reading. They reported that they did not have a structured phonics program per se and “we use a lot of different things”. P8 described a combination of finding phonics resources available online and “you can make [programs] yourself”, in the context of tier two and tier three interventions, rather than across all three tiers, as in primary schools (see *The Three Tiers Model*, figure 5.3).

Secondary school participants described more varying pedagogical approaches for dyslexia than those in the primary schools. For example, the enactment of the three tiers of support model was described more systematically in the primary schools than in the secondary school. The primary schools demonstrated greater consistency in dyslexia pedagogies, with Marram Primary School indicating the greatest internal consistency, supported by highly visible dissemination of school policy.

Figure 5.10 (below) The classroom poster ‘FAIL’ First Attempt In Learning’ from Walert Secondary School conveys an individualised and inclusive approach to teaching and learning.

Figure 5.10

Classroom Poster – ‘FAIL’ First Attempt in Learning



The approach of Walert Secondary suggested a move away from additional school-based testing, assessment batteries and standardisation. Participant interviews reflected the belief among its teachers that students can present with low self-esteem and feel pressure to achieve. P8 described F.A.I.L “we have a motto *First Attempt in Learning*, instead of *you got it wrong*”, believing in the importance of “celebrating anything that is going well [and] talking to the students if something goes wrong, it’s not like the end of the world”. And P9 emphasised the need to ‘take the anxiety off’ the students.

In contrast to Victorian Government policy, the two dyslexia exemplar primary schools demonstrated a progressive shift towards a sophisticated approach to dyslexia pedagogy, emphasising broader literacy and language skills, including etymology and morphology. While the secondary school demonstrated an intent towards inclusive education, it lacked a specific dyslexia pedagogy.

5.5 Schools Adopt Contrasting Inclusive Education Approaches

As discussed throughout the thesis, Victorian Government policy is central to constructing education rights for students with dyslexia. Findings in *Chapter Four* demonstrated an unclear paradigm for dyslexia. Therefore, it is important to understand how schools have interpreted Victorian Government policy for including students with dyslexia.

Before presenting findings, it is necessary to preface with government policy the underpinnings of access and inclusion as rights under the Disability Standards for Education (Australian Government, 2005). Ideals outlined in UNCRPD by the UN General Assembly (2006, article 24) state:

> States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to… the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity.

An inclusive education paradigm reinforces the right of students with dyslexia to be taught in regular classrooms, engage in common experiences, and learn on the same basis as their peers (UN General Assembly, 2006). In contrast, a special education paradigm denotes segregated school systems and classrooms based on perceived abilities and deficits (Booth, 2018; Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

Participants across all three schools acknowledged that schools should prepare students for a world that is reliant on text-based literacies, yet the enactment of specific policies and practices varied between the schools. They consistently described their schools as modelling best practice, in contrast to the practices they associated with regular schools (non-exemplar Victorian schools).

Participants considered that while regular schools were not equipped with knowledge and understanding to meet the needs of learners with dyslexia, their schools had enhanced capabilities to be inclusive through utilising specialist knowledge.

Primary schools viewed best practice for dyslexia through a universal design and ‘catch all’ approach, aligned to disability perspective that seeks to normalise diversity in the classroom (Dolmage, 2005; Rappolt-Schlichtmann et al., 2018). Despite evidence that the schools were attempting to address inclusion, there were limitations and tensions in the practices described. Paradoxically, tensions arose in learning support intervention and interaction with Victorian Government policy.

Table 5.3 (on the following page) outlines key education rights articulated in interviews and school documents. My analysis evaluated the extent to which key rights were expressed in inclusive education discourse. It highlights that the primary schools placed greater importance on universal design (tier one approaches), teacher knowledge of dyslexia and early intervention to support inclusive education. Secondary school participants argued that secondary settings posed greater challenges for addressing dyslexia, including wider needs and achievement gaps of older students. While this argument can be made, I identified broader issues that impact on the enactment of education rights (discussed in section 5.9).

Table 5.3

Key Education Rights for Students with Dyslexia from Participant Interviews

Key education rights from interviews	Marram Primary	Gawan Primary	Walert Secondary
1. Quality teaching with embedded universal design	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓
2. Teachers with training and knowledge of dyslexia	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓
3. Early intervention	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓
4. Learning support	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
5. Multidisciplinary support and allied health	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
6. Accommodations	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
7. Strength-based views of dyslexia	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
8. Individualised adapted programs	✓	✓	✓✓
9. Celebrating differences	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
10. Acknowledging strengths	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓

Note: ✓✓✓ highly articulated ✓✓ moderately articulated ✓ minimally articulated

5.5.1 Inclusion and Strengths-Based Practice in Dyslexia Exemplar Schools

Inclusive education denotes issues of equity and the potential for positive student outcomes. In contrast to deficit perspectives from a medicalised tradition, strengths-based perspectives empower and enable students through recognition of their needs and capabilities.

Differences were observed in school level interpretation of strengths-based approaches for learning support, accommodations, and interactions with allied health professionals. For instance, some schools and teachers perceived their role to be highlighting invisible disability by raising awareness and celebrating dyslexia, while others argued that allied health professionals and private dyslexia organisations were at the forefront of a dyslexia response. In the secondary school case, participants perceived access and inclusion connected to an individualised approach to learning with adapted learning outcomes.

Although Victorian Government policy has yet to embed a consistent strength-based model for dyslexia—all three schools have a discourse of celebrating differences and acknowledging strengths expressed in interviews, classroom posters and school newsletters. It was broadly recognised across the school settings that reading difficulties and dyslexia can lead to significant life-long barriers, particularly when individuals are stigmatised. From interviews, I identified that a strengths-based approach was perceived in multiple ways, recognising dyslexia, addressing stigma and creating a positive identity valuing broader strengths and promoting access. My results question whether dyslexia exemplar schools suggest inclusive or special (segregated) education systems for dyslexia.

Participants unanimously agreed on the importance of recognising that students with dyslexia could face lifelong disadvantage when educational needs were not met. Furthermore, there was emphasis on recognising immediate burdens for learners, such as a high cognitive load (Roberts, 2021; Tricot et al., 2020). Participants reported that learners often struggled with self-esteem due to the stigma associated with reading difficulties and argued that deficit views of dyslexia needed to be replaced with empowering narratives for students.

P2 (Marram Primary School) noted that “there is quite a bit of anxiety with dyslexia, along with the suicide stats, the prison stats and with 48% of prisoners that end up having literacy difficulties”. The specific research cited was unclear because a source was not provided. Nonetheless, Moody et al. (2000) found that in their study of 253 subjects randomly selected from more than 130,000 prison inmates in Texas, that “47.8% of the inmates were deficient in word attack skills” (p. 69).

Participants in all three schools agreed that learners are vulnerable in the context of widespread misunderstanding and ignorance about dyslexia. P2 believed that it should be recognised positively rather than hidden:

> Whether we call that dyslexia, I don’t really care but I don’t want kids at this school or my kids to have anxiety issues and social issues. And often that happens because the kids have failed and the experience failure… and the label of dyslexia and people not understanding it. Again, we are trying to create a culture where it is not seen as a negative, we celebrate it. (Marram Primary School, P2)

Secondary school participant P7, mirroring perspectives from the primary schools, asserted that challenges associated with dyslexia could make reading tasks onerous and exhausting, and it was therefore important to be open about dyslexia rather than treating it as a taboo subject. School documents described how attempts to raise dyslexia awareness were communicated to the broader school community:

> The simple task of reading for [students with dyslexia] is so hard physically and mentally, that a mere 20-minutes of reading can feel like several hours of stressful, hard, physical work. All too often in school, these children are labelled as lazy. To an unaware teacher, orally they appear to be very skilled learners. They appear knowledgeable, learning very quickly and in great depth. Yet, they produce very little if any written work (Walert Secondary School, D2).

Celebrating dyslexia was a common theme in all three schools. There was evidence that they created occasions to recognise dyslexia including awareness weeks and assemblies, and promoted a strength-based discourse for dyslexia. Without directly researching the perspectives of students, it is unclear if students themselves perceived dyslexia awareness activities as a true celebration that recognised their value as learners.

Participants reported opportunities to address dyslexia self-esteem issues as identified by Camilleri et al. (2020). P3 perceived that students *championed* their dyslexia and could “wear it like a badge” due to a whole school emphasis on removing stigma.

A Marram Primary School participant P3 explained that dyslexia knowledge enabled teachers to be understanding and recognise underlying strengths, and juxtaposed teachers at their school with beliefs about teachers at non-exemplar schools:

> the teacher is just frustrated because a child can't do something or thinks they are being lazy and avoiding and all sorts of things. They understand that there's a whole lot more going on under there but it's because they have that knowledge and capacity themselves which teachers don't get.

5.5.2 Valuing Broader Strengths

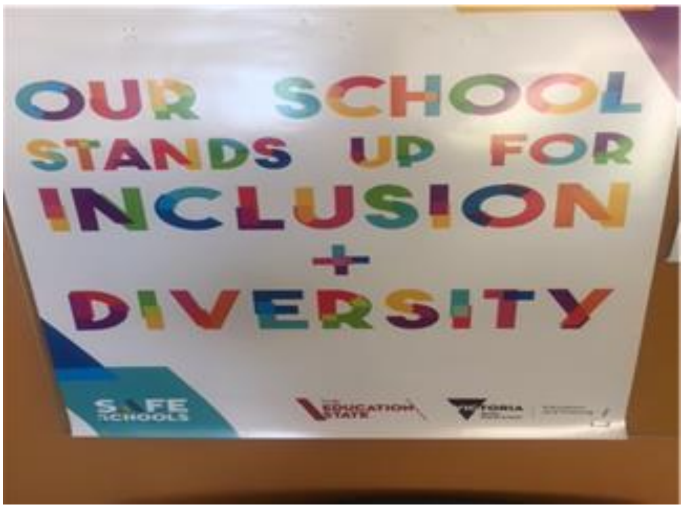
The prevailing discourse within all three schools was about strengths and capabilities. Participants normalised differences through inclusive discourses emphasising that the learner with dyslexia was not to be pitied or disabled; rather, individual strengths needed to be identified. Documents communicated to the school community by Gawan Primary School demonstrated attempts to raise dyslexia awareness and promote the view that people with dyslexia possessed broader strengths. One (Gawan Primary School, D10) described literacy as being “tough for students with dyslexia, whilst computer coding is a skill that they may excel at to feel a sense of achievement and self-worth”.

Dyslexia was celebrated by the primary schools by hosting a dyslexia awareness week and at school assemblies. P2 (Marram Primary School) viewed dyslexia as having a positive influence in the school. Similarly, Gawan Primary School had circulated documents to raise awareness that students with dyslexia often have broader creative attributes and provided examples of high achieving famous people with dyslexia including Albert Einstein, Steven Spielberg, Pablo Picasso and Richard Branson (Gawan Primary School, D7).

A Department of Education and Training Victoria classroom poster on the wall at Walert Secondary School (Figure 5.11) signalled that the school supported inclusion and diversity.

Figure 5.11

Classroom Poster – Standing up for Inclusion and Diversity



This inclusive approach emphasised self-esteem, well-being, individualism and student-centred outcomes. Students with dyslexia were described by P7 as "really smart and it's just that they haven't had things put the right way so that they can learn". Classroom artefacts and documents reflected attempts to promote diversity and an inclusive school community. For instance, "we welcome students with these language-based learning difficulties" (Walert Secondary School, D11).

5.5.3 Contradictory Discourses

School documents across the three schools were predominantly strengths-based, although there were occasional examples of deficit discourses in interviews. Descriptions of literacy ability groupings introduced the notion of *high-flyers* in contrast to *bottom group kids* (de-identified quote). There were occasional uses of medicalised deficit terms such as *severe cases of dyslexia*. In these instances, dyslexia was described using a bell-curve (Florian, 2015) that relied on the construction of a low-ability group and a deficit view. Documents and interviews highlighted examples of dyslexia being referred to by a range of terminology. For instance, dyslexia was termed a *learning difference*

(Gawan Primary School, D10), Marram D12), *learning issue*, (Gawan Primary School, D10), *literacy issue* (P6) *learning difficulty* (P2, P3) and *specific learning difficulty* (p2).

The word *disability* tended to be associated with Victorian Government policy; for instance, when participants articulated pressures for students to reach age-related achievement norms as prescribed by curriculum levels. Other examples related to working within the policy frameworks of *The Program for Students with Disabilities* (DET, 2022c) and a reference to the *Nationally Consistent Collection of Data* on school students with disability (NCCD, 2021). However, the interview participants did not use the terms *deficit* or *disorder* to describe dyslexia, although these terms were identified in government policy findings (*Chapter Four*).

One example of a deficit discourse used in Walert Secondary School, came from an instructional page and was presented to me as part of school's knowledge framework, although the origin of the document was unknown. The document (D13) outlined ways of *helping dyslexics in class*, opening with a discussion on "handling a dyslexic pupil … The child is likely to have problems organising himself … sit him at the front of the class rather than have him daydreaming … give him easier work." It focused on lowering expectations rather than providing opportunities for success.

5.6 Providing Access for Students with Dyslexia

Participant interviews and school documents outlined teacher responsibility to meet education rights of all students, as stipulated in human rights frameworks (UN General Assembly, 2006).

> if a child is not moving or goes backwards, the class teacher needs to start putting things into place in order to improve the student's skills, such as speaking to the parents to see if the child is unwell or tired, and using encouragement to try to reverse the situation (Gawan Primary School, D4)

Participants considered that non-exemplar schools often lacked knowledge of appropriate teaching and accommodations, losing valuable time to implement appropriate support and intervention. They asserted that schools should address access issues urgently even in the absence of a dyslexia diagnosis, as the following comment indicates:

> Looking into how we define it from an education point of view, it is basically any student that is not picking up how to read or spell. From an education point of view, we say that's our issue and that's the symptom. The diagnosis, so to speak, doesn't really concern us as much. It is more, how do we get students to learn how to read? (Marram Primary School, P1)

Both primary schools articulated an access and inclusion policy that suggested some alignment—rather than referenced—social model of disability principles. Marram Primary School used a detailed policy framework (D15) to clarify education rights for students and responsibilities of schools and teachers. The document emphasised accountability on the school to eliminate barriers to access, including physical, instructional, attitudinal, and curriculum barriers. In D15 the latter three barriers were defined as:

> **Instructional Barriers** - Staff who do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to support learners with specific needs
> **Attitudinal Barriers -** These are behaviours, perceptions and assumptions that discriminate against a person with a disability. Such as forming an idea about someone through lack of knowledge or because of stereotype.
> **Curriculum barriers -** A rigid curriculum that does not allow for different teaching methods to meet a diverse range of learners. (D15)

Walert Secondary School participants perceived that interventions to promote foundational skills development could have a positive effect on self-esteem, and inclusion must be met with access and a readiness to provide dyslexia support. Interviews and documents demonstrated that there was an intent to remove dyslexia stigma and ensure that it was not a hidden disability in the school setting.

One document from Walert Secondary School focused on individual strengths, learning opportunities and interests (D11) and another described students as being "on their own learning pathway" (D2). Thus, inclusive education was connected to an individualised and tailored model of teaching and support (explored further in the next section).

The primary and secondary schools shared similar inclusive education ideals and intentions towards strengths-based practices for dyslexia and highlighted positive views of dyslexia to address self-esteem and access issues. Although the primary and secondary school participants conceptualised dyslexia differently (e.g., through an Irlen perspective), there was a shared view that dyslexia awareness was key to removing barriers. While inclusive education ideals tended to align, enactment of these principles was shown to vary.

5.6.1 Learning Support (Intervention) in Primary Schools

In examining both access and inclusion for students with dyslexia, my research explored themes arising from learning support (intervention), accommodations, the role of allied health professionals and issues of equity. These themes highlight a paradigm with the potential to disrupt or reinforce systemic exclusion for dyslexia.

The primary school participants articulated the belief that their schools offered high quality teaching and learning support, with emphasis on enhanced teacher knowledge and skill, while the secondary school focused on themes of personalised support. All three schools structured support through the Response to Intervention RTI model (Rose, 2009) (also known as *The Three Tiers* or *Waves of Support*). The RTI model requires targeted intervention (support) for students with inadequate progress during tier one teaching. While the RTI model is suggested in Victorian Government policy, specific practices for dyslexia remain unclear (DET, 2022a).

Interviews and documents from fieldwork revealed that primary school participants favoured early identification of pre-school students with dyslexia precursors such as weaknesses in phonological awareness, alphabetic knowledge and speech and language (Seidenberg, 2019; Snowling et al., 2020). As previously described, Marram Primary School had developed an early intervention program—to screen children prior to school entry—with achievement gaps judged as being fluid when addressed early.

Participants opposed segregation and othering (Carroll, 2016) suggesting that providing learning support should be “about getting away from it just being special ed. We need to have the best research on reading for everyone” (P2). They acknowledged that an inclusive ideal was students receiving intervention to remain in the classroom with their peers. “We don’t want to pull them out of class instruction because it is really good and now we want them to be in the phonics and morphology part of the day” (Marram Primary School, P2).

Students with dyslexia received support both in and outside their regular classrooms. Participants acknowledged that implementing the three tiers of learning support could involve withdrawing students from their regular lessons and advocated for proactive dyslexia approaches (primarily through a tier one ‘catch all’ approach) to reduce the need for intervention at subsequent tiers (tier two and three). Marram Primary School participants justified their learning support intervention practices by showing me examples of improved literacy results from NAPLAN (national testing) (D18) following literacy improvement measures.

Table 5.4 (on the following page) presents descriptions of intervention strategies that can involve withdrawing students (left column), alongside my analysis of the participant’s assumption and rationale (right column). Although research participants described implementing strategies to avoid segregated special education practices, exceptions were acknowledged in the table.

Table 5.4

Descriptions of Segregated Approaches from Research Interviews

Interviews and documents from fieldwork	***Assumption and rationale***
[RTI] is a catch them before they fail policy rather than wait for their whole first year of schooling where they are that far behind, they have already labelled themselves as someone who can't read and that whole confidence and exuberance… quickly evaporates (Marram Primary School, P1)	Withdrawing students was justified by concerns that they will experience failure and reduced self-esteem.
We do whole class and there's two of us that team teach quite a bit. I wouldn't withdraw them. I do focus groups and every week we do conferencing [for] reading conferencing with writing, wherever possible (Gawan Primary School, P5).	Team teaching and focus groups were used as an approach to avoid withdrawing students.
The rest of the class are doing spelling mastery but the processing and the speed that it was going was not helping them. We also do see [students with dyslexia] during Italian, during LOTE. It is a prime time for a lot of the kids do one-on-one support. (Marram Primary School, P2).	Withdrawing students from LOTE (Languages Other Than English) was justified by the view that reading skills take priority over foreign languages.
[withdrawing students] depends on where they are in the response to intervention… our most severe cases we may see them every day, particularly in the younger grades. Generally, in the older grades, we may see only twice a week. We are focusing a lot of our resources on prep to year two, to try and close that gap before that gap gets even bigger (de-identified quote)	Early intervention was designed to avoid tier three interventions for older students.

Note. The assumption and rationale have been derived from my analysis of results.

My results highlight that participants are aware of disability rights such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities UNCRPD (UN General Assembly, 2006) including the right to "effective individualised support in environments that maximise academic and social development" (p.17). They expressed a desire to avoid withdrawing students from the classroom in cases where they believed this was possible, but not offering proactive early support was viewed as the greatest problem of all.

The Science of Reading (Snowling & Hulme, 2005) prescribes that individuals with the most pronounced reading difficulties need the most intensive support. Instruction of this kind is teacher-centred, individualised, and labour intensive on the part of both student and teacher (Rose, 2009). Current views of best practices have yet to envisage how tier three support can be delivered in a truly inclusive environment. So how can these issues be reconciled? Participants perceived that failing to provide access to appropriate intervention is a significant contravention of education rights.

The acknowledgement that dyslexia and reading difficulties require intervention lends itself to deficit views of dyslexia. Participants argued they had implemented strengths-based models designed to frame a positive identity for dyslexia and proactively reduced the need for tier three interventions to offset these issues. Whether these arguments can be sustained, my research highlights broader issues in dyslexia approaches within school inclusive education paradigms which connect to inclusive education paradoxes discussed throughout *Chapter Six*.

5.6.2 Learning Support (Intervention) in Secondary School

Secondary school participants shifted away from the theme of early intervention, regarding this as an issue for primary schools and allied health professionals. They acknowledged that they missed opportunities for early intervention, particularly in developing systems for primary to secondary school transition. Although the school valued these opportunities one participant (de-identified) admitted that the secondary school transition process for the current year had been negatively impacted by competing priorities. However, they believed that conversations with primary schools yielded important information about how to support future students.

Participants described exhaustive barriers to learning support access in secondary schools, including a perception of self-consciousness in older students, widening achievement gaps, an inflexible curriculum and pressure to prepare for exams. They suggested that a lack of dyslexia pedagogical knowledge was pronounced in secondary teachers due to the reduced emphasis on teaching literacy. “Because it is secondary school, people aren’t trained in primary and secondary as well. It can be an issue teaching phonics in class because when are you going to get time to teach phonics when they’re doing Macbeth? (Walert Secondary School, P8).

Like the primary schools, the secondary school demonstrated special systems for learning support, involving withdrawing students. Teaching aides were identified as providing learning support, although P8 suggests that the school avoided situations where students worked solely with a full-time aide Walert Secondary School relied upon the Response to Intervention RTI model; yet learning support was described as addressing a broader spectrum of student needs. Participants described the three tiers of support model, with the third tier of being individualised, often covering multiple domains of the curriculum, and extending to student well-being, as the following participant described:

> It could be behaviour or could be academic depending on the students. Intervention is just strictly at a point of need. I might make an abridged version of the text … having conversations [to] have a deep understanding of [the text] … then we play a little game at the end and then back to class…it has got to be a no shoe fits all. (Walert Secondary School, P8)

This participant P8 used the phrase ‘no shoe fits all’ to signal an individualised pedagogical approach to teaching and support. They perceived that certain pedagogies were effective in one-to-one settings but in the next statement, explained that it could be difficult to sustain in whole class setting:

> I [share] student profiles and different reports for those kids so it's integrated into the classroom. I think that's really important, that they see what we're doing here. So, if it's working here, incorporating into the classroom because [students] might think they can do everything in here and they're creeping up their levels. But they go back to class and the gap is maybe too high. (Walert Secondary School, P8)

Across the primary and secondary schools there was a consistent focus on strengths-based practices and developing inclusive practices. Challenges to best practice and inclusion were exacerbated by various factors including government policy issues. From an unclear policy framework for tiered intervention—to blurred pathways to accessing support—the Victorian Government plays a significant role in school level responses to inclusive education. Despite participants having strengths-based views of dyslexia, they were more likely to use deficit terminology when relating to frameworks set by government. Tensions arose for practices at tiers two and three where students required the most intensive support. It was unclear whether the students with the greatest needs received equal access to professionals with the most training such as teachers rather than teaching aides.

5.6.3 *Teaching Assistants (Aides)*

While teachers in exemplar schools describe being highly trained, evidence from school case studies suggested reliance on teaching assistants (teaching aides) to facilitate learning support. Participants across both primary schools acknowledged equity issues in using teaching aides for dyslexia support, aligning to the right to as equal access to regular classroom teachers (UN General Assembly, 2006). Documents from Gawan Primary School suggested that “a teacher may develop lessons for the parent, an aide, or a helper to use with the child” (D4).

Participants expressed a preference for specialist teachers to facilitate dyslexia support, but those roles were “usually given to people with the least skills. It is given perhaps to your aides who have no additional skills or training” (de-identified quote). They suggested that the knowledge of teaching aides varied, with descriptions of an exceptional teaching aide with additional specialist qualifications who was credited with being pivotal to exemplar practices within the school. The same teaching aide was credited as introducing dyslexia-friendly texts otherwise known as decodable rather than opaque texts. “The decodable books again didn't come from the department [DET] that came from [the teaching aide]” P4. The role of the teaching aide was described as running:

> a program or one-on-one program and sees the kids probably four times a week for about half an hour. [It’s an] MSL program and that is obviously similar to what we're learning in the classrooms. The same spelling rules for reading and writing but that's delivered in a one-on-one session. So much more targeted. (Gawan Primary School, P6)

Participants conceded that teaching aides were more readily employed in learning support roles in response to government funding policies and limitations on school budgets.

5.6.4 *Accommodations in the Primary Schools*

Participants from the three schools identified systemic barriers to accessing accommodations. The theme of dyslexia as a hidden and invisible disability re-emerged in the context of applying for accommodations. They reported that attitudinal barriers were present at a systemic level. One participant shared the view that they had experienced fewer difficulties applying for accommodations for students with injuries and physical disabilities that can be seen, than for dyslexia which cannot be seen (Gawan Primary School, P4).

The use of variant terminology for dyslexia was again cited as barrier to accessing accommodations. P2 reported having to use the variant term *specific learning difficulty* when preferred by external providers and government systems: “If you put the word dyslexia you will be turned down [from receiving accommodations] but if you put specific learning difficulty you will get approved. So, it is not consistent across the country either” (P2).

Primary school participants articulated a sense of urgency for dyslexia accommodations, in the context of what they perceived to be widespread systemic issues. They maintained that the systems for accessing accommodations were unclear at Victorian Government level, impacting on teachers’ capacity to act on behalf of their students. Students with dyslexia commonly needed accommodations for exams that might include extra time, a computerised device and/or a dedicated scribe. Despite students having the right to appropriate accommodations for dyslexia, participants believed that student access depended on teacher knowledge of the administrative process and the types of supports to which students were entitled:

> Teachers [must be] aware in the first place [about accommodations] so if you haven’t got access to a computer and you haven’t got a scribe and you haven’t got that in place then you’re not going to [succeed]. So, it comes back to the systems again and your class teachers don’t know in a primary or secondary school that they need to have those accommodations. (Marram Primary School, P2)

Participants contrasted descriptions of systemic barriers to what they perceived to be proactive learning accommodations at their schools. P2 described a dyslexia awareness card system that had been implemented, designed to minimise possible discrimination. It was designed to prevent negative teacher judgments of students with dyslexia—and penalties such as lunch time detention—for differences in their writing or memory processing abilities:

> [Students with dyslexia] will come with the parents to create an awareness card. So, they've got a card in their bag for when a relief teacher comes. They can show it to them. Because that is often when anxiety crops in and they are kept in at lunch. So, to get on top of that will help with the anxiety often because they don't know what is coming next or can't understand the processing of instructions. (Marram Primary School, P2)

Both primary schools valued new literacies described by Tompkins et al. (2019) as proactive accommodations. Participants perceived that there were benefits in encouraging students to respond to tasks multi-modally, not just through text-based literacy. Gawan Primary School defined literacy as "the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, print, broadcast media and digital media" (D4).

Both primary schools valued connections with parents and carers to support implementation of learning accommodations and promote positive student outcomes. They demonstrated an intention to decrease anxiety and stigma surrounding dyslexia. Participants encouraged the topic of dyslexia to be tackled directly. P2 from Marram Primary explained "we have a support group for the parents, which I run once or twice a term. The parents come along, and we quash some things before they get to be bigger issues".

P2 believed that achievement gaps become more pronounced in secondary schools along with a greater need for accommodations. Therefore, proactive support in primary schools was perceived to be vital: "The key is [when students] get to secondary… accommodations, accommodations, accommodations—and access to assistive technology—if you haven't got them early enough in primary" (P2).

5.6.5 Accommodations in Secondary School

Walert Secondary School participants and school documents echoed similar sentiments I relation to systemic access to dyslexia accommodations. They argued that teachers needed to be proactive and well informed about accommodations. including extra time and access to technology and devices, or students could miss out:

> In Victoria it's really hard [to access accommodations for dyslexia]. Look you can do it but it's a battle… it's a lot of hard work and if you leave it too late in the process you won't get it over the line. It's something I've always got to push for, for months in the lead up to the formal exams to get any sort of accommodation to assist these kids. (Walert Secondary School, P7)
>
> Where it shouldn't be that difficult. It should just be this kid needs a computer. The process is very slow… if you have dyslexia in primary school, you're going to have it in secondary school. It is something that should be addressed very early on. Rather than, we're dealing with a kid in year 11 and I had to fight for him just to get that. (Walert Secondary School, P8)

Perceptions of learning accommodations for dyslexia were grounded in the school’s dyslexia approaches. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the Irlen dyslexia approach (Irlen, 2005) influenced its practices by emphasising visual processing difficulties as aspects of dyslexia. The following document attributed to the school’s training organisation (Org2) encouraged teachers to focus on visual issues:

> 1. Eye strain, fatigue and headaches when doing near point work. 2. Sensitivity to glare (especially fluorescent lights), and 3. Copying from the board (especially white boards and [overhead projectors]). Students can suffer from a combination of some or all of these symptoms. (Org2, D12)

It was clear in the interviews and policy documents that the school promoted its accommodations to the broader school community:

> Teachers have been trained to understand and screen students for Irlen Syndrome and accommodations to reduce glare in the classrooms have been undertaken. Our staff are working with various professionals in the field of Dyslexia to understand how best to assist children with this learning difficulty in our classrooms. (Walert Secondary School, D2)

Some teachers perceived accommodations within an Irlen method to be effective:

> You can give a student an overlay, which [improves their] ability to read. The difference for some kids — it's just incredible. What they tell you it was like before and what it is now with just a simple overlay ... over what they're reading… it is just showing that you're making an effort to help them. That definitely boosts their self-confidence. (Walert Secondary School, P7)

All three schools highlighted barriers to accessing accommodations for students with dyslexia, particularly when interacting with Victorian Government systems. Barriers for teaching and supporting students with dyslexia included a lack of funding and resources, lengthy waiting times to receive support and assistance, and complex administrative procedures to secure necessary resources.

5.7 Dyslexia Exemplar School Interactions with Allied Health Professionals

Despite schools establishing strengths-based views for dyslexia and models of best practice, these were challenged by interactions with stakeholders and government policy. Participants across the three schools describe a significant role played by allied health professionals for dyslexia support.

In the next section, I present perspectives on collaborative practice with multi-disciplinary professionals including psychologists, speech therapists and occupational therapists. Although students with a dyslexia diagnosis have the right to access learning accommodations, entitlement to funded support is challenged under state government policy *The Program for Students with Disabilities* (DET, 2022c). Participants implied this situation was problematic and unjustly set dyslexia apart from other learning difficulties and disabilities. P1 explained “the problem is there is no formal funding that you can apply for … if we got that right there would be a lot less students who find themselves in absolute dire need”, while P2 reported that “a dyslexia diagnosis is not going to get you funding in the school. It is not going to get you funding on the PSD program”.

5.7.1 Psychologists

From the outset of this research, psychologists were assumed to be the leading allied health professionals due to their systemic role in providing diagnostic assessment. Participants often perceived psychologists as gatekeepers, indicating that access to psychologists for dyslexia diagnosis could involve long waiting times and significant costs. They suggested that in some cases psychologists had limited specialist knowledge of dyslexia, and described how they attempted to reduce these challenges.

One primary school participant (P2) maintained that it was important to build trusted professional relationships with psychologists for the benefit of students requiring dyslexia assessment. They described proactively developing effective working partnerships with trusted psychologists, describing some as being “on the same page”. Hence, teachers can hold important information to support the allied health professionals’ work.

The same participant suggested that internal capacity to meet the needs of students with dyslexia could compensate for barriers in accessing psychologists:

> [We] screen them before they even start school… in the October. We’re not labelling. We're not diagnosing. We're not psychologists. We're identifying who has gaps in a phonemic awareness in the October. We really don't wait for them to be not making gains, to be failing. (Marram Primary School, P2)

5.7.2 Speech and Language Therapists

Participants mentioned support of speech therapists more often than psychologists and valued their role in providing dyslexia support. This dyslexia support could be enhanced by access to speech and language therapy. Hence, speech therapists could work in a range of ways to support students, perhaps as a whole class, small groups or one-to-one. School documents from Marram Primary School suggested that, consistent with DET policy, they worked with outside agencies including speech therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and [Multi-sensory Structured Language] therapists/educators.

Walert Secondary School participants described similar barriers to accessing allied health professionals. P7 noted that only a small number of students were formally diagnosed with dyslexia due to the high cost to parents and carers. To mitigate this issue, participants across all three schools provided support for students with reading difficulties regardless of a diagnosis. Nonetheless support practices were interpreted differently across the schools.

In addition to the difficulty of accessing diagnostic testing from psychologists, secondary school participants supported greater access to speech therapists who were credited with providing valuable support. They reported that specialist support from speech therapists was often discontinued on transition to secondary school:

> A lot of the primary schools in this area… do really good work with speech pathologists… Having a bigger impact and the evidence is massive. [The speech therapist] worked with [students] for years in the primary schools. What does that say? To say, *okay you're in secondary now stop working with these kids* [emphasis added]. (Walert Secondary School, P7)

The ideal situation was for students to have long-term access to a speech therapist (P7). Another participant discussed access to allied health professionals as being more difficult to access than in their home country [de-identified British Isles country].

> I've been pushing for more speech and language therapists than we get in schools. This is what we need in every school. Every school back home would have one… Occupational therapists as well. Especially with kids that they've actually recognised need help. (Walert Secondary School, P8)

While it was evident that schools relied on outside agencies to provide access to dyslexia assessment and support, there were insufficient allied health professionals (e.g., appropriately trained educational psychologists within the Victorian education system) to meet the demands of students.

An unexpected finding was the perception that speech therapists played a valuable and collaborative role; but there were fewer examples of teachers and psychologists working collaboratively to support a whole school approach.

5.8 Dyslexia Exemplar School Connections to Practice from England

One of my research questions explicitly asked *how might dyslexia exemplar schools and practice from England further understanding of dyslexia policy and practice?* Comparison with England aimed to broaden the potential for insights and problematisation (see section 3.6.6). From the outset, I deductively assumed that England's dyslexia reform model offered a useful comparison to the Victorian education context, illuminating relevant policy, legislation, research, and enactment of dyslexia-friendly schools in England.

One unexpected finding was the broader influence of specialist teachers with initial teacher training from the British Isles, including England. All three schools in my research described having access to teachers with specialist training beyond the regular scope of Victorian initial teacher training and Victorian Government training initiatives. The two primary school participants described models of dyslexia best practice initiated and influenced by teachers with specialist training from England. In addition, the secondary school benefited from a teacher with education experience from a British Isles country [de-identified country].

Participants across all three schools valued developing their professional knowledge and learning from comparative international education systems. They referred to the importance of keeping knowledge up to date, suggesting that teaching practices should be informed by *research* elsewhere in the world and emphasised the need to continually reflect on their own practices to evaluate what worked for individual students (Brooks, 2007, 2016):

> Specialist teachers sometimes have more knowledge than some of the psychologists. Some of them have no dyslexia training at all. I know one of our previous school psychs [sic] wouldn't even use the word and didn't even believe it existed. (Marram Primary School, P2)

P4 from Gawan Primary noted that "I don't think I've come across any specialist teaching staff other than [teachers from England]" and attributed the influence of these teachers as supporting its development as a dyslexia exemplar school.

A Marram Primary participant (P2) described the training and experience gained in England and applying it in their school; teachers in England were required to teach phonics systematically in ways that differed from the Victorian education system "it was normal practice. This is what you do. You screen kids for phonemic awareness… this is a regular teaching drill in [England]".

Participants suggested that becoming an exemplar school was influenced by proactive advocates that created momentum towards dyslexia exemplar practices, from specialist teachers to members of the parent community. Ultimately though, some considered that school principals needed to be persuaded by evidence of the benefits of becoming a dyslexia exemplar school before implementing change. Findings suggest that evaluation strategies varied across the three schools: “The principal and the leadership have a big impact. If you don’t have them on board, it is kind of tricky” (P2).

One problem for experienced teachers was “definitely lack of time to look at research” (Marram Primary School, P2) but advocated for more emphasis in the initial teacher training stage: “dyslexia and special needs has got to come in there. Many grads are coming in and saying I’ve had one session on spelling or one session literacy and then when you get to special needs, they’ve had even less”. Another participant from Marram Primary argued that:

> having that intense training definitely sets you up on the right foot. Like I learnt more in the week certainly about how young children best learn, than I probably did in all my time at uni. When it comes to English and teaching kids how to read, not just your understanding of it but how to deliver it as well. (P3)

Although P2 had gained many qualifications to support students with dyslexia, they perceived that their initial teacher training and experience from England enabled them to gain an understanding pf foundation literacy and dyslexia best practice. Participants described dyslexia as a specialist issue, requiring specialist knowledge of reading and spelling instruction informed by research. P2 described the training they had undertaken:

> I've done pretty much everything that's out there for dyslexia. I've done the Dyslexia Action [post-graduate] course in the UK. I've done the MSL structured literacy. I've sat the structured literacy exam in the States …and even did a certificate of dyslexia even before that… then the letters training with Louisa Moats, which is the American letters course, which is face to face 12 days, training that I did [interstate] in the last holidays. And I’ve done Ron Yoshimoto, as well.

5.9 Outcomes and Equity

Throughout this chapter, I have reported on approaches to teaching and supporting students with dyslexia that constantly incorporate access and inclusion (equity) themes. This section is dedicated to outlining results that provide insights into the consistency of access, as I assume that students have a right for their educational needs to be met through equitable systems. I explore perspectives that suggest inclusion and those that steer towards exclusion and segregation.

Participants consistently reported that they developed their knowledge of supporting dyslexia best practice outside the scope of regular initial teacher training, usually through private training organisations and overseas universities. P3 explained: “I've learned so much in the last year 2-3 years compared to all those years beforehand and I've taught for 9-10 years of that as well … if I knew then what I know now, there could be some different results for kids”.

5.9.1 Systems Level Consistency

All three schools demonstrated that they wished to improve outcomes for students with dyslexia. Yet, interviews and school documents indicated conflicting interpretation of Victorian Government policy—not just at school level—but also at individual teacher level. Participants asserted that their schools delivered more equitable outcomes for students with dyslexia than non-exemplar schools. Despite individual differences between teachers, my research assumed that perspectives on best practice for dyslexia and inclusion should be consistent and students experiencing intersectional issues, such as English as an Additional Language (EAL) learner, faced greater inequality within systems (Gonski et al., 2011).

This section focuses on systemic issues at each level; teacher level consistency (no matter which teacher in a school), school level (no matter which government school in the state) and systems level (no matter which policy, support or allied health professional).

I created Table 5.5 (on the following page) from analysis of participant and document perspectives of best practice for supporting students with dyslexia. These examples represent perceived strategies to address systemic support at teacher, school or systems levels to provide equitable and consistent approaches for all students across Victorian Government schools.

Table 5.5

Promoting Equity for Students with Dyslexia from Analysis of Participant Perspectives

Systemic level	**Strategy**
Teacher level	Teachers with dyslexia knowledge
	Teachers with inclusive strengths-based views
School level	A consistent whole school approach
	Transparent policies
	Clearly defined best practice
	Well-resourced provision
	Timely access to accommodations
	Timely access to learning support
	Well-coordinated school transitions
Systems level	Allied health professionals with dyslexia knowledge
	Allied health professionals with inclusive strengths-based views
	Greater collaboration between the disciplines

To foster a whole school (consistent) approach at school and teacher level, Marram Primary School had implemented what they termed a *low-variance curriculum*. Their teaching and learning handbook (D3) provided a detailed framework underpinned by notions of shared values, transparent policies, and a school wide pedagogy. The school’s low variance curriculum was described in D3 as providing consistency over *what to teach* to allow teachers time to focus on *how to teach* (pedagogical skills).

Participants highlighted various issues impacting on the consistency of teacher approaches. P2 observed that in non-exemplar schools responsibility for dyslexia support was sometimes offered to teachers looking for flexible and part-time teaching roles, not necessarily those most qualified and knowledgeable.

> I've been a teacher without this knowledge most of my career. And it's not the teachers' fault. Like I said before, they don't know what they don't know. So, this is where it has got to come partly from the Department but also from universities as well. (Marram Primary School, P3)

Continuing the theme of inclusive education by *chance*, interviews and documents identified problems for school level consistency. Schools interpreted perspectives of dyslexia best practice, constructing their own policies and practices. School level issues were described as exacerbated by a lack of funding mandates, particularly in context of *The Program for Students with Disabilities* (DET, 2022c), and an unclear framework for dyslexia. A document from Gawan Primary School highlights that discretion is involved when choosing to fund supports for students with dyslexia:

> We are pleased to announce that our school has received some extra funding from the Department of Education. The funding is to help our students access learning that might otherwise be difficult for them. We have elected to spend this round of funding on supporting our students with dyslexia. (Gawan Primary School, D5)

Participants from Walert Secondary School also suggested they became a dyslexia exemplar school by chance, after a parent campaigned for school level change. P7 explained that “what we’re listening to is this parent that had done all this work and the child was transitioning into year seven. And obviously you've got to listen”.

From allied health professionals to government and private dyslexia organisations, consistent systems have implications for equity and positive student outcomes. Throughout this chapter I have presented examples of inconsistent systems for dyslexia. The primary schools provided many examples of teaching and assessment resources that they believed were necessary for best practice, even though not mandated. For instance, both primary schools emphasised the importance of decodable books for reading success, which P6 described as best practice for all students, including those with dyslexia:

> The way decodable readers work, you don't have to know a lot to be able to read even the most basic decodable book. You only need six sounds to read the first level of decodable works. So, there's a girl in my grade who has got an intellectual disability she can still read… at a very low level but she can still read. She still reads by herself, and she still does the partner reading and I just chose carefully who I put her with. Someone who will be supportive. (Gawan Primary, School, P6)

Other systemic issues were linked to lack of regulation of allied health professionals and private dyslexia organisations that interacted with schools. Victorian Government policy was described as a barrier to access and adequate standards:

> There’s a low-level knowledge of evidence-based programs in their schools… I would like to see more regulation about how external companies and [others] can pitch to schools. Because when we are flying blind, we are very vulnerable to spending a lot of money on things that don’t work. They look glossy. They look great. They appeal to our needs and to time poor, under-the-pump leaders they can look [good]. If I buy this program, it will solve our problems. It doesn’t happen. (Marram Primary School, P1)

P1 believed that students and their families were disadvantaged by a lack of dyslexia exemplar schools and subjected to unfair practices at non-exemplar schools.

> In the dyslexia space in particular, there’s a lot of distraught families… I almost want to let everyone [enrol] at times. They go to school all day and [are subjected to ineffective teaching instruction]. Then they have to do their tutoring outside. A lot of parents just break down. They get it every day here and they can go home and just play. (Marram Primary School, P1)

Consistent themes emerging from this research were “catch them before they fail” and the impact on self-esteem for students who were *failed* by the Victorian education system. The secondary school participants reported that many of their students were from disadvantaged backgrounds. P7 described the problem of poor-quality literacy experiences in the early years which impacted on many students at the school. Secondary school participants indicated that while there was an attempt to narrow literacy gaps, they were not as hopeful or confident of success as the primary school teachers who spoke about the power of effective teaching tools to have an impact.

> I honestly feel that last year was the first year I could help every single student in the class, no matter if they have [an intellectual disability or any learning need]. I've never had that before. There's always been one or two that you… weren't helping them ... And they'd lose it over the holidays. You just knew this was working! and that's a powerful thing for a teacher when you can suddenly help everybody. That's what you want to do. That's why you're teaching. It's phenomenal. It really is amazing. That's why I feel really strongly about it. It's definitely something that I would never stop doing. (Gawan Primary School, P4)

5.10 Summary

Outcomes for students with dyslexia hinge on schools adopting best practice, yet my research highlighted how schools and teachers demonstrated an interpretative response. Policy document and teacher perspectives suggested that proactive advocates were a catalyst for addressing dyslexia. Inconsistent approaches to teaching and supporting dyslexia were identified at teacher, school, and wider systemic levels. Participants highlighted that systemic issues had significant impact on students with dyslexia, including on their self-esteem and opportunities during their education and beyond.

In this chapter, I have highlighted a variety of interpretative school-level responses to Victorian Government dyslexia policy—to shed light on innovation and enactment—addressing the following research questions; how is dyslexia being approached in the Victorian education system? And how are students with dyslexia being included in the Victorian education system?

Findings from dyslexia exemplar schools revealed examples where inconsistencies at Victorian Government policy level were replicated at individual school level, where dyslexia was characterised both within progressive views of inclusive education but also belonging to the domain of special education. Nonetheless, all three schools contrasted their approaches to examples of Victorian Government policy that understate the challenges of learning to read and spell (as described in *Chapters Two* and *Four*).

The primary school participants suggested that phonics debates and government policy were over-simplistic, without due consideration of explicit teaching, metacognition, etymology, and morphology. Both primary and secondary dyslexia exemplar schools needed to supplement Victorian Government frameworks with their own dyslexia specific resources.

The finding that dyslexia exemplar schools are rare and hidden, including a lack of government systems to identify the dyslexia exemplar schools, emerged during the research sampling stage. Further issues identified by this research include contrasting definitions and approaches for dyslexia, from best practice through an explicit pedagogy to an Irlen approach used by the secondary school.

All three schools demonstrated ongoing initiatives for dyslexia, with significant investment of time, professional learning and resources to pursuing their view of evidenced-based practice. I identified stakeholders from various factions, introducing a spectrum of influence and agendas.

My research identified examples of resourcefulness, creating new policies and practices, and attempting to eliminate barriers for students. Schools have moved beyond the dyslexia education rights suggested by the Victorian Government to adopting enhanced teacher responsibility for addressing dyslexia best practice. I identified initiatives of dyslexia exemplar schools to destigmatise dyslexia, reduce access barriers, and apply strengths-based discourse and universal design practices.

But perspectives on adopting best practice have exposed the challenges of limited school capacity and reliance on allied health professionals and private dyslexia organisations. My results indicated that school interactions with Victorian Government policy and systems uncovered examples of exclusion and segregation. These considerations are used to inform a new paradigm proposed in *Chapter Six*.

Chapter 6

Discussion

In this chapter, I present the implications of my research findings—the challenges and opportunities to improve education rights for students with dyslexia—before proposing a new dyslexia response model. Like Bacchi (2009) and Thomas (2004), my frameworks for analysis problematise policy and challenge exclusionary systems. The use of an education rather than a psychological perspective offers new insights for dyslexia within the Victorian education context. Specifically, the Social Relational Model of Disability (Thomas, 2004) is applied to disrupt assumptions embedded in the education system.

My research offers a lens on school-level policy and practice for dyslexia, in greater focus than previous reviews on literacy (Rowe, 2005) and dyslexia support (Bond et al., 2010). I highlight barriers to enacting dyslexia practice overlooked in policy development. While my research focused on exemplar school practice, I do not suggest that developing exemplar schools is necessarily the best way to address dyslexia. Inclusive practice for dyslexia should be conceived as regular practice in regular schools and classrooms, rather than in segregated specialist schools (UN General Assembly, 2006).

From the outset, I identified that dyslexia policy and practice is under-researched, particularly in the Victorian education system. Beyond addressing a knowledge gap, my research was motivated by the ethical goal of articulating education rights for students with dyslexia through their access to teachers and teaching. As described in *Chapter One*, problematising policy contradictions prompted a research puzzle to disrupt dominant paradigms (Gustafsson & Hagström, 2018; Hopman, 2017). In conceptualising the research puzzle, I questioned *why the current approach to dyslexia in the Victorian education system despite other possible approaches*? I aimed to introduce new policy understandings through my specific theoretical frameworks and case studies of exemplar practice. I posed the following research questions:

> *How is dyslexia being approached in the Victorian education system?*
> *How are students with dyslexia being included in the Victorian education system?*
> *How might Dyslexia Exemplar Schools and practice from England further the understanding of such issues?*

In the next section, the discussion focuses on issues for dyslexia best practice, access, and inclusion. To address research questions, my discussion weaves between interconnected systemic relationships contextualising the Victorian education system within broader bioecological systems. My discussion aims to strengthen comparisons with England to devise a useful policy reference, a strategy supported by Chong and Graham (2013). I outline how the Victorian education system might benefit from systematic reforms that go beyond the current approach. Consideration of policy and practice exemplars from the Victorian context and from England aims to inform a new dyslexia response model.

My research supports the impetus of *Helping people with dyslexia: A national action agenda's* (Bond et al., 2010) in demanding consistent dyslexia definitions and greater access to school-based support. I extend the recommendations of Bond et al. with new insights on the Victorian education system. I also add to the larger conversation by drawing on international understanding of dyslexia (Rose, 2009) while contesting psycho-medical framing of disability rights, drawing on understandings from Norwich (2010) and Slee (2011). Finally, I revisit key literature and tensions for dyslexia best practice within a new era of policy, research, technology, stakeholders, and the emergence of dyslexia exemplar schools.

6.1 Best Practice Implications for Teaching Students with a Dyslexia Diagnosis

A devolved Australian education system paradoxically imposes compliance with Victorian state systems, yet enables schools to act autonomously in matters that concern equity (Keddie & Holloway, 2020). Although Victorian Government education policy belongs to an indirect systemic layer, there may be profound effects for a student's experience of school, including entitlements to appropriate teaching and support. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's (1994) bioecological systems imply that unseen influence of policy can impact on the ways that teachers interact with students, the language teachers use and the knowledge that is privileged in the classroom. Victorian Government policy has potential power to promote access, inclusion, and a sense of belonging for all including students with dyslexia.

Returning to my research puzzle, I considered *why the current approach to dyslexia in the Victorian education system despite other possible approaches?* My results found that only primary school participants rigorously defended their approach to teaching reading and spelling as best practice. In contrast, secondary school participants discussed drawing on various pedagogical approaches, rather than a whole school or systematic approach, and noted that the structure and demands of the Victorian Government secondary curriculum were a barrier to bridging gaps in foundational skills.

Instead of defining a best practice teaching pedagogy for dyslexia, approaches in the secondary school often centred on learning accommodations and adapting the complexity of text-based literacy tasks (e.g., providing abridged texts when studying narrative texts including novels). Accommodations represented an important aspect of providing accessible learning, which the secondary school teachers perceived were the most feasible way to enable students to access curriculum content. Nonetheless, they demonstrated an intent towards a dyslexia specific pedagogy—and therefore an intent to address dyslexia proactively—through enlisting the support of their training provider.

Best practice dyslexia pedagogy may be understood through examples of successful enactment in primary schools and consideration of how these models could be adapted to suit the secondary school context. My results and the literature suggest that the unique systemic issues in secondary school systems have been underestimated. In this section, I focus on my results of best practice from primary schools, before returning to the secondary school context later in the chapter.

The National Inquiry into the Teaching Literacy (NITL) (Rowe, 2005) established itself as a key document for literacy best practice. Its report argued for explicit approaches to teaching literacy in Australia—opposing so-called constructivist (whole language) pedagogical approaches for reading instruction—relying on a synthesis of research evidence including the *American Report of the National Reading Panel* NRP (National Reading Panel & National Institute of Child Health Human and Development, 2000). The results of my research identified that large scale research reviews such as the NITL and the NRP remain on the periphery of Victorian Government policy.

Given the unclear Victorian Government policy, I identified examples of teachers and principals in my research utilising inquiries and reviews such as the NITL (Rowe, 2005) and the NRP (National Reading Panel & National Institute of Child Health Human and Development, 2000) to inform their pedagogies. The NITL was valued by the primary schools for focusing on literacy best practice—favoured for its Australian perspective—although it lacked focus on broader issues for dyslexia access and inclusion. Indeed, the NITL was not positioned as an inquiry based on education rights for student literacy and dyslexia; rather the opening paragraphs foreground Australia's literacy achievement results within the OECD as a key concern.

My research challenges the false dichotomy of Rowe (2005) in the NITL which is reinforced by academic perspectives such as Snyder's (2008) *The literacy wars: Why teaching children to read and write is a battleground in Australia*. Despite contributing to understanding best practice literacy teaching, the NITL's (Rowe, 2005) capacity to affect positive change was subverted by proposing a compromised middle-ground for literacy best practice. The NITL dismissed the concerns of academics at the time (Adams, 1991; Moats, 2000)—in particular those of Moats, prominent in the field of dyslexia research—who argued that *whole language* and *balanced literacy* were indistinguishable categories that excluded students with reading difficulties and dyslexia. The NITL endorsed an ill-defined "balanced approach" (p. 35), inadvertently adding to the prevailing challenges of clarifying dyslexia best practice. Similar challenges were observed in my examination of Victorian Government policy, where a range of contradictory pedagogical approaches was endorsed and poorly defined (Marland, 2021).

It appears that within Victorian Government policy, phonics-based pedagogy needs a tighter definition. Participants in my research differentiated their pedagogies from other phonics-based approaches through descriptions of being *systematic*—requiring a commercially available structured phonics-based program that builds cumulatively—emphasis that has been lost in the field of literacy research. It has been assumed that Victorian teachers have the capacity to employ a phonics-based approach, although phonics-based programs rarely feature in such discussions. What are the implications of this omission? Can teachers be expected to design a rigorous phonics scope and sequence, equal to a commercially available professionally designed program? Might this be one of the key enablers of broad interpretations of best practice? Policy should be evaluated to see how gaps in the provision of systematic phonics programs might impact on best practice. Later in the chapter, I propose that policy gaps have created space for new stakeholders in ways that present further systemic tension.

Evidence from dyslexia exemplar schools in this research introduces richer understandings that challenge polarising descriptions of whole language and phonics-based approaches in the literature (Rowe, 2005; Snyder, 2008). Phonics-based approaches are often termed as *basics* or *back-to-basics* (Rowe, 2005). Debates such as those from The Australian College of Educators and The Centre for Independent Studies (2018) have implied that a phonics-based approach is taught by rote and devoid of engaging authentic texts.

In my research, I observed exemplar school classrooms—rich with a variety of texts—suggesting that phonics-based approaches are not at odds with so called authentic literacy experiences. Indeed, the term *basics* (Rowe, 2005) detracts from the complexity of teacher pedagogical knowledge and practice described by teachers and principals from my research in exemplar schools; they discussed embedded practices for dyslexia that were more sophisticated than merely attuning to students' phonological skills. As I have previously argued (Marland, 2021), traditional literacy pedagogies have failed to address elitist assumptions about reading acquisition. Teachers and principals in my research recognised that the English language is opaque, difficult to decipher and master as described by Cain (2010) and Castles and Coltheart (1993). Exemplar schools represented a disruption of the ableist view that all students naturally develop text-based literacy skills, paving the way for strengths-based perspectives.

Aligned with a systematic phonics-based approach, research participants described enhanced pedagogies and their wish to make phonics more accessible. Drawing from reading research *the Science of Reading*, teachers from exemplar primary schools described utilising phonics instruction underpinned by an explicit pedagogy to teach morphological and etymological knowledge. The advantages of embedding morphology and etymology are supported by numerous research studies (Johnston, 2019; Kirby & Bowers, 2017; Templeton, 2012) yet under-represented in how the Victorian Government addresses dyslexia. Building on research from Bond et al. (2010) and Rose (2009) on ways of improving best practice for dyslexia, new focus could be given to morphology and etymology as key elements of an explicit approach to teaching reading and spelling.

Extending on the NITL (Rowe, 2005), teachers and principals from dyslexia exemplar schools reinforced the view that initial teacher training under-prepares teachers to deliver reading and spelling instruction. My discussion detours from the NITL's performative emphasis on *teacher quality* to instead listening to the voices of teachers to identify systemic constraints on best practice. The NITL report assumes that gaps in teacher knowledge can be remedied through regular training mechanisms in initial teacher training courses and ongoing professional learning. In contrast, this research included examples of teachers and principals who considered that the depth of knowledge required to enact dyslexia best practice was beyond the scope of initial teacher training.

In alignment with Konza (2014), research participants perceived that teaching reading and spelling required a deep and interconnected understanding of print (orthography), phonological awareness, fluency, oral language, vocabulary, comprehension and systematic phonics. Those with the greatest understanding of these domains described exceptional training, including post-graduate and private training courses in international contexts, followed by years of ongoing training and research engagement.

While initial teacher training programs should address understanding of reading instruction and dyslexia, my research cautions possible under-estimation of the scope of study required. Participants described exhaustive personal and financial costs to become highly skilled teachers of literacy within all domains, including reading and spelling. Teachers articulated that layers of theoretical knowledge needed to enact best practice stemmed from the Science of Reading research and branched into multi-disciplines of education, speech therapy and psychology. The Victorian Government's DET has not fully addressed the possibility that best practice requires teachers to become multi-disciplinary specialists, nor has its policy fully realised the constituent elements of reading and spelling instruction. Evidence from my case studies suggested that teachers required knowledge of orthography, morphology, phonology, oral language, etymology, and applied linguistics. Rather than using a psychological framework (quantitative framework) to frame dyslexia, research from the perspective of practicing teachers and students—which has largely been missed—would have useful application.

Victorian Government policy has failed to articulate best practice for dyslexia, with a lack of consistency within individual policy statements. Australian policy analysts Althaus et al. (2020) support government co-ordination and policy monitoring—to ensure policies do not undermine one another—across the public sector. Government inquiries and academic research have rarely examined the systemic tensions resulting from the multiple policy domains for dyslexia (e.g., literacy and disability). My school-based case studies revealed that contradictory dyslexia policies have been interpreted inconsistently by schools. Inconsistencies are *policy problems* that impede best practice and demonstrate that government has averted responsibility for the inclusion of students with dyslexia. If a social relational model of disability were applied to dyslexia policy, new opportunities could arise for a collaborative multidisciplinary practice and research landscape.

6.2 Why Access Matters and What Can Be Done About It

Receiving timely support is critical to the inclusion of students with dyslexia. Under the law, students with disabilities including dyslexia have the right to access education on the same basis as their peers, without exclusion or discrimination (Australian Government, 1992, 2005). It is imperative to address the educational needs of all students. Students who fail to develop required competencies in the early years of school are less likely to achieve a year 12 qualification and face significant lifelong consequences (Gonski et al., 2011).

Despite the urgency of education reform, a significant body of Australian research (Jenkin et al., 2018; Poed et al., 2020) suggests that students with disabilities are being denied appropriate teaching and opportunities to develop their learning potential. Considering how research supports accessible teaching practices is central to improving outcomes for students with dyslexia in the Victorian education system.

Konza (2014) maintains that “the pervasive influence of a child’s early experiences on future reading achievement must be understood if teachers are to maximise the opportunities of all children to become independent readers” (p. 153). This connects with Australian research (Edwards et al., 2013; Jha, 2016) presented in *Chapter Two* on the benefits of early literacy opportunities as foundational to positive life outcomes.

The implications of my research support and extend previous understanding of education inequalities specifically focusing on issues facing students with dyslexia. My findings concur with Gonski’s (2011) view that national literacy and numeracy testing (NAPLAN) in year three is “too late to be an entry-level diagnostic tool” (p. 218). Although Gonski’s criticisms may seem to favour the Victorian Government’s dyslexia screening tool (DET, 2022e) given in the first year of school, I have questioned the rationale and efficacy of implementing a multi-purpose screening tool. My research supports dyslexia screening being given proactively at the earliest opportunity, with regular follow-up screening throughout primary and during transition into secondary school.

Research from Rose (2009) supports the early identification of students with dyslexia as an important mechanism of dyslexia support. However, the research and rationale underpinning the design of the Victorian Government screening tool is unclear. Petscher et al. (2019) argue that “universal screening for dyslexia risk is one of the most promising, but most challenging elements of the dyslexia education reform effort” (p. 2). Other research (Care et al., 2018; Keenan & Meenan, 2014) asserts that with any form of screening or testing, the aim of the screening instrument (e.g., the capabilities being targeted) needs to align with the design of the screening instrument. Furthermore, post-screening protocols should be clearly defined. The International Dyslexia Association, (2022) advises that following screening “preventative intervention should begin immediately, even if dyslexia is suspected” (para. 4).

In addition to the limitations of current dyslexia screening measures (DET, 2022e), my findings have highlighted gaps in dyslexia provision that signal inadequate funding and resourcing protocols. Jenkin et al. (2018), found that a lack of appropriate resources in Victorian schools disproportionately affects students with disabilities, constructing systems of disablement. While this thesis does not directly investigate funding models, there are systemic caveats that restrict funding for students with dyslexia, as exemplified through my analysis (in section 4.3) of *The Program for Students with Disabilities* (PSD) (DET, 2022c).

Access to education was addressed in Bond et al.’s (2010) *Helping people with dyslexia: A national action agenda*. It recommended changes to initial teacher training, ongoing professional learning, and the implementation of a *dyslexia-friendly* school model. This report predates the emergence of new literacies and technologies, the emergence of the first Australian dyslexia exemplar school (Learning Difficulties Australia, 2021; Robina State High School, 2022), and the Victorian Government’s stated dyslexia intent to address dyslexia (Victorian Government, 2016). Reform opportunities exist in the context of research from dyslexia exemplar schools and insights from policy enactment at school level.

My findings respond to Bond et al.’s (2010) notion of the *dyslexia-friendly* *school*, a term that has surfaced in political discourse. Following a dyslexia round table, Pyne (2014a) emphasised the importance of both school autonomy and the need for dyslexia-friendly schools in Australia. But understanding what constitutes dyslexia-friendly schools remains contradictory. They may refer to specialist schools for students with dyslexia or an approach that is embedded in every school.

As my research questions draw on understandings from dyslexia exemplar schools and practice from England, it is useful to consider the role of English registration councils. The Council for the Registration of Schools Teaching Dyslexic Pupils (CReSTeD) provides open public access to schools listed as being *dyslexia-friendly* or *dyslexia specialist*, with an aim to "help parents and also those who advise them to choose an educational establishment for children with Specific Learning Difficulties [dyslexia]" (CReSTeD, 2021, para. 2).

Registration councils offer certain advantages including the potential to increase visibility, consistency and alignment of the dyslexia exemplar schools. Similarly, the dyslexia-friendly school model from the British Dyslexia Association (Cochrane & Saunders, 2012) may promote greater consistency through its Quality Mark accreditation system (Riddick, 2006). However, research into the efficacy of dyslexia friendly schools in England (UK) suggests limitations to exemplar school practice with "differences in … not only between schools but also between teachers at the same school" (Riddick, 2006, p. 152).

I argue that segregation is not necessarily a step towards inclusion and therefore specialist schools for dyslexia create new problems for including students with dyslexia. Publicly identifying dyslexia exemplar schools creates a risk of establishing a system of segregation where parents and guardians seek out specialist schools. While exemplar schools aim for best practice for teaching students with dyslexia, the same responsibility for inclusion and best practice applies to every teacher in every school.

My research highlights that Bond et al. (2010) remains an important milestone towards re-imagining the rights for people with dyslexia, despite many recommendations not being implemented. Their demand for a consistent definition of dyslexia is still a pressing issue, although I argue for greater attention to disrupting the deficit framing of dyslexia. I extend on Bond et al. by reinforcing the social relational model of disability (Macdonald, 2009; Thomas, 2004) recommending that a dyslexia definition embed a disabilities theories approach to challenge social and governmental forms of disablement. A dyslexia definition within my use of the social relational model offers opportunities to develop strengths and capability approaches, rather than accepting the psycho-medical status quo.

As argued by Deacon and Macdonald (2015) and Deacon et al. (2020) the social relational model enables the distinction between ‘disability’ as structural exclusion and ‘impairment’ as a neurobiological variation with functional limitations/effects on the individual. According to Deacon and Macdonald, the social relational model recognises the interaction between these factors coupled with disabling social barriers and structural exclusion. The recognition of these broader factors illustrates the importance of diagnosis/assessment; the potential psychological implications of being excluded relates to the reduction of stigma and supportive teaching practices; and the removal of social barriers relates to inclusive pedagogical approaches and the use of assistive technologies. The removal of barriers connects to my overarching policy analysis to move away from segregated education systems to that of an inclusive approach to dyslexia in all schools.

In alignment with Bond et al. (2010), my results indicate the need for urgent legislative and policy reform for state-level mandates to recognise dyslexia as a disability. Bond et al. recommended that “Commonwealth funding of all educational institutions should be contingent on demonstrated compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Amended in 2008), and the Disability Standards for Education 2005” (p. 9). Although, I offer an ontological challenge to the medicalised perspectives of disability—by arguing for the social relational lens (Thomas, 2004)—my research reaffirms the requirement for greater disability protection under the law (UN General Assembly, 2006).

6.3 The SEN Code of Practice (England)

My results identified caveats that allow government and schools to avoid their responsibilities for inclusive education by implying that inclusion can place hardship on schools. The implication of Victorian Government policies that describe reasonable adjustments as needing to “balance the interests of everyone affected’ (DET, 2022j, para 1), is that students with disabilities such as dyslexia are positioned with ambiguous education rights. Nevertheless, these tensions are present within the UNCRPD (UN General Assembly, 2006) itself where inclusive education contains caveats that call for individualised and special measures to enable participation.

The Victorian Government may consider adopting a legislative framework similar to England to strengthen legal protection for students with disability. The Special Education Needs (SEN) Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015; Department for Education England, 1994) makes teachers accountable for proactively responding to the individual needs of their students. The code reinforces the requirement for schools to monitor and report student progress, reducing the possibility for hidden disabilities. Subsequent data collection has found that at “age 15 the most prevalent type of need for pupils with SEN Support is Specific Learning Difficulty [including dyslexia]” (Department for Education England, 2018, p. 10). In the context of greater education rights, systemic barriers within the English system may delay identifying dyslexia.

A framework such as the SEN Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015) suggests a shift of power towards universal accessibility within the education system. Nonetheless, the SEN Code is not without tensions as it embeds a medicalised view of disability, limiting strengths-based views of the individual. In the Victorian context, the absence of an embedded disability rights framework—exacerbates policy tensions and contradictions—allowing dyslexia to remain hidden and ill-defined. State level policies construct dyslexia as a category of *otherness* with discretionary rights and status. In this section, I focus on the potential to address these barriers and move away from fragmented and exclusionary systems.

6.4 Access to Teaching and Qualified Professionals

I begin this section with implications from my findings that policy constructs tensions for teachers' professional roles and designates responsibility for students with dyslexia outside the education system. Bond et al. (2010) subverted teacher capacity by proposing that in-depth reading and spelling assessments be ascribed to an "appropriately-trained psychologist, speech pathologist or other person with relevant qualifications" (p. 10).

At Australian national and Victorian state level, attention has been averted from professional workforce structure and organisation within schools (Bond et al., 2010; Rowe, 2005; Victorian Government, 2016). My research highlights that teaching professionals deserve far greater attention. Best practice for dyslexia must articulate not only *how* students are supported but also *by whom*. Specifically, the roles of teaching assistants, specialist teachers and learning co-coordinators deserve a new place in the conversation. The next section considers the example of English policy reform to present new ways of viewing access problems identified by my research.

6.4.1 Specialist Dyslexia Teachers

In this chapter, I have previously questioned whether the depth of knowledge to enact best practice for dyslexia has been under-estimated by government and reform agendas (Bond et al., 2010; Rowe, 2005; Victorian Government, 2016). Despite the notion of specialisation being applied in the Victorian education system, regulatory frameworks offer limited recognition of specialist dyslexia teachers or those teachers with advanced training to address reading difficulties (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2022; VIT, 2021). My findings imply that *specialist dyslexia teachers* are a hidden phenomenon within the Victorian education system and an issue that needs to be explored within conversations about building capacity for inclusive education.

In contrast, England's reform agenda following the Rose Review (2009) was underpinned by the role of dyslexia specialist teachers. The Rose Review implemented government funding for 4,000 teachers to undertake specialist dyslexia training courses at universities such as the University of London and the University of York. The courses offered masters level training modules in "diagnostic assessment and fit the criteria established by the Specific Learning Difficulties Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) which leads to eligibility for the award of a [SASC] Practising Certificate" (Rose, 2009, p. 95). Rose's recommendations implied that the needs of students with reading difficulties and dyslexia could solely be met within the education system. While psychologists were not excluded from providing assessment, the initiative was designed to strengthen teacher capacity and professionalisation, and provide increased access for students. This approach may help to address the problem identified by Gibbs and Elliot (2020) that "while calling for greater levels of resource for dyslexic children, dyslexia assessors act as gatekeepers to finite levels of resource that would be stretched if all struggling readers were provided with the help they require" (p. 492).

I propose that England's incentivisation of specialist teacher training represents a proactive strategy which warrants further discussion for the Victorian context. By contrast, teachers in England are encouraged to become teaching specialists and are rewarded with additional remuneration under the special education award (NASUWT Teachers' Union, 2022). Research by Arain et al. (2014) suggests that remuneration for teachers with additional qualifications is a positive investment in teachers and improving student outcomes.

Nonetheless researchers (Duke & Whitburn, 2020) argue that the notion of *specialist teachers* embeds tension for inclusive education by privileging particular knowledge and expertism. Yet, specialisation favours deeper knowledge at local school level, rather than diverting responsibility for dyslexia outside the education system. Although it is beyond the scope of my research, New Zealand has additional layers of specialism with resources for teachers of literacy, worthy of greater interrogation~~s~~ (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2023).

6.4.2 Coordinators of Dyslexia Provision

The next reform suggested is to explore the role of coordinators with responsibility for dyslexia education provision (Mackenzie, 2007). My research demonstrated contrasting organisational structures that blur responsibilities for dyslexia provision, particularly due to the intersection of literacy and disability. In England, the role of Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCo) is well-defined and enshrined in a legislative framework of the Special Education Needs (SEN) Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015). Countries such as New Zealand have adopted the SENCo model, although it is less formalised than in England (Lin, 2020). In England, the role of SENCo is professionalised through a national university qualification to develop knowledge to lead and co-ordinate education provision for learners with disabilities (Kingston University, 2022).

The SENCo model (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015) embeds tensions through the concept of special and different, rather than inclusive education conceptualised through a disability theory approach from Booth and Ainscow (2002). However, the Victorian context may benefit from borrowing elements of the SENCo model to clarify professional responsibilities that advance education rights for students with dyslexia. Dempsey and Dally's (2014) comparative study examined professional standards in special education in Australia compared to those in the United States and the United Kingdom. They found a lack of professional standards for special education professionals in Australia that had not been addressed in previous reforms, and argued that professional standards have the potential to address systemic issues with improved outcomes for both students and teachers.

6.4.3 Teaching Assistants (Aides)

The other professional role under focus for dyslexia best practice is teaching assistant. Participants in my research reported that teaching assistants played an important function in facilitating dyslexia support. Yet the issue has been largely overlooked in Rowe's (2005) research and Victorian Government policy has failed to clarify best practice in relation to the role played by teaching assistants. However, English research suggested that teaching assistants may perform a gatekeeping role in supporting students with disabilities (Webster et al., 2015). A study by Webster and Blatchford (2017) recommended that schools be mindful of institutional arrangements and practices that result in students with disabilities having less time with teachers, relative to other pupils.

They argue that classroom roles be considered, developed and supported through appropriate training, with pedagogical responsibilities being retained by teachers. Hence, this raises questions about the role of teaching assistants that are beyond the scope of this thesis.

The issue of students being taught by teaching assistants instead of teachers, was not canvassed in Victorian Government policy document discussion of best practice for teaching students with dyslexia. Studies have indicated that there can be a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning (Webster & Blatchford, 2012), social segregation and decreased student autonomy (Whitburn, 2013). The impact of teaching interventions performed by teaching assistants over the short or long-term is unclear from previous research. However, within an education rights framework UNCRPD (UN General Assembly, 2006), this can denote segregation and exclusionary practice.

6.5 Outcomes and Equity

The issues raised by my research highlight that the Victorian Government educational context does not guarantee consistent educational access for students with dyslexia. As school principals and teachers exercise a degree of autonomy, there may be intersectional barriers for students from marginalised backgrounds or attending remote schools. Jenkin et al. (2018), argue that student equity is threatened by the overarching “challenge of translating legislative and policy imperatives into action in the school and classroom [and] the failure to temper increased school autonomy with effective oversight and accountability” (p. 2). The exemplar schools in my research self-initiated a response to dyslexia, implementing measures beyond specific mandates. The schools benefited from teachers with specific training in dyslexia and developed an infrastructure of resources to support their practices. It is unknown how students in other Victorian Government schools are supported and the resources available to them.

In England, the Rose Review (2009) was initiated to strengthen best practice and develop greater accountability for the inclusion of students with dyslexia. It provides an operational guide for schools and teachers, across school transitions across life stages, and is a tool which is notably absent in the Victoria education context. While there are limitations to the 214-page review, including the use of traditional medicalised discourse and the time and place in which it was written, such a framework has untapped potential to influence modern strengths-based guidance that is appropriate for Victorian Schools.

Teachers in my research have suggested that a reliance on private dyslexia organisations may widen inequalities between schools. I argue that gaps in Government policy for funding and resourcing dyslexia provision enable privatisation. Exemplar schools in my research relied on private dyslexia organisations to supplement teacher training and provide structured programs for teacher professional learning in pedagogy, assessment and learning support. I identified that key resources owned by private dyslexia organisations and utilised by exemplar schools were subject to privilege. Ownership of explicit and systematic phonics-based programs is a significant and problematic issue. While the notion of phonics-based practice has entered the discussion, the problem of enactment has been overlooked by the Victorian Government's policy frameworks (Victorian Government, 2016) *The English Online Interview* (DET, 2022e) *The Program for Students with Disabilities* (DET, 2022c) and *The Department of Education and Training Victoria's website* (DET, 2022a).

The Disability Standards for Education (Australian Government, 2005) and supplementary guide (Australian Government, 2015) implied that systematic support relied on parental resources. Participants in my research noted that parents advocated for their children in the context of Victorian Government policy gaps that denied access to funding and support, which concurs with Levi's (2017) findings. Illustrative examples of collaboration between families and schools were skewed towards describing parental labour including planning, meeting, visiting, emailing, reporting and advocating for their children.

6.6 Assessment, Diagnosis and the Dyslexia 'Label'

I have identified challenges and opportunities for dyslexia assessment and diagnosis protocols in Victoria. I argue for a review of the dyslexia screening tool *English Online Interview* EOI (Victorian Government, 2016) as a school-based form of identification. Future reviews need to re-imagine a dyslexia specific screening tool that embeds a strengthened rationale, including references and peer review. It should consider the characteristic traits of dyslexia as described within research by Rose (2009). There may also be opportunities to co-design protocols that consider the views of teachers from exemplar schools and students with dyslexia. Furthermore, screening tools must embed the next steps following screening, considered within a disability rights framework (UN General Assembly, 2006) that affirms access to education.

My research highlights unclear pathways to support for students with dyslexia, such as access to diagnostic testing. Firstly, participants point to complex differences in the ways that students recognise having dyslexia, including the choice to accept or reject the dyslexia label. A systematic review by Gibby-Leversuch (2019) identified some cases of more positive self-perceptions for students with dyslexia which offered an alternative to the view that they had been labelled unintelligent or idle. Secondly, Gibby-Leversuch highlights the problem of students who remain undiagnosed primarily due to access issues and barriers to costly diagnoses with shortages of trained professionals, as identified by Bond et al. (2010).

Table 6.1

Dyslexia Diagnosis - Subcategories of Learners Identified in Victorian Dyslexia Exemplar Schools

Learner categories with and without a dyslexia diagnosis or label	
Students with a dyslexia diagnosis (with a label)	
Students with undiagnosed dyslexia (due to access issues)	
Students with literacy difficulties due to limited literacy opportunities (not dyslexia)	
Students with generalised learning difficulties including reading difficulties (not dyslexia)	
Students with dyslexia (choosing not to be diagnosed and/or labelled)	*
All other students	

Note. Exposure to literacy opportunities varies between students and is a factor linked to literacy success. The Australian Government ICSEA scale recognises educational disadvantage through its ICSEA scale (ACARA, 2021)

Table 6.1 indicated that from my results there were at least six categories of students in relation to dyslexia diagnosis and labelling. By highlighting subcategories of learners in relation to diagnosis, future policy can be developed with all learners in focus. Previously, consideration of dyslexia diagnosis subcategories has been overlooked within the Victorian education system.

My findings identified broader groups of learners experiencing difficulties with reading (see Table 6.1) and more possible scenarios than outlined in the influential work of Gough and Tunmer (1986). The implications of dyslexia diagnosis can impact on student identity, particularly as there is no definite cut off for people with or without dyslexia. Diagnosis is not always straight forward or welcome and may be avoided in the early years for borderline young people because of the wide range of ‘typical’ development in the early years (Wagner, 2018).

The use of dyslexia definition and diagnostic labels is a key concern for policy, with legal, educational, and social ramifications. While Victorian Government policy has side-stepped the complex issues surrounding labelling students with dyslexia, future reform should consider how to mitigate these challenges. Identifying subcategories of learners with varying diagnostic status has implications for teacher practice in schools. I established that exemplar schools aimed to respond to learners' functional needs and abilities, regardless of whether there was a dyslexia diagnosis in place. Participants agreed that best practice for teaching students with reading difficulties should not differ from those students with a dyslexia diagnosis, consistent with the findings of the House of Commons (UK) Parliament (2009). This perspective represents a forward strategy within dyslexia labelling debates that have halted progress in dyslexia reform. Snowling et al. (2020) argue that while dyslexia debates remain, research has explained "how reading develops and how best to teach it" (p. 508).

Herein lies a paradox, what use is a label if some students with dyslexia remain undiagnosed? Should efforts to define best practice be abandoned alongside all that is understood about dyslexia? Of course not. Snowling et al. (2020) and Rose (2009) focus on dyslexia as being defined as difficulty with reading and spelling fluency that persist over time, despite well-founded targeted teaching and support. Best practice approaches for dyslexia benefit all students while a disability theory approach supports the view that students have the right to decide whether or not to identity with a recognised disability.

6.7 Exemplars and Cluster Schools

My research found that the development of practices at two dyslexia exemplar primary schools implied emergent cluster school arrangements, albeit informal. According to Chikoko (2007) a cluster school is "the grouping of schools within the same geographical location, for economic, pedagogic, administrative and political purposes" (p. 1). Teachers and principals from these schools in my research recognised the benefits of networking and sharing their understandings of best practice. While dyslexia exemplar schools had not formalised cluster school arrangements, it raises questions about whether such arrangements may support teaching students with dyslexia through enhanced capacity and innovation.

Allensworth (2020) asserted that cluster school models can “advance a cohesive, high-quality school and student support system by coordinating and aligning resources, programs, and partnerships” (p. 6). Cluster schools may involve larger schools sharing resources with smaller ones including access to teachers with defined and designated specialist literacy roles. Atkinson (2007) notes the benefits of inter-school collaboration including the economy of scales. It is perhaps too early to suggest whether a significant cluster of dyslexia exemplar schools will emerge in the Victorian context, although it would be prudent for the Victorian Government to consider the potential to strengthen best practice. Moving from the medical to social model of disability, cluster schools represent the centralising of dyslexia support within the education system and offer scope to maximise resources to support inclusion; the ultimate goal of dyslexia reform should be to build capacity within every school.

Cluster school collaboration may have additional benefits to enable schools to keep pace with rapid change in education. Nested within broader systems, Victorian Government schools are required to adapt to increased digitisation, automation, and globalisation. Thomson et al. (2018) identified the rapid rise of information technology and internet access on education and in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic escalated the use of technologies even further (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). Jobst (2014) argues that developing holistic, human-centred innovation is the key to softening the impact of globalisation and modernity “where the number of wicked problems will grow” (p. 105).

6.8 Inclusion: Systemic Issues

What about inclusion? As recognised by Zembylas (2021), inclusion is complex and contested territory. Nonetheless, policy can be prone to focusing on accessibility over inclusion (Hums et al., 2016). The right to participate in education can be regarded as schools meeting their obligations to provide accessible teaching, classroom resources, information, facilities and services (UN General Assembly, 2006). Beyond simply accessing education, there are deeper dimensions to students feeling included within the education system; Previous research (Rowe, 2005; Snyder, 2008) into literacy reform has tended to understate this imperative.

Although the notion of inclusive education is subjective, researchers (Slee, 2018) have attempted to define it as practices that promote a sense of belonging for all students. Inclusive education embeds considerations of social factors such as acceptance, valuing and welcoming all students, including students with disabilities. An inclusive education agenda places greater emphasis on removing attitudinal barriers and ableist bias (Hums et al., 2016; UN General Assembly, 2006). In a symbiotic relationship, inclusive education relies upon the premise that access requirements are met. According to Hymel (2019) strengths-based practice might be seen as intentional efforts within education to design “a level of intimate relation that allows students to truly get to know one another, see others’ strengths and gifts, and form bonds that cross ingroup/outgroup boundaries. In this regard, social and emotional learning and academic achievement are not truly separate issues” (p. 334).

My results indicate that the issue of inclusive education for dyslexia warrants further discussion within the Victorian context. Specifically, there is a need for a framework directed at promoting a sense of belonging for all, including students with dyslexia. Booth and Ainscow’s (2002) *Index for inclusion* offers a transformative tool to support the development of inclusive education practice that should be further considered within the Victorian context. Produced collaboratively, the index considered three dimensions: *creating inclusive cultures*, *producing inclusive policies,* and *evolving inclusive practices*. It has relevance for policymakers and schools alike, with an intended purpose of addressing learning barriers while supporting diversity. Booth and Ainscow assert that “inclusion starts from a recognition of the difference between students” (p. 3) with the goal of improving education for every child.

Teachers and principals from my research in dyslexia exemplar schools demonstrated perspectives that align to these inclusive education ideals (Booth and Ainscow, 2002). Dyslexia exemplar schools represented cases of policy enactment that highlight both tensions and opportunities towards inclusive education. A consensus was shared among these teachers and principals that schools should not fail students. There was evidence of strengths-based discourses and celebrating diversity.

Teachers highlighted that they wanted learners to have a positive self-identity, with role models serving as signifiers that students with dyslexia can achieve greatness. Both teachers and principals shared perspectives that suggest cultures of collaboration, continuous improvement, problem-solving to remove access barriers, innovation, and strengths-based practices. Ainscow (2020) calls upon policy to lead schools to respond positively to student diversity "seeing individual differences not as problems to be fixed but as opportunities for enriching learning" (p. 128).

Researchers Nieto (2001) and Katz (2015) have argued that creating inclusive classrooms and adopting strengths-based practice has benefits for students and teachers alike. Neito and Katz connect strengths-based practice to creating a sense of hopefulness for teachers who make a valuable contribution to students' lives. Katz considers that there is reciprocity in creating inclusive classrooms and recognising learning diversity; practices that make students feel socially and academically included enable teachers to grow and develop alongside their students.

Adopting inclusive education involves unpacking the very narrow ways in which we frame *a good student*. For instance, a student who speedily sits national testing exams and answers all the questions in just the way that we expect is seen as a good student. Would not truly valuing students with dyslexia mean that we need to assess and value other ways of thinking and solving problems rather than this *standardised approach*?

Dyslexia exemplar schools in my research specifically supported students with dyslexia and were not necessarily schools of best practice. How do we know that what is happening in these schools is indeed supportive to students with dyslexia? Since student experience is outside the realm of this research, NAPLAN data might be a logical place to interrogate levels of school success. However, due to the narrow view of NAPLAN outlined above, that data is not necessarily helpful.

6.9 Universal Design

My research identified teachers who shared Florit and Cain's (2011) view that text-based literacy acquisition is complex through the opaqueness of the English language. The acknowledgement that decoding and encoding in English is a sophisticated rather than innate skill, has multiple advantages for the Victorian education system. Not only does it validate the professional role of teachers, but it also seeks to challenge deficit views of dyslexia. The dyslexia exemplar schools in my research recognised the complexity of the English language with the aim of simplifying the challenge for all learners through a universal design approach.

Hickey (2021) argues that policy reforms should recognise the potential for universal design—an approach that considers all students from the outset—rather than retrospective adjustment (UN General Assembly, 2006). The opportunities to embed universal design principles into best practice for dyslexia represent benefits for all students not just those with dyslexia. Universal design has significant advantages when considering the sub-categories of learners that I identified, including students without a dyslexia diagnosis (table 6.1). I argue that there is an ethical requirement for the Victorian Government to consider universal design and inclusive pedagogies across the continuum from primary to secondary school. As previously discussed, further research is needed to identify how policy can contend with widening achievement gaps of older students and address curriculum-level barriers.

Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's (1994) *proximal processes* emphasise the importance of elements from children's worlds including the people, objects and symbols they encounter in the microsystem of the school. Within the context of broader systemic levels, students with dyslexia are likely to formulate a self-view based on the culmination of all systemic encounters. Participants emphasised the importance of inclusive views of dyslexia within the school context (e.g., tackling stigma) to a greater degree than reflected in Victorian

Government policy. Henceforth, policy should articulate ways to intentionally represent dyslexia positively in every Victorian Government school.

6.10 Neurodiversity

When considering a path forward for inclusive approaches to dyslexia, a concept of neurodiversity has been recently emerging in the literature (Armstrong, 2017; Rentenbach et al., 2017). Absent from my research are terms such as neurodiverse, neurodivergent and alternative ways to conceptualise dyslexia. Indeed, the battle for education rights subverts genuine progress towards strengths-based discourse. An inclusive education ideal might be to reject dyslexia as a disability altogether. In considering this move, Macdonald (2019) warns that:

> adopting a neurodiversity perspective could potentially break ties with and stigmatize other disability groups. It should be noted that the social model aimed to unite impairment groups under the banner of ‘disability’ in order to confront structural inequalities and force political change. (p. 19)

Alternatively, the social relational model of disability (Macdonald, 2009; Thomas, 2004) embeds the legal protections of the term *disability,* while rejecting the notion of *disability* in the conventional sense. The social relational lens on dyslexia maintains education rights while placing the onus on the education system to be fully inclusive. It challenges educational segregation, stigmatisation, and deficit perspectives of dyslexia. It validates the perspectives of teachers and principals in this research when they described their efforts towards increasing self-esteem through strengths-based approaches and empowerment of students with dyslexia.

Rappolt-Schlichtmann et al. (2018) argue that progress towards strengths-based approaches for dyslexia requires a shift in mindset. They maintain that when students with dyslexia are supported to “improve on their areas of weakness, as well as build on their individual and unique areas of strength, we begin to create the foundation for thriving in learning and life” (p. 870). In realising a strengths-based approach, Booth and Ainscow (2002) offer a practical tool for implementation. They suggest that taking responsibility for a strengths-based approach requires ongoing commitment to the principles of inclusive education as “an ideal to which schools can aspire but which is never fully reached” (p. 3).

Reconceptualising dyslexia within inclusive education ideals suggests an imperative to challenge ableism in the education system. Collinson’s (2012; 2017; 2020) concept of *lexism* deserves greater attention to approach institutional bias that marginalises students with dyslexia. He argues that education systems are complicit in a type of discrimination described as lexism, defined as “normative assumptions and practices of literacy which others and discriminates against those who do not meet those particular norms” (p. 994). He implies that lexism shares similarities with other prejudicial attitudes such as sexism and racism. Despite Collinson having used the term lexism over a period of years, the concept has gained little traction, but may offer a new lens for viewing dyslexia and elitism within the education system.

6.11 Policy Reform Implications

My research identified tensions in targeted dyslexia provision, with scepticism directed at cultures of over-testing and standardisation, tensions that have been highlighted in debates of The Australian College of Educators & The Centre for Independent Studies (2018). Yet, screening, assessment, and targeted teaching for dyslexia diverge from high-stakes assessment such as national testing regimes (NAPLAN) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). For instance, “PISA assesses students at age fifteen, as they near the completion of compulsory schooling. Its purpose is to evaluate education systems” (Cox et al., 2019, p. 5). Retrospective assessment of education systems—often for the purpose of league tabling—is entirely different from proactive assessment that is designed to inform teaching and learning. While one type of assessment is governed by neoliberalism and global competition, the other is motivated by the assumption that all students have the right to receive appropriate teaching and support.

Duke and Whitburn (2020) might not agree with my position, arguing against aspects of targeted phonics testing and provision which they suggest are infiltration of neoliberalism in the Australian education system. They maintain that “structural exclusion is determined in part by the assessment of learners as able or not able” (p. 6) setting in motion binaries that imply the ability to participate in the world as a consumer marketplace. I agree with their concerns about the exclusion of learners who may be deemed *not able*. Nonetheless, I do not share their perspective that identifying and proactively addressing student needs is entrenched in an exclusionary agenda. Indeed, I argue the opposite, that failure to address student needs overlooks the right to participate on an equal basis with one’s peers. I also reject the notion that students should be judged as able or not able; rather the onus is on the education system to meet student learning needs. Targeted support and addressing student needs proactively benefits all students including those with dyslexia, challenging stigmatising attitudinal and access barriers.

Duke and Whitburn (2020) have additional concerns that apply to education reform for dyslexia. They argue that teaching reading has recently “succumbed to the isolated skills of phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary” (p. 1), overlooking the advantages of other approaches. They emphasise that literacy is social practice, a view that has been utilised by whole language advocates to challenge phonics-based approaches. Further to these criticisms, Cholewinski (2009) points to the assumption that pedagogies within a constructivist paradigm have become synonymous with authenticity, driving the subjective concept of what constitutes authentic learning (e.g., transformative, student-centred, cooperative, and inquiry-based).

Teachers in my research who identified with a phonics-based approach, perceived broad literacy skills as being complementary and demonstrated evidence of so-called authentic literacy practices. Teachers from one dyslexia exemplar school with a phonics-based approach connected their understandings of best practice to Konza’s (2014) notion that students should be “immersed in various aspects of language” to strengthen their reading capacity. Konza claims that students “who are surrounded by, and included in, rich and increasingly complex conversations have an overwhelming advantage in vocabulary development, in understanding the structures of language, and in tuning into the sounds of English" (p. 154).

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that literacy debates have misrepresented the issues for best practice, hampering reform efforts. Dyslexia exemplar primary schools in my research demonstrated evidence that inquiry-based learning was valued, along with students working together collaboratively in processes of discovery, questioning, and finding solutions to problems. Inquiry-based learning had a place in the curriculum although learning through discovery was perceived as ill-suited to learning the complex skills of mapping the alphabetic code.

Tensions arise from a pedagogical approach that is perceived to be at odds with creativity, literacy enjoyment, social cultural understanding, and student autonomy. Explicit teaching and phonics-based instruction has been negatively associated with Skinner's (1985) behaviourism. Yet, it is necessary to debunk the idea that a phonics-based approach embeds total reliance on teacher-centred classrooms of a bygone era. Instead, teachers from exemplar primary schools aligned to a Vygotskian-style scaffolding approach through the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Both primary schools demonstrated evidence of scaffolding and references to Pearson's model. Teachers described the lesson stages and the gradual release of teacher responsibility: from a teacher focus (teacher modelling), through to practising new skills together, student collaboration and student independence.

My findings of pedagogies that embed spaced practice for reading automaticity support the principle of 'little and often' as recognised by Brooks (2016) and Torgesen et al. (2001). My results may challenge the view that systemic phonics-based approaches and explicit teaching leaves no time for authentic texts and other literacy experiences, as implied in recent debate hosted by The Australian College of Educators and The Centre for Independent Studies (2018).

The question remains as to whether students can reasonably be assumed to acquire phonics-based knowledge without being explicitly and systematically taught. Can phonics knowledge reliably be acquired by students through a range of pedagogical approaches? I have argued throughout the thesis that the opaqueness of the English language presents significant challenges for many students. Unless these skills are explicitly and systematically taught, many students will continue to have difficulty with reading and spelling. Some argue that such an approach is unhelpful for the most capable readers (The Australian College of Educators & The Centre for Independent Studies, 2018). Yet, in my research explicitly teaching phonics-based knowledge was accompanied with teaching morphology and etymology, described as providing enrichment to extend the competencies of all students.

According to Thompson (2002) and Gallagher (2017) there are vast benefits of an approach that is underpinned by morphological and etymological knowledge. They argue that developing morphological and etymological skills builds confidence with approaching discipline-specific vocabulary, ability to recognise words from foreign origins and understanding subtle nuances of language.

Approaches to dyslexia in the Victorian education system have prompted me to propose a new dyslexia response model. Its key priority is to strengthen best practice for dyslexia in three critical areas: pedagogical approaches, access to education, and inclusion for students with dyslexia. I have identified possibilities to learn from practice from England and from dyslexia exemplar school practice in government schools. Exemplars are offered to provide a lens on the challenges and opportunities for innovation.

Applying Althaus et al. (2020) research highlights that in addressing wicked or intractable problems, policy problems must be clearly identified and broken “into smaller well-structured issues …only some issues make the agenda, and these may be presented in ways that assist particular interests while ignoring others”. In this thesis, I have argued that Victorian Government policy for dyslexia has been constructed using an ableist lens, overlooking key stakeholders including students with dyslexia. Key recommendations from *Helping people with dyslexia: A national action agenda* (Bond et al., 2010)—albeit written primarily for federal government—have not been implemented in the development of a

Victorian dyslexia policy framework. Policymakers had an opportunity to consider the perspectives of stakeholders that included people with dyslexia, who called for a consistent definition of dyslexia, recognition of dyslexia as a disability and measures to support compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (Australian Government, 1992).

The next consideration for overarching dyslexia reform is the potential to address the systemic layers described by Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994). Shaddock (2015) argues that “it is almost impossible for individual practitioners to instigate and sustain changed practices without involving and affecting others. The ‘systems thinking’ addresses the dynamic linkages and interactions between components in the organisation, both vertically and horizontally” (p. 66). The Victorian education system would benefit from adopting a broader systemic approach that considers interactions between the government, media, schools, and allied health professionals. Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted the tensions with medicalisation and privatisation of dyslexia provision; inconsistent approaches at one systemic level have the power to disrupt progress made at another.

Reforms for dyslexia should be implemented alongside policies that govern disability and literacy, to maximise the possibility for overarching and cohesive reforms. As argued by Booth and Ainscow (2002), for inclusive education changes to be sustained “they need to be owned by staff, governors, parents/carers and students. They need to be integrated into the school’s cultures” (p. 13). Previous concepts about dyslexia reform (Bond et al., 2010; Rowe, 2005; Victorian Government, 2016) have under-estimated the impact of the problem of a siloed approach. An overarching systems approach aims to develop greater connection between practices in primary schools and those in secondary schools.

An effective strategy to address dyslexia in Victorian Government schools might demonstrate greater adherence to human rights frameworks than the present approach. Such a strategy sets the priority of a students’ right to inclusive education at the heart of all policymaking. Strengthening best practice for dyslexia relies on equity as a central tenant of the policy-making process and improvement cycles. Furthermore, the Victorian Government must address inconsistencies within policies and across sectors. Throughout the thesis, I have argued for centralised services not privatisation, strengths-based not deficit approaches, inclusion not segregation, and celebration of diversity not stigmatisation.

To improve outcomes from students with dyslexia, education rights and competing politicised neoliberal agendas must be kept in full view. Bacchi’s (2009) approach to policy calls upon us to consider who has been silenced and excluded from the policy-making process. As Duke and Whitburn (2020) warn, the creep of neoliberalism is an ongoing threat to inclusion, as students with preferred abilities are valued in the marketplace and become educationally privileged. Strengthening policy requires an explicit declaration of the rights of students with disabilities including dyslexia and conceptualising academic skills more broadly than dominant text-based approaches.

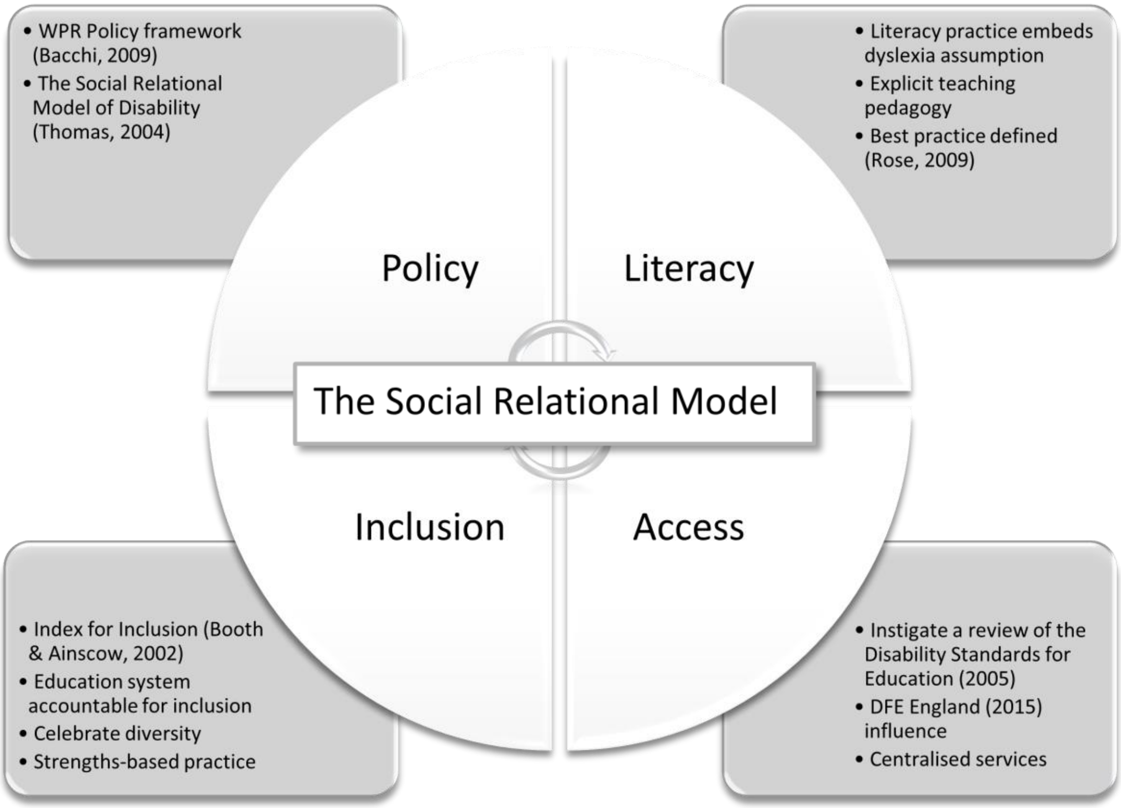
Although gaps in Victorian Government policies create significant problems for enactment, all is not lost. As an education system with relative strengths, the Victorian context is presented with opportunities to strengthen policy development for dyslexia by highlighting rigour at all stages including consultation, coordination monitoring and evaluation. Althaus et al.’s (2020) checklists for policy development (p. 254) represent a useful tool for minimising policy issues. They argue that successful policy must aim for clarity, strive for good governance, improve through new iterations and overcome policy inertia. They contend that implementing a policy is an experiment, requiring a swift response following monitoring its effects.

Drawing on my findings, I have proposed a new Four-Dimensional Dyslexia Reform Model in figure 6.1 (below). The reform model is based on the education rights of students with dyslexia in the Victorian education system and highlights that reform for supporting students with dyslexia can be advanced in four domains: policy, literacy, access, and inclusion. Within each domain I embed frameworks to clarify best practice and direct the future of policy development.

The social relational model—at the centre—aims to remove macro-level universal barriers (i.e., improve policy), to facilitate inclusion at the micro-level and transform inclusive teaching practices. Changes at the macro-level and meso-level aim to improve literacy at the micro-level for people with dyslexia (i.e., these interventions aim to reduce the impairment effect of dyslexia).

Figure 6.1

New Four-Dimensional Dyslexia Reform Model


• WPR Policy framework (Bacchi, 2009)
• The Social Relational Model of Disability (Thomas, 2004)
• Literacy practice embeds dyslexia assumption
• Explicit teaching pedagogy
• Best practice defined (Rose, 2009)
Policy
Literacy
The Social Relational Model
Inclusion
Access
• Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002)
• Education system accountable for inclusion
• Celebrate diversity
• Strengths-based practice
• Instigate a review of the Disability Standards for Education (2005)
• DFE England (2015) influence
• Centralised services

Note. Key concerns for policy, clockwise from the top. 1. Policy 2. Literacy 3. Access 4. Inclusion**.**

Table 6.2 (on the following page) highlights my recommendations for adopting under-utilised frameworks to enhance best practice for teaching students with dyslexia in four key areas: overarching *policy assumptions* and reforms in the domains of *policy, literacy*, *access*, and *inclusion*. These four domains have rarely been considered together with the social relational model at the centre, alongside a disability theory approach. My recommendations aim to fill a knowledge gap, focusing on potential benefits of an understated perspectives within the literature.

Table 6.2

A New Dyslexia Paradigm: Recommendations for Adopting Under-Utilised Frameworks

	Policy	Literacy	Access	Inclusion
Policy development: Consider strengths/limitations of operational exemplars and exemplar practice	*Address:* competing policy agendas, assumptions, deficit models and exclusionary practices.	- Policy alignment to recognise dyslexia consistently across all policy domains - Develop consistent strengths-based definitions - Over-arching human rights frameworks explicitly embedded across all policies (including literacy) - Student-centred approach to policymaking - Teachers and schools are seen as valuable resources - Disability definition makes education system accountable (SRMD)		
	Embed: The Social Relational Model of Disability SRMD (Thomas, 2004) to inform policy decisions	*Operational exemplar:* Guide for literacy and dyslexia teaching Rose (2009)	*Operational exemplar:* Guide for dyslexia access Rose (2009)	*Operational exemplar:* Index for Inclusion Booth & Ainscow (2002) - Strengths-based practice - Opportunities for success - Celebrate/normalise diversity
	Utilise: Althaus et al. (2020) policy checklists	Clearly defined best practice teaching, assessment, and support. Literacy practice addresses dyslexia as regular practice (Universal design)		
	Althaus et al. (2020) systems review, policy monitoring cycle - minimise policy gaps	- Accountability for best practice, access, and inclusion at all systemic levels - Victorian Government regulates minimum standards - Regular monitoring and evaluation of current policies for dyslexia - Opportunities for co-design		
	Policy assumes legal rights to access and inclusion in education	- Requires a new legal framework ‘Code of Practice’ to embed rights for students with dyslexia *Operational exemplar:* Department for Education England (2015)		
	Bioecological systen to build capacity (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci,1994)	- Schools adequately resourced for dyslexia best practice - Students not made to wait and fail (proactive approach) - Address student needs within the school (centralised servic - De-privatisation of resources to reduce system barriers - Cluster-provision to promote best practice in every school - Further research to learn what works to make students feel included		

Note. Operational exemplars offer a framework for development. Limitations are offset by using the above suggested portfolio of exemplars

6.12 Summary

Previous reviews of dyslexia, literacy and disability rights have signalled serious concerns about educational inequality and exclusion in Australia. My findings build upon previous reviews and understanding of dyslexia policy and practice, in a new era of policy, research, technology, stakeholders and the emergence of dyslexia exemplar schools. Providing examples of enactment from the perspective of teachers and principals contributes to the conversation on dyslexia policy and practice in the Victorian education system. Disrupting previous policy assumptions through my frameworks of analysis, my research identified under-explored issues in prior research alongside opportunities to embed the social relational model of disability from Thomas (2004). The importance of the social relational model is the shift in the way disability is perceived and the role played by the education system to either enable or disable students with dyslexia.

In this thesis I argue the need for specific reforms, including the need to clarify definitions of dyslexia and fully recognise dyslexia as a disability in the Victoria education system. I identified specific issues in Victorian Government policy (document analysis) and in dyslexia exemplar schools (document analysis and interviews) that have implications for education rights for students with dyslexia. My discussion cut across bioecological systems to highlight hidden systemic tensions with consideration of barriers that present across systems over time. Consistent with this chronosystem in view, school transitions and systemic evolution must continue to reflect proactive opportunities to adapt and innovate for students with disabilities including dyslexia.

My findings suggest that the Victorian Government has not fully considered possible enactment issues—such as overlapping policy domains—related to an intent to address dyslexia. Policy assumptions fail to consider tensions from within the Victorian education system as well as from interactions with external systemic layers including private businesses and allied health professionals. The assumption from within the education system that teachers can utilise a phonics-based approach overlooks the scope of professional knowledge and resources required, including access to well-designed phonics programs, integral to best practice and inclusive teaching for students with dyslexia.

In this chapter, I have highlighted opportunities to address systemic tensions through exploring models of exemplar practice both in Victorian Government schools and exemplars from England. I argued that reform should be directed at building capacity within the education system, challenging psycho-medical views of dyslexia, strengthening best practice and creating clear pathways of support. I maintained that social justice and education rights should be the key motivation for dyslexia policy reform and the chief priority of an overarching framework. In opposition to neoliberalism and performativity agendas, I focused on systemic issues that act as barriers to best practice. I made the distinction that screening and assessment for dyslexia represent a proactive approach, while international standardised testing regimes (PISA) are retrospective and designed for global comparisons of education systems.

Examining policy and practice in England, I explored opportunities to draw influence from school workforce and organisational models as well as policy frameworks for disability, and specific initiatives to reinforce accountability for the inclusion of students with dyslexia. I signalled the need for enhanced legislative protection and templates to guide best practice for dyslexia, as have been developed in England. Noting the limitations of individual policy frameworks from England, transformative potential rests in embedding an over-arching disability theory framework *Index for inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). From Victorian Government policy and dyslexia exemplar schools, I explored proactive dyslexia approaches including increasing the visibility of dyslexia as *a hidden disability* and strengthening inclusive practice through a universal design approach. My recommendations were developed through a four-dimensional model targeting four reformist domains of policy, literacy, access, and inclusion.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Beginning this research, I was motivated by an ethical belief that education rights underpin a socially just education system. Observing systemic differences between local and international contexts, I aimed to develop new understanding of dyslexia policy and practice within the Victorian context. The global impetus on social and educational inequality added to the urgency of shining a light on dyslexia. In the tradition of Gustafsson and Hagström's (2018) formula for conceptualising research puzzles, I asked *why the current approach to dyslexia in the Victorian education system despite other possible approaches?*

Along the research journey my understanding and assumptions shifted, as I engaged with new questions within a reflexive stance. My research examined three key questions: How is dyslexia being approached in the Victorian education system? How are students with dyslexia being included in the same context? And finally, how might dyslexia exemplar schools and practice from England further understanding of such issues? Using a Deductive-Inductive-Abductive approach (Åsvoll, 2014), I explored policy and practice from the Victorian context alongside examples of policy and research from England to foster new knowledge and problematisation.

The overarching aim of the research was to influence dyslexia policy and practice at a systemic level in Victoria for the estimated 10% of students with dyslexia. I aimed to elicit best practice and innovate ways of addressing the intent behind Victoria's dyslexia education initiatives. The framing of this work from an education rather than a psychological perspective was intended to offer new insights and understanding of dyslexia teaching policy and practice.

Addressing my assumptions, I have highlighted the subjectivities of the term *inclusive education*, recognising there is no singular agreed definition. Furthermore, the concept of dyslexia is framed by the same tension. Articulating a best practice for dyslexia transcends competing agendas—from state, federal and international contexts—and the overlapping policy domains of literacy, dyslexia, and disability. My research grappled with wicked problems, a term used to describe complex social issues, defined by tension and opaque parameters (Rittel & Webber, 1973). However, wicked problems can and must be addressed. As I have argued, defining priority areas, adopting human centred approaches and the use of prototypes (exemplars) present opportunities to address complex policy issues (Jobst & Meinel, 2014)

7.1 Research Summary

Through a case study methodology—using interview and document analysis—my research explored Victorian Government policy guiding systemic approaches to dyslexia and examples of policy enactment. Firstly, a *macrosystem* policy case study explored a bounded system within the Victorian policy context, sampling formal and informal government policy including government published guidance for literacy, dyslexia, learning support, disability, and inclusion. My analysis of government manuals, press releases, initiatives, glossaries, and images focused on government constructions of best practice and inclusion for students with dyslexia.

Secondly, the *microsystem* multiple-case studies explored dyslexia policy interpretation in Victorian Government dyslexia exemplar schools. Nine semi-structured interviews—with six teachers and three principals—aimed to identify how schools interpreted best practice and inclusion for students with dyslexia. Interviews were thematically analysed for descriptions of teaching pedagogy, literacy assessment, dyslexia screening, learning support and inclusion. School documents were sourced from Victorian Government and school websites, then compared with documents and interviews from the school setting to add trustworthiness to the research. From the school setting participants provided examples of assessment materials, standardised tests, learning support programs and texts guiding pedagogy. Teachers and principals consented to and initiated photography in the school setting to be included in the research, although some photographs were excluded for ethical reasons such as privacy, commercialisation, and intellectual property.

7.2 Response to the Research Questions

> *How is dyslexia being approached in the Victorian education system?*
> *How are students with dyslexia being included in the Victorian education system?*
> *How might dyslexia exemplar schools and practice from England further understanding of dyslexia policy and practice?*

7.2.1 How is Dyslexia Being Approached in the Victorian Education System?

a) Policy Context

Within the Victorian education system—at both policy and practice level—there were contrasting paradigms to guide dyslexia approaches. Accordingly, in Victorian Government policy there was no unified or agreed perspective of dyslexia best practice and no consistent definition of dyslexia, even on the matter of whether dyslexia is aligned to protected disability status. Contrasting guidance is given for dyslexia teaching pedagogy, assessment, and support. Thus, Victorian Government policy was interpretive on matters that concern teaching students with dyslexia, a recognised disability.

b) School Context

Just as the Victorian Government policy context represented competing dyslexia paradigms, dyslexia best practice varied at school level. In fact, dyslexia exemplar schools demonstrated that interpretations of best practice can differ remarkably between schools, from the understanding of dyslexia to pedagogies for teaching, assessment, and support. My research provided evidence that within the Victorian education system a select group of schools were initiating a response to dyslexia, although underpinned by competing views of evidence-based practice and systemic influences.

7.2.2 How are Students with Dyslexia Being Included in the Victorian Education System?

a) Policy Context

The Victorian Government policy for dyslexia was devoid of a unified overarching framework to guide inclusive practice for students with dyslexia. *Inclusive education* and *special education* were not clearly delineated in policy, with the terms often used synonymously. While arguably the role of government policy is to clarify complex issues, policy for dyslexia overlooked the dichotomy of special and inclusive education approaches for dyslexia. The pursuit of inclusive education ideals had missed opportunities to create systems, discourses, and policy frameworks that embedded education rights for students with dyslexia.

b) School Context

In alignment to the policy context, interpretation of inclusive education varied across the school settings. Schools demonstrated examples of strengths-based and innovative dyslexia practices to promote educational inclusion for students with dyslexia. Teachers recognised the strengths and talents of students with dyslexia, viewing self-esteem and a sense of belonging as key components of inclusive education. Nonetheless, the possibility of realising inclusive education ideals at school level was challenged by interaction with Victorian Government policy that required teachers to engage with deficit discourses, and inaccessible and exclusionary systems.

7.2.3 How Might Dyslexia Exemplar Schools and Practice from England Further Understanding of Dyslexia Policy and Practice?

When reviewing new policies, exemplars transcend theoretical ideas to demonstrate cases of real-world implementation. Exemplars are the valuable *prototypes* to support tackling so-called *wicked problems* (Jobst, 2014)*.* The Victorian Government has expressed a commitment to a continuous review and improvement cycle of its dyslexia policy reform *Improving Early Years Screening for Learning Difficulties* (Victorian Government, 2016). To support the review process, dyslexia exemplar schools in my research provided knowledge of broad factors that might limit or support implementation of best practice. The exemplars drew attention to new understanding of best practice situated within the specific context of the Victoria education system. In the previous chapter, I outlined ways that exemplar practice supports new knowledge, including a renewed emphasis on a universal design approach. Additionally, school level practices aimed at removing access barriers for students with dyslexia, highlighted potential for capacity building and shone a light on specific innovative approaches.

In this thesis, I have drawn on specific policy and research from England to provide comparative modelling for dyslexia best practice, supporting an innovative response. Comparisons with England indicated the benefit of dyslexia reform that is nested within greater legislative protection for students with disabilities, offered by the *SEN Code of Practice* (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015). Australian federal and state governments have an opportunity to compare English legislative protections for students with disabilities to develop and improve the Disability Standards for Education (Australian Government, 2005). Moreover, dyslexia reforms outlined in *the Rose Review* (Rose, 2009) offer an operational template for approaches to dyslexia at school level that warrant further exploration for the Victorian context.

Nonetheless, English frameworks for conceptualising education rights for students with disabilities such as dyslexia, continue to embed a medical model paradigm. I have argued throughout this thesis and in my published work for an alternative to this continued reliance on the medical model of disability paradigm (Marland, 2018a, 2021). Utilising the *Index for inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) would provide a strategy for strengthening an inclusive education response at school level. Therefore, comparative policies promote broader discussion and scrutiny, rather than direct replication.

7.3 How Research Aims and Objectives Have Been Addressed

The overarching aim of the research was to influence dyslexia policy and practice at systemic level in Victoria. Document analysis from the Victorian policy context has identified contradictory discourses and unclear paradigms for dyslexia. Document analysis and interviews from dyslexia exemplar schools aimed to understand school level interpretation of dyslexia best practice for pedagogy, assessment and support. Framing of this work from an education rather than a psychological perspective has enabled new insights and understandings of dyslexia teaching policy and practice. A disability theory approach (Thomas, 2004) and Bacchi’s (2009) policy problematisation model have enabled the interrogation of ableist assumptions within policy. Insights from exemplar schools and education paradigms from England aimed to elicit best practice and innovate ways of addressing the intent behind Victoria's dyslexia education initiatives.

7.3.1 Research Outputs to Arise from My Research

Throughout my doctoral candidature, I addressed the aims and objectives of my research through achieving the following research outputs:

- a series of cases which provide examples to which teachers can relate
- conference presentations
- submission to academic publications
- submission to teacher practice journals
- sharing findings with the Department of Education and Training Victoria

7.4 Significance and Implications of Findings

Victorian Government policy is in a continuous state of review, yet effective policy reform can only be achieved by addressing the issues raised in this PhD thesis. Policymaking relies on the ability to clearly articulate the problems that it aims to address. As policy is a top down and bottom-up process (Codd, 2005) it also relies on developing the capacity of professionals to enact and develop the policy. While the Victorian Government must act swiftly to tackle the broader issues underpinning dyslexia policy reform, there is a need for proactive, deliberate and thoughtful measures to instigate change. Effective reforms rely on the ability to identify broad systemic issues that impact on the rights of students with dyslexia.

In this thesis, I have outlined how the Victorian education system may benefit from dyslexia reform that draws on practice from dyslexia exemplar schools and practice from England, with disability theory problematisation. Previous research has understated the opportunities to use exemplars to strengthen dyslexia policy and practice, while signalling challenges for implementation. Arguing that the existing dyslexia paradigm is flawed, I proposed that a strengthened dyslexia reform model needs to align with the social rather the medical model of disability and consider alternatives to the privatisation of services. A new dyslexia paradigm relies on student-centred systems, strengths-based practice, and universal design with an interest in research on learning what works to make students feel included.

Borrowing elements from English policy, I introduced the possibility for school-based reforms that rely on incentivisation of teacher skills and career development, noting that capacity building must be geared towards averting neoliberal managerialism of teachers. I offered examples of policy from England that demonstrates enhanced rights for students with disabilities such as legal status afforded by the SEN Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015). I argued that schools must be adequately resourced to meet the needs of students within the school rather than in private or medicalised settings. Furthermore, I argued for developing school-based guidance for best practice drawing on *The Rose Review* (Rose, 2009) and the disability theory frameworks such as the *Index of Inclusion* (2002).

In the context of an unclear paradigm for dyslexia, my findings demonstrate that schools forge their own pathways ahead. While all three schools in my research demonstrated a strong intent towards best practice and inclusion for students with dyslexia, the inconsistency of school knowledge frameworks implied the need for the government to deliver a clearer framework. Within this interpretive response, approaches to teaching, assessment and support are influenced by internal and external stakeholders with select dyslexia organisations identified as key collaborators. The results of this research suggest that teachers and principals may value descriptive and specific information to direct their practice, including real-world examples, models and resources which can be applied practically.

This thesis has addressed the tensions of competing policies as an under-represented issue in previous research and inquiries such as from Bond et al., (2010) and Rowe (2005). The overlapping policy domains of literacy, dyslexia and disability present significant challenges in delivering a cohesive dyslexia policy framework. Despite competing agendas, policies must demonstrate coherence, consistency, and alignment to human rights frameworks. Althaus (2020) contends that “the policy cycle cannot end with a decision but must flow through to implementation and evaluation” (p. 246). Therefore, future iterations of Victorian Government policy must embed the ethical assumption of education rights for dyslexia to sustain meaningful progress.

The findings from the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy NITL (Rowe, 2005) centred on the importance of articulating a best practice for literacy teaching. While the report added to the authoritative literature to support a phonics-based approach, broader pedagogical practices to complement the implementation of phonics did not receive adequate attention. Greater capacity to affect change may have been achieved with greater emphasis on the role of morphology, etymology, oral language skills and an inclusive strengths-based pedagogy. In addition, I constructively challenge the assumptions and positionality of the report that utilised a neoliberal lens of literacy performativity through the notion of *teacher quality*. NITL represents another government review that missed opportunities to recognise that supporting teachers may have favourable implications for supporting students with disabilities.

My research adds new understandings for policy and practice in the context of the contributions of *The National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* (NITL) (Rowe, 2005) and *Helping people with dyslexia: A national action agenda* (Bond et al., 2010). Unlike the previous work of Rowe (2005) who focused on literacy teaching practices rather than dyslexia per se and Bond et al. (2010) who focused on improving outcomes for people with dyslexia nationally, my research focuses on dyslexia approaches to teaching and supporting students in the Victorian education system. I contribute to the conversation on policy and practice by providing examples of dyslexia policy enactment from the perspectives of teachers and principals and unsettling previous policy assumptions through my frameworks of analysis.

In this new era and context, I argue that the Victorian Government has an opportunity to strengthen the education system through valuing and investing in teachers. Booth and Ainscow (2002) proclaimed that inclusive education requires “valuing all students and staff equally” (p. 3). Additionally, Gonski argued for investment to teachers “attract, develop and retain” teachers. Reflexively, education systems benefit from not only investing in teachers but also from implementing research perspectives of teachers and principals to co-design enhanced functional systems.

As outlined in *Chapter Two*, much of the literature on dyslexia comes from a psychological perspective, either ignoring or underestimating the value of teacher knowledge and expertise. From Snowling and Hulme (2005) to Stein (2018), research has often emphasised how teachers and principals may contribute to new understanding of school efforts to strengthen best practice.

Shifting the focus back to dyslexia as a human rights issue was the *Helping people with dyslexia: A national action agenda* (Bond et al., 2010). The report drew attention to the systemic exclusion of people with dyslexia in Australia across multiple domains, including the education system. The report supported the need for "legislative recognition at both State and Commonwealth level of dyslexia *as a disability* as determined under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992)" (p. 8). Its finding about a lack of specified pathways for dyslexia support, has been reinforced in the new context of my research where teachers and principals identified systemic gaps—with greater specificity and detail of the educational context—despite the many years that have passed since the panel's report.

Indeed, the Bond et al.'s (2010) recommendations such as the call for "better pedagogies" (p. 7) and "evidence-based reading instruction" (p. 9) have broad interpretation. In this thesis, I have emphasised the need for clear definitions of best practice to avoid interpretative responses to matters concerned with equity. My research highlights that schools have diverse interpretations of effective pedagogical approaches for teaching students with dyslexia and utilise contrasting evidence-bases. The role of the Victorian Government is to articulate a consistent version of best practice for all students including those with dyslexia.

This research also highlights that previous research and government inquiries have not gone far enough to position education rights for dyslexia within a disability theory approach, nor has there been emphasis on social models of disability (Armstrong, 2017; Oliver, 1983; Thomas, 2004). Areheart (2008) argues that "society seems to have retained a medical paradigm for understanding disability" (p. 183); This research questions the view that dyslexia should be treated as a medical issue. In addition, school level interpretative responses to Victorian Government policy must explicitly address the issue, rather than allowing it to remain a hidden disability.

Best practice for students with disabilities is challenged by translating policy directives into school action, particularly in light of school autonomy (Jenkin et al., 2018). An implication of this research is that that the Victorian Government may need to consider how to balance school autonomy with accountability measures. While the notion of autonomy is linked to rational professional decision making, there is a need to ask whose interests are being served and for what outcome (Bacchi, 2009). Heikkinen et al. (2021) argue that in some global contexts school principals may operate through a *praxis orientation* aimed at serving the interests of the student who is being educated. Alternatively, neoliberal pressure in Western countries requires schools to develop productive citizens as active consumers, ready to serve and compete in the economy (Ball, 2012, 2016). Heikkinen et al. argue that in the context of neoliberalism, market orientated autonomy must be reclaimed towards a praxis orientation directed at "the good for society and humankind" (p. 202).

Principals in Victorian Government schools make far-reaching decisions that impact on all students, including those with dyslexia (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014). Best practice for dyslexia must articulate not only how students are supported but also by whom. Researchers (Jenkin et al., 2018; Webster et al., 2015; Whitburn, 2013) have highlighted that educational segregation and access is a key issue in education support provision, although not adequately addressed in Victorian Government policies for dyslexia. Gonski (2011) argued that failing to provide high quality education in fundamental areas such as literacy carries significant costs for individuals and for society.

Moving forward, the Victorian Government would be prudent to consider the unequivocal advantages of adopting universal design strategy as part of its response in addressing dyslexia. Participants in my research argued that schools need to utilise the best research to support all learners, rather than perceiving dyslexia as an issue of special education. Policy reform geared towards improving outcomes for students with dyslexia—with benefits for all students more broadly—makes progress towards addressing educational inequality raised by the *Gonski Review* (Gonski et al., 2011).

Snow and Juel (2005) argue from their synthesis of research into reading development and instructional practices that “explicit teaching of alphabetic decoding skills is helpful for all children, harmful for none, and crucial for some” (p. 518). Nonetheless, heavy reliance on explicit decoding instruction at the cost of other pedagogies is not the intention either. Beyond learning to read, literacy is a socially situated and mediated practice that calls upon learners to engage in and understand the world.

7.5 Unexpected Research Findings

During the research sampling stage, I had the opportunity to speak with principals and specialist teachers who did not eventually participate in the research. The non-participant schools offered valuable insights as they had at one stage attempted to address dyslexia, although had not sustained whole school practice in the long-term. It emerged that some schools had undertaken professional development training for dyslexia but that initiatives were not developed or embedded. I found documentary evidence on school websites (newsletters and school announcements) that some schools had facilitated stand-alone professional development days on the topic of dyslexia. Through document analysis and conversations with school principals and their representatives, stand-alone training was not always accompanied by evidence of an embedded whole school approach. In such cases, schools were precluded from being identified as dyslexia exemplar schools.

I also found that there were cases of schools represented online as having expertise in dyslexia, although my interrogation of data and cross-checking challenged this assumption. I identified cases where school expertise was tied to individual specialist teachers who had left a school. For instance, one principal explained that following the departure of a specialist dyslexia teacher, the school no longer identified itself as having specialist knowledge to support dyslexia best practice. During the research sampling and later reinforced by participants during this research, it emerged that there were perceived disincentives to adopting dyslexia specialist practices. Several participants shared the view that schools which become known for best practice for dyslexia might disproportionately attract enrolment from students with dyslexia. While dyslexia exemplar schools aimed to cater for diversity, there was caution that they may promote a two-tiered specialist system.

7.6 Research Contribution

I have shifted focus back to the systemic barriers that disable students with dyslexia, calling into question under-researched Victorian Government policies and dyslexia exemplar schools. I questioned the focus on teacher quality as a means of viewing systemic issues. From the results of my research, I proposed a New Four-Dimensional Dyslexia Reform Model (Figure 6.1) based on the rights of students with dyslexia to access and inclusion within the Victorian education system.

In 2018, I presented at *The Inclusive Education Summit* at Deakin University (Geelong Campus, Victoria), asking “How does education policy position Victorian Government primary and secondary students?” (Marland, 2018a). Discussing initial research findings, I aimed to unsettle exclusionary paradigms within state education policy. The conference explored vast tensions in the inclusive education research space arising from contrasting research traditions of the auto-ethnographers, post-humanists, socio-culturalists and action-researchers. Nonetheless, there was a sentiment among researchers such as Zembylas et al. (2021) that the challenges for inclusive education should not overshadow the opportunities for change. These perspectives resonated with me, as I believe the greatest privilege has been learning from the experience of teaching young people with a disability and engaging with their perspectives on change-making.

The same year, I published an article in Massey University’s (New Zealand) Education Research Journal. In the article, I argued for the need to re-imagine dyslexia through inclusive pedagogies and the provision of centralised support (Marland, 2018b). I opened the article with the views of self-proclaimed dyslexic poet Benjamin Zephaniah (2015) who said “if you’re dyslexic and feel there’s something holding you back, just remember: it’s not you. It’s the way things at school or in society are presented to you … In many ways being dyslexic is a natural way to be" (p. 223). In the article, I argued that there is an ideal model of dyslexia support provision, framed by professional collaboration with a shared inclusive education strategy. Writing for a New Zealand audience, I made comparisons with the Australian educational context, citing issues raised by the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand (Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand, n.d.) who have identified their nation to be at a crossroads "as to whether to proceed with a disability mentality that regards dyslexia as part of a problem, or embrace a solutions perspective which sees dyslexia as a key driver" (para. 2).

In 2019, I presented within a research symposium at the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) Conference at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane. The research symposium *Inclusive literacy practices? Critical reconstruction of literacy as an arena of/for diversity and social justice* involved collaboration with academics from Karlstad University (Sweden) and Murdoch University (Perth, Australia). I presented initial findings from research in dyslexia exemplar schools where I argued that varying pedagogical approaches in the Victorian education system create dilemmas for social justice and equity in schools. I presented a sample of innovative responses from exemplar schools as a challenge to the status quo for literacy teaching and argued that my research confronts traditional and elitist views of literacy practice. I argued that research needs to identify how schools are meeting their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) and the Disability Standards for Education (2005). Additionally, the conference provided a valuable opportunity to engage with literacy special interest groups.

In 2021, I published a chapter in *Inclusive education is a right, right?* (Marland, 2021), an edited text from the Brill Sense Publishers *Studies in inclusive education* series. The editors described the collection of works as an original consideration of educational inclusion and "human rights within both policy and practice, drawing from contexts as diverse as the atolls of the Maldives, Vietnam's coast, and a remote school in the Northern Territory of Australia" (Thomas et al., 2021, p. 1). My chapter entitled *Reading rights: Dyslexia policy enactment and challenges for inclusion* is described as follows by the book editors:

> In chapter 13, Bec Marland takes a closer look at the tensions between dyslexia and educational policy in Australia. Her work picks at the discrepancies of policy and focuses on the rights of children painting a clear path forward. Marland notes that best practice teaching requires a teacher to "choreograph [their approach] for the individual and clusters of students within the classroom, just as the swan lake is to the ballet". Marland highlights the value of teachers knowing their students and their content whilst rejecting an ableist and exclusionary agenda that destabilizes education rights. (p. 7)

7.6.1 Theoretical Contributions

The issues I have explored through my publications, conferences and in the thesis are important for social democracy and equity in education. As I have argued, previous research, government inquiries and policies have detoured from human rights frameworks, through oversight of how education systems can be responsive to all students. Bringing disability theory into dyslexia research shifts the onus on education systems to remove barriers to educational participation and inclusion. In this thesis, I have aimed to highlight that dyslexia best practice and inclusion require new attention. Furthermore, I have argued that a new dyslexia paradigm be underpinned by education rights for students with dyslexia as a core principle. Consequently, the Victorian Government has an obligation to learn from evidence of what works and what makes students feel included.

I accept that my analytical frameworks and claims may be opposed by other researchers with contrasting ontological perspectives. My preference for the Social Relational Model of Disability (SRMD) (Thomas, 2004) over the traditional Social Model of Disability (Oliver, 1983) may draw scepticism. Disability scholarship is divided. While the strength of the social model of disability is its inclusive focus, it does not go far enough to secure access rights. Those from a strictly social model perspective suggest that students with dyslexia—or students with any disability for that matter—should be unquestionably accepted without the need for *intervention* (learning support). I reject this argument on various grounds. I ask how is this argument reconciled with students with dyslexia who have been denied access to appropriate teaching and learning? And what then is the purpose of education if not to teach the foundational skills required for civic participation?

Alternatively, students may experience segregation and exclusion through the consequence of the disabling effects of reading difficulties, as described by Snow (n.d.) and Martin and Beese (2017). A Social Relational Model considers the need for social inclusion and acceptance and the effects of the reading difficulty (impairment affects) on the individual, paving the way for greater access to support. These debates are not isolated to dyslexia support, as disability rights theory grapples with establishing a clear paradigm that provides full educational access and inclusion.

The application of Thomas' (2004) SRMD addresses this dilemma by disrupting the construct of dyslexia as a pathology. The SRMD undermines the continued reliance on *The-diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5* (American Psychiatric Association, 2022) for embedding a deficit framework at all levels of the education system. An appropriate replacement framework must be social relational in nature, re-imagined through universal design and an inclusive strengths-based paradigm. Furthermore, the SRMD re-ignites the requirement for systemic acknowledgement that the English language is opaque and relies on skills that are not innate.

Confronting *dyslexia stigma*—a socially constructed phenomenon—is central to destabilising exclusionary practices within the education system. Through a social constructionist ontology, deficit perspectives are rejected with new space for counter-identities and counter-realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Indeed, conceptions of disability are subjective alongside the meaning attached to what it means to be *Disabled*. Berger and Luckmann argue that humans interact with a cultural and social order that is mediated by those in their environment, especially authoritarians: "not only is the survival of the human infant dependent upon certain social arrangements, the direction of [their] organismic development is socially determined … subjected to continuing socially determined interference" (p. 66). The social constructionist framework is a powerful disrupter of dominant dyslexia perspectives, making new space for strengths-based views.

7.6.2 Methodological Contribution

A multiple-case study approach offered original insights into dyslexia policy and practice with systemic focus. My research was guided by Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) and Merriam's (1998) approach to case study. Yazan's (2015) analysis of Merriam (1998) argued that her approach to case study differs from other popular methodologists such as Yin (1992) and Stake (1995). Merriam's framework perceives case study to be a bounded system, where a case can include a school, a program, or a policy. The attributes of case study are that it is particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. The unique aspects of Merriam's case study approach were embedded in my research design to align with a qualitative methodological approach with social constructionist analysis.

A multiple-case study approach focused on two types of case studies including a bounded case to examine the Victorian Government policy context and three dyslexia exemplar school cases. The boundaries of my research design were unique to my focus of inquiry, as were the cases themselves. Each case represented a unique bounded study and represented a snapshot in time. Case studies aimed to explore systemic issues through a bioecological perspective that considers systemic layers including changes that occur over time (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). The paradigm locates the individual at the centre of their environment *ecology*—surrounded by five systemic levels of developmental influence—drawing attention to how systemic exclusion may impact on students with dyslexia.

In the process of the research, I have constructively challenged the Victorian Government's approach to dyslexia reform. Bacchi's (2009) policy problematisation model and Åsvoll's (2014) Deductive-Inductive-Abductive (D-I-A) analytical approach were central to disrupting policy assumptions. Åsvoll (2014) argues that the under-utilised D-I-A approach enables the researcher to articulate pre-defined theories to strengthen the research design before field observation. I made certain assumptions including that students with dyslexia should be at the forefront of agendas to include them. In addition, I assumed that policy and practice from England may offer a valuable comparative tool for analysis. Rather than merely policy borrowing, the focus of the analysis was policy problematisation, inductively constructing understanding and knowledge that emerged from the data.

7.7 Limitations

The methodological limitations of this research were highlighted in *Chapter Three*. Notably, that this PhD research is a small-scale project. Strengths and limitations arise from my researcher standpoint and insider position (Bridges, 2009) that may have influenced the interpretation of findings and the perspectives that participants have chosen to share. I acknowledge that access to data from government and non-government sources was subject to gatekeeping and privilege. Data from my selective sampling represents approaches to dyslexia at a particular point in time. Online data demonstrates a view of schools that may be constructed for publicity, self-promotion or in other ways that may differ from everyday practices.

Gathering photographic documentary evidence, in part as a stimulus material, had both merits and challenges. While it enabled participants to direct my attention to artefacts of interest and supported a collaborative research approach, many of the images were associated with commercially available programs, resources, and book series. I decided to only include images that were vital to understanding the school context or interview perspectives, including highlighting the issue of commercialisation.

Although I have attempted to define inclusive education (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), there are limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn. Recognising there is no singular agreed definition, the term *inclusive education* embeds multiple subjectivities. The concept of dyslexia is framed by the same tension, as Seidenberg (2019) argues there is an absence of an integrated developmental theory of dyslexia that connects multi-disciplinary knowledge together authoritatively.

Furthermore, my research did not directly explore learner perspectives. Gatekeeping applied to sensitive information, including *student voice*. The restriction of children’s perspectives in research is an issue identified by researchers and children’s advocates (Commission for Children and Young People, 2021), with research involving children regarded as high risk (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2020). Although not directly including the voice of students from the Victorian context, utilising a disability theory approach was designed to disrupt ableist assumptions from current policy and practice from the Victorian context.

Limitations arise from my utilisation of an ICSEA measurement *The Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage* to report on aspects of privilege and disadvantage that are inherently complex to capture (ACARA, 2021). There were limitations to my sampling of dyslexia exemplar schools, as I excluded social media sampling to determine schools that may promote themselves through non-official channels. As I have previously argued (Marland, 2021), access and inclusion are best positioned within regular, public, and ordinary places, not marginalised or private spaces (UN General Assembly, 2006). I acknowledge that access to data from government and non-government sources was subject to gatekeeping of privileged commercial information. Online data was revisited to analyse changes in content. Nonetheless online content accessed during data collection represents the approaches to dyslexia at a particular point in time.

I also acknowledge that I only had one secondary school dyslexia exemplar school and thus represents an imbalance between the primary and secondary inputs. Therefore, my research is not generalisable and does not claim to represent all dyslexia supportive schools in Victoria. Instead, case study methodology was expected to capture the particularity and complexity of a single policy case and multiple-case studies of school practice.

Within my research there are limited examples of how strengths-based practices can be applied beyond universal design, improving access and challenging medicalised and deficit perspectives. Further research is needed to identify perspectives from the lived experience of Victorian students with dyslexia, on what works to make them feel included. Qualitative research has the potential to explore the unique perspectives of students, while recognising that students with dyslexia might not identify their experiences in the same way as each other. New understandings should aim to represent diverse student perspectives, avoiding perceptions of students with dyslexia as a homogeneous group.

7.8 Recommendations for Further Research

My research has highlighted challenges identifying dyslexia exemplar schools, particularly among Victorian Government secondary schools. The Victorian Education context would benefit from further research that identifies embedded whole school approaches for dyslexia in secondary schools. New knowledge is needed to understand how secondary schools can be supported to build foundational literacy skills (reading and spelling) while addressing the broader requirements of the curriculum from the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (2022).

Research is needed to identify examples of school partnerships that support students with dyslexia to transition into secondary school and post-secondary opportunities. Research should aim to identify strengths-based practices that enable education rights, access, and inclusion (a sense of belonging). Previous research has focused on closing the gap in primary school without addressing how gains might be carried over or lost in secondary school. Findings suggest school leaders may wish to observe a small-scale trial and evaluate supporting evidence for such a model, before embarking on change.

Longitudinal research is needed to evaluate the impact and efficacy of specific teaching practices spanning from pre-school and secondary school to outcomes in adulthood (e.g., poverty, health, employment, and measures of wellbeing). Further studies are required to investigate the efficacy of multi-sensory approaches that remained hidden due to privatisation. Research should continue to gather empirical evidence for explicit literacy pedagogies that embed etymology and morphology to support learners with dyslexia.

Feasibility studies should evaluate possibilities to build greater capacity from within the education system. My research identified that teachers in exemplar schools had access to training from overseas universities and privatised training providers. Privatisation of dyslexia training presents challenges for the Victorian context and may be a restrictive factor in replicating exemplar practice. Research could explore innovative ways for the Victorian Government to address knowledge and training gaps to support local universities to develop high quality tertiary programs. And it should investigate the feasibility of initiatives such as scholarships for qualified teachers and partnerships between local and overseas universities with existing dyslexia courses.

Approaches to dyslexia in the school setting *microsystem* (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994)—comprising teachers, curriculum, technology and peers—connect to broader systems that impact on learners and their development. Although I identified bi-directional systemic relationships within Victorian Government schools, the primary direction of influence identified in my research was primarily *top-down* from outer systemic layers of the exosystem and macrosystem. Thus, representations of government policy filter into the personal worlds of students with dyslexia, through the people, objects, and systems with which they have contact. In contrast, examples of learners with dyslexia co-constructing the Victorian education system were rarely identified in documents and interviews. Research is needed to identify possibilities of co-designing innovative systems alongside students with dyslexia, within a disability theory approach.

A key policy challenge according to Booth and Ainscow (2002) is the sustainment of best practice. I identified challenges to the sustainability of exemplar practice both during the process of selective sampling and within the exemplar school setting. I located examples of schools that ceased to identify with exemplar practice due to systemic constraints including teacher retention issues. Research is needed to identify how exemplar practices can be sustained and developed, to ensure that whole school practices are not reliant on the ongoing service of teachers with specific expertise. Research may examine possibilities for replication and sharing of best practice through cluster school arrangements.

Research should examine a range of possibilities for policy borrowing from

England, as described in this chapter. Furthermore, research is needed to identify whether access and inclusion for students with dyslexia may be enhanced by re-imagining the professional work-force structure and organisation within schools (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015; Rose, 2009). Research should be conducted using a disability theory approach, with the rights of learners and strengths-based perspectives at the heart of systemic inquiry.

7.9 Final Reflections on the Thesis

I maintain that denying a student the opportunity to learn to read is an act of exploitation and the maintenance of a particular type of social system. Undoubtedly, the Victorian Government's stated intention to address dyslexia is a step towards improving student outcomes, yet ableist policy assumptions remain unchallenged. As argued by Bacchi (2009), government policies have repercussions for various groups of people through constructing individuals as citizens or *others*. Within this notion, policy constructs a representation of dyslexia that has become an assumed reality.

Policy is conceived on paradigms dependent on one's ontology (Colebatch, 2006). In formulating a policy response for dyslexia, Victorian Government assumptions have led to a flawed paradigm. Socially constructed and mediated, competing constructions of the issue of dyslexia have been overlooked. Bacchi (2009) argues that it is imperative to observe who has been silenced by policies in order to seek alternative views with attention to how policy might be questioned, disrupted, or replaced.

Arguably, at the heart of education policy are the students and their right to full participation. It has been my contention in the thesis that education rights require renewed emphasis on matters that concern students with dyslexia. A shift needs to occur from placing the onus on reading development squarely on the learner, to enhanced responsibility from within the education system. Such a shift relies on effective education policy, constructed with a genuine interest in understanding and addressing educational barriers for students with dyslexia.

Indeed, reconciling tensions with best practice is just one of the challenges facing the Victorian Government. Commitment to establishing improved standards requires an approach that values teachers and the relative strengths of the education system. Continuous investment in teachers and the education system requires reflection on the forces that motivate policy change. Neoliberal agendas and teacher managerialism have no place in creating or sustaining positive change. The motivation for improving student outcomes is guided by equity, fairness, and human rights, regardless of Australia's position within international literacy league tables.

Beyond the right to access the education system is the requirement for students to be valued through structures of inclusive teaching and support. Victorian Government policy needs to redefine the ways that inclusive cultures are created and how a sense of belonging is fostered. Dyslexia exemplar schools in this research suggest what is possible, with evidence of strengths-based practices and initiatives to challenge dyslexia stigma. With an emphasis on valuing rather than concealing individual differences, exemplar schools favour celebrating students' unique strengths and abilities.

As an education system with relative strengths, Victoria may have a lot to gain from systemic dyslexia reform that borrows from insights from exemplar schools and practice from England. Yet, the advancement of education rights for students with specific disabilities including dyslexia requires a steadfast resolve to break away from traditional approaches in education. Meaningful progress requires a paradigm shift from the medical psychological perspectives of dyslexia—to dyslexia as an educational issue—where schools have the capacity to meet the needs of all learners. Rather than viewing problems and barriers, there are opportunities for proactivity, innovation, and the upheaval of traditional paradigms. The potential benefits of inclusive education systems are vast, not just for students with dyslexia but reciprocally there are benefits for teachers as they create new hopefulness.

I foregrounded the thesis with the global impetus focused on matters of social equity—including the *Me Too movement*—prior to the unexpected arrival of the COVID pandemic in early 2020. Writing this thesis during a pandemic, it became clear that new unforeseen global changes can impact swiftly on local education contexts. The implications for education following unprecedented change will reveal future impacts, yet the climate is ripe for unsettling ideological constructs though systemic evolution.

Undoubtedly, the pandemic has further destabilised the dominance of text-based literacy through increased pressure to adapt to digitisation and automation. Reimers (2020) highlights the possibilities for educational innovation and embracing new technologies, although protections for learners with disabilities must be intentional and proactive. While an education response to COVID disruption might entail repair and recovery, Slee (2021) prompts questions about the systems we are hoping to restore. Instead of a return to systems of exclusion, restoration should radically reconsider the education rights of marginalised students, including students with dyslexia.

As a final word, this thesis documents my reflexive change during the research journey. I align myself to the position of Hopman (2017,) observing that listening to important voices encountered along the research journey can promote one’s own shifting stance. I acknowledge that key topics for the thesis are embedded with contextual reflexivity, subject to redefinition over time. As I have engaged with teachers, principals, disability scholars and researchers across multi-disciplines, I am aware of shifts in my assumptions. The schools in my research offer hopeful examples of proactive innovation—to develop solutions that move beyond government mandates—intended to improve outcomes for students with dyslexia. It is my hope that this research gives rise to future directions of policy and practice. As Hopman (2017) articulates, the quest for new understanding does not end with the thesis.

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Appendices

Appendix A List of publications

List of publications and conference presentations
Marland, B. (2021). Reading Rights: Dyslexia Policy Enactment and Challenges for Inclusion In M. K. E. Thomas, L. Heng & P. Walker (Eds.), *Inclusive Education Is a Right, Right?* (pp. 158-171). Brill Sense. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004434783_013
Marland, B. (2019). *Viewing literacy teaching practices in Victoria: A critical lens on inclusion and best practice*, The Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, 03/12/19, Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology.
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Appendix B: Ethics Approval Victoria University

Rebecca Marland
College of Arts & Education
Victoria University
Footscray Park
Email: Rebecca.marland@live.vu.edu.au

Your ethics application has been formally reviewed and finalised.

» Application ID: HRE18-007
» Chief Investigator: DR GWEN GILMORE
» Other Investigators: MS Rebecca Marland, DR VALERIE MARGRAIN
» Application Title: Dyslexia in Government Primary and Secondary Schools in Victoria, Australia: A critical comparative study with England to inform new thinking on inclusive policy and practice
» Form Version: 13-07

The application has been accepted and deemed to meet the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)' by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval has been granted for two (2) years from the approval date; 06/02/2018.

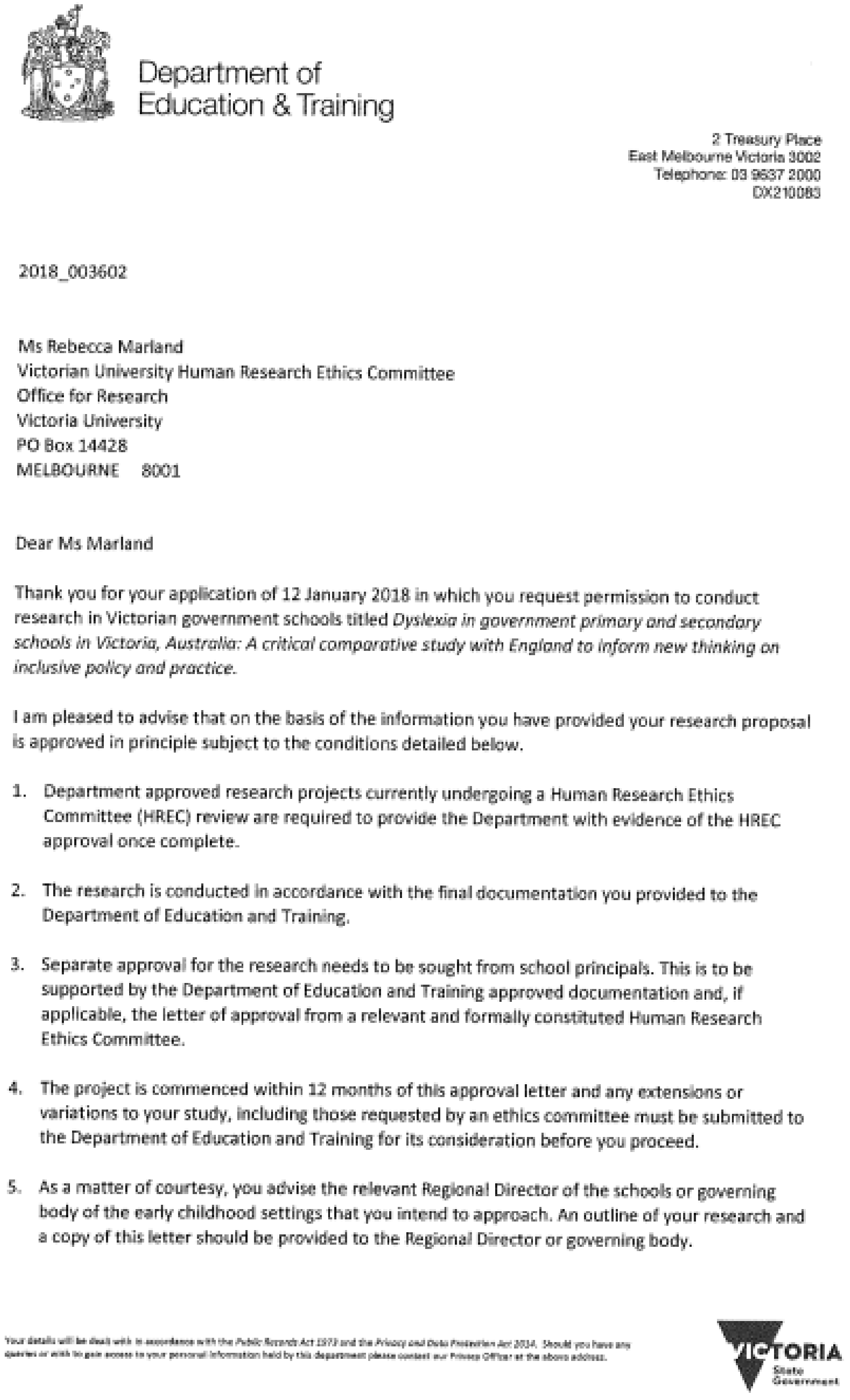
Continued approval of this research project by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) is conditional upon the provision of a report within 12 months of the above approval date or upon the completion of the project (if earlier). A report proforma may be downloaded from the Office for Research website at: http://research.vu.edu.au/hrec.php.

Please note that the Human Research Ethics Committee must be informed of the following: any changes to the approved research protocol, project timelines, any serious events or adverse and/or unforeseen events that may affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. In these unlikely events, researchers must immediately cease all data collection until the Committee has approved the changes. Researchers are also reminded of the need to notify the approving HREC of changes to personnel in research projects via a request for a minor amendment. It should also be noted that it is the Chief Investigators' responsibility to ensure the research project is conducted in line with the recommendations outlined in the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).'

On behalf of the Committee, I wish you all the best for the conduct of the project.

Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
Phone: 9919 4781 or 9919 4461
Email: researchethics@vu.edu.au

Appendix C: Ethics Approval DET



Department of
Education & Training

2 Treasury Place
East Melbourne Victoria 3002
Telephone: 03 9637 2000
DX210083

2018_003602

Ms Rebecca Marland
Victorian University Human Research Ethics Committee
Office for Research
Victoria University
PO Box 14428
MELBOURNE 8001

Dear Ms Marland

Thank you for your application of 12 January 2018 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools titled *Dyslexia in government primary and secondary schools in Victoria, Australia: A critical comparative study with England to inform new thinking on inclusive policy and practice.*

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. Department approved research projects currently undergoing a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) review are required to provide the Department with evidence of the HREC approval once complete.

2. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Training.

3. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals. This is to be supported by the Department of Education and Training approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.

4. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Training for its consideration before you proceed.

5. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.

Your details will be dealt with in accordance with the *Public Records Act 1973* and the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*. Should you have any queries or wish to gain access to your personal information held by this department please contact our Privacy Officer at the above address.

VICTORIA
State
Government

Appendix D: *Information to participants — Principal*

Information to participants (school principals involved in research)

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in research entitled ‘Dyslexia in Government Primary and Secondary Schools in Victoria, Australia: A critical comparative study of England to inform new thinking on inclusive policy and practice’.

This project is being conducted by a student researcher, Rebeca Marland, as part of a PhD study at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr Gwen Gilmore and Dr Valerie Margrain from the College of Arts and Education.

The aim of the research is to investigate the views of school principals and teachers in relation to inclusive pedagogy for students with dyslexia in Victoria. The researcher is interested in the experiences of principals to shine light on issues for dyslexia policy and practice, to enable those views to be shared with others in the research community and government policy makers.

School principals who are currently working in Victorian Primary & Secondary Schools are invited to participate.

The research is interested in:

- The process of diagnosis and referral for dyslexia
- Assessment and support
- Education philosophy and pedagogical approach
- Systems of inclusion

Project explanation

Although dyslexia and inclusive education are identified priority areas for the government, little is known about how schools are addressing dyslexia in Victoria. The project is interested in understanding more about how schools are addressing dyslexia through school based research with principals and teachers. The research is also interested in examining how trends in special and inclusive education and government policy relate to practice in schools. Policy and analysis from England will form part of this research.

What will I be asked to do?

1. Participate in a semi-structured interview on the topic of dyslexia policy and practice, of approximately 30 minutes, to be held at your school at a time convenient to you,
2. Nominate two members of your staff who have the greatest responsibility for literacy support for those students with dyslexia. For instance, the designated teacher with responsibility for children diagnosed with dyslexia or those with dyslexic traits, including persistent reading difficulties. These nominated teachers will also be invited to participate in an interview, and independently asked for consent.
3. Give permission for the researcher to review school documents such as literacy policy and de-identified assessment results.
4. Sign approval for the researcher to use photographs taken of relevant, non-identifiable text, for example signage within the school. The researcher will provide the principal with an itemised list to sign, if authority to photograph is requested.

What will I gain from participating?

Some participants may find benefit in reflecting on the voices dyslexia policy and practice. A summary of findings will be shared with participants. Also, you will be invited to a seminar at conclusion which showcases good practice and further points for development from teacher perspectives. However, the researcher recognises there may be no direct benefits to the participants in the study.

How will the information I give be used?

The information will be used as a part of a PhD thesis, with findings reported at conferences and/or published in a range of formats which may include book or journal submissions.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

I understand that there are a range of ways that schools are approaching teaching and learning for students with dyslexia. Participant identity will be protected by replacing participant names with pseudonyms and school names will be changed.

Data will be kept securely and stored on the online repository in line with Victoria University guidelines. All original data will be destroyed at the end of the project.

Therefore, we believe this is low-risk research.

How will this project be conducted?

The researcher will schedule an agreeable interview time for one face-to-face interview (30 minutes) with you, the principal. The Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The researcher may wish to contact you to verify your interview data and to ask additional clarifying questions, if you agree to be contacted. Principals will be invited to share views on how the education system accommodates students with dyslexia. No students will be interviewed and no photographs of staff or students will be used in the research.

Additional consent may be requested to photograph within the school. For instance, signage within the school, a school display or other item of interest to the study. All identifying information will be removed for privacy reasons. The researcher will provide the principal with an itemised list to sign, if authority to photograph is requested.

Who is conducting the study?

Victoria University, College of Arts and Education
Footscray Park
P.O. Box 14428
Melbourne Vic 8001

Rebecca Marland
Rebecca.marland@live.vu.edu.au
Phone: + 61 [redacted]

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator listed above.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix E: *Consent form — Principal*

CONSENT FORM FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION FOR PRINCIPALS:

I would like to invite you to be a part of a study into dyslexia policy and practice within the Victorian Primary and Secondary Education System.

Little is known about how Victorian schools are addressing teaching for students with dyslexia. The research aims to compare dyslexia policy and practice in Victoria with education models currently used in England. The research will investigate the views of school principals and teachers in relation to inclusive pedagogy in Victoria, to shine a light on issues for dyslexia policy and practice. The research aims to allow those views to be shared with others in the research community and government policy makers.

The research will be based on case studies of approximately four schools, primarily focusing on schools with a special interest in dyslexia. The research will use semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers to learn more about how professionals within the education system are responding to accommodate students with dyslexia.

I understand that there are a range of ways that schools are approaching teaching and learning for students with dyslexia. Your identity will be protected by replacing your name with a pseudonym and school names will be changed. Therefore, we believe this is low-risk research.

CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT

I, ____ (full name) of

____ (principal's suburb).

I certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study:

'**Dyslexia in government primary and secondary schools in Victoria, Australia: A critical comparative study of England to inform new thinking on inclusive policy and practice'** being conducted at Victoria University by Rebecca Marland.

I certify that the objectives of this study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by Rebecca Marland (PhD Student Researcher) and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- Audio recorded semi-structured interviews
- Transcription from audio to text
- Findings to be analysed using broad themes of policy, practice and pedagogy

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and anonymous in any publications.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this research may be directed to the researcher

Rebecca Marland

+ 61 [redacted]

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix F: *Information to participants — Teacher*

Information for participants (school teachers) involved in research

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled ‘Dyslexia in Government Primary and Secondary Schools in Victoria, Australia: A critical comparative study of England to inform new thinking on inclusive policy and practice’.

This project is being conducted by a student researcher, Rebeca Marland, as part of a PhD study at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr Gwen Gilmore and Dr Valerie Margrain from the College of Arts and Education.

The aim of the research is to investigate the views of school principals and teachers in relation to inclusive pedagogy for students with dyslexia in Victoria. The researcher is interested in the experiences of teachers to shine light on issues for dyslexia policy and practice, to enable those views to be shared with others in the research community and government policy makers.

School teachers invited to participate:

- Currently teaching in a primary or secondary school in Victoria
- Those with responsibility for teaching students with dyslexia (or dyslexic traits)
- Qualified and registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT)

The research is interested in:

- The process of diagnosis and referral for dyslexia
- Assessment and support
- Education philosophy and pedagogical approach
- Systems of inclusion

Project explanation

Although dyslexia and inclusive education are identified priority areas for the government, little is known about how schools are addressing dyslexia in Victoria. The project is interested in understanding more about how schools are addressing dyslexia through school based research with principals and teachers. The research is also interested in examining how trends in special and inclusive education and government policy relate to practice in schools. Policy and analysis from England will form part of this research.

What will I be asked to do?

Participate in a semi-structured interview on the topic of dyslexia policy and practice, of approximately 45 minutes, to be held at your school at a time convenient to you.

What will I gain from participating?

Some teachers may find benefit in reflecting on the voices dyslexia policy and practice, and the inclusive experience of relevant affected individuals. A summary of findings will be shared with participating teachers. Also, you will be invited to a seminar at conclusion which showcases good practice and further points for development from teacher perspectives. However, the researcher recognises there may be no direct benefits to the participants in the study.

How will the information I give be used?

The information will be used as a part of a PhD thesis, with findings reported at conferences and/or published in a range of formats which may include book or journal submissions.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

I understand that there are a range of ways that schools are approaching teaching and learning for students with dyslexia. Teacher identity will be protected by replacing participant names with pseudonyms and school names will be changed.

Data will be kept securely and stored on the online repository in line with Victoria University guidelines. All original data will be destroyed at the end of the project.

Therefore, we do not believe your engagement with this project has significant risk.

How will this project be conducted?

This project will be conducted over a series of visits to the school, with the number of visits being between two and three, depending on the availability of the teachers. These visits will be scheduled with the school by agreement. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Teachers will be invited to share views on how the education system accommodate students with dyslexia. No children will be interviewed and no photographs of adults or children will be used in the research.

Additional consent may be requested to photograph within the school. For instance, signage within the school, a school display or other item of interest to the study. All identifying information will be removed for privacy reasons. The researcher will provide the principal with an itemised list to sign, if authority to photograph is requested.

Who is conducting the study?

Victoria University, College of Arts and Education
Footscray Park
P.O. Box 14428
Melbourne Vic 8001

Rebecca Marland
Rebecca.marland@live.vu.edu.au
Phone: + 61 [redacted]

Appendix G *Consent form — Teacher*

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS:

I would like to invite you to be a part of a study into dyslexia policy and practice within the Victorian Primary and Secondary Education System.

Little is known about how Victorian schools are addressing teaching for students with dyslexia. The research aims to compare dyslexia policy and practice in Victoria with education models currently used in England. The research will investigate the views of school principals and teachers in relation to inclusive pedagogy in Victoria, to shine a light on issues for dyslexia policy and practice. The research aims to allow those views to be shared with others in the research community and government policy makers.

The research will be based on case studies of approximately four schools, primarily focusing on schools with a special interest in dyslexia. The research will use semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers to learn more about how professionals within the education system are responding to accommodate students with dyslexia.

I understand that there are a range of ways that schools are approaching teaching and learning for students with dyslexia. Your identity will be protected by replacing your name with a pseudonym and school names will be changed. Therefore, we believe this is low-risk research.

CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT

I, ____ (full name) of

____ (teacher's suburb).

I certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study:

'**Dyslexia in government primary and secondary schools in Victoria, Australia: A critical comparative study of England to inform new thinking on inclusive policy and practice'** being conducted at Victoria University by Rebecca Marland.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by Rebecca Marland (PhD Student Researcher) and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- Audio recorded semi-structured interviews
- Transcription from audio to text
- Findings to be analysed using broad themes of policy, practice and pedagogy

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and anonymous in any publications.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher

Rebecca Marland

+ 61 [redacted]

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix H: ***Semi-structured Interview schedule — Principal***

Semi-Structured Interview for Principals

- ☐ Identified as a principal working in Primary or Secondary School in Victoria
- ☐ Belonging to a school with a special interest in dyslexia

Interview Schedule for Principals (30 min interview)	
Q.1	Tell me about your school. *Probe: How many students in your school? Type of school? Demographics?*
Q.2	How do you define dyslexia? *Probe: Rationale for this definition?*
Q.3	Tell me about how your school support students with dyslexia. *Probe: Specialist program?*
Q.4	Tell me about the students in the school with dyslexia. *Probe: How many students in the school with a formal diagnosis of dyslexia?*
Q.5	Tell me about assessment and diagnosis for dyslexia in your school? *Probe: Is there a formal process? Policy?*
Q.6	How is funding allocated to support students with dyslexia? *Probe: Additional teaching staff? Teaching assistants? Assistive technology? Reading programs?*
Q.7	What would you like to see happen in relation to funding for additional support? *Probe: What are the challenges for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)? Opportunities for NDIS?*
Q.8	What are the challenges for school principals in providing inclusive schools for students with dyslexia? *Probe: Specialist teachers? Teacher education? Resources?*
Q.9	Is there anything more that could be done to assist schools in being more dyslexia friendly? i) by the Department of Education, Victoria ii) by the State and Federal Government *Probe: policy? Issues for reform?*
*	Could you please nominate two teachers who have the greatest level of responsibility for students with dyslexia?

*	After interviews have been transcribed, I may have follow-up questions to clarify transcripts. Is this okay with you? Also, to thank you for participating, you will be invited to a dyslexia training seminar, which will be open to a range of schools and stakeholders. I will use the contact details that I have to get in touch with you. Is this something you might be interested in?

Appendix I: Semi-structured Interview schedule — Teacher

Semi-Structured Interview for Teachers

- ☐ Currently teaching in a primary or secondary school in Victoria
- ☐ Nominated by the principal of the school as a teacher for having responsibility for teaching students with dyslexia (or dyslexic traits).
- ☐ Qualified and registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT)

Interview Schedule for Teachers (45 mins interview)	
Q.1	Tell me about your role in the school. *Probe: Age of students? Subject taught? Program taught? Dyslexia program?*
Q.2	Tell me about your teaching background? *Probe: Qualifications? Experience?*
Q.3	How do you define dyslexia? *Probe: How did you develop your current understanding of dyslexia? Rationale?*
Q.4	Tell me about the students you teach with dyslexia. *Probe: How many students with a formal diagnosis of dyslexia?*
Q.5	Tell me, have you had experience of the Department of Education’s online dyslexia screening tool or what you know about it. *Probe: If you haven’t used it, how might you feel about using a dyslexia screening tool?*
Q.6	Tell me about dyslexia assessment and diagnosis for students in your school? *Probe: Where do they go for assessment services? How do you see this process for students and their families?*
Q.7	Tell me what the challenges are for students with dyslexia? *Probe: Barriers to learning?*
Q.8	Tell me about the challenges for teachers in supporting students with dyslexia? *Probe: Systematic barriers?*
Q.9	How are students supported? *Probe: In class? Withdrawal? How often? Support by whom?*
Q.10	What methods and resources are used in the school to support students with dyslexia? *Probe: Names of programs? Pedagogy? Theory/theorists?*

Q.11	What do you see as the success of these programs/methods? *Probe: Outcomes for students? Ongoing tracking data through school*
Q.12	What are the important elements of good support program for students with dyslexia? *Phonics program? Reading with comprehension? Skills targeted*
Q.13	What is most important for students with dyslexia? *Probe: Success and well-being? Resilience through school? Home-school connections?*
Q.14	In what ways are you inclusive for students with dyslexia? *Probe: assessment criteria? Opportunities for success?* **additional probe for Secondary around VCE assessment*
Q.15	If you could ask the Department of Education to provide more support for learners with dyslexia, what would you ask for? *Probe: Policy clear and transparent? Funding?*
Q16.	How could the education system be improved to better support students with dyslexia? *Probe: Is there anything else you would like to say about dyslexia and systemic issues?*
*	I am interested in items in your classroom and in the schools which illustrate how dyslexia is approached. Is there anything you would like to show me? Probe: *timetables, classroom layout, resources, signage, displays?*
*	After interviews have been transcribed, I may have follow-up questions to clarify transcripts. Is this okay with you? Also, to thank you for participating, you will be invited to a dyslexia training seminar, which will be open to a range of schools and stakeholders. I will use the contact details that I have to get in touch with you. Is this something you might be interested in?

Appendix J: Reflective research journal (sample)

Extract #1
My conversations with potential dyslexia exemplar school are intriguing and call my attention to an issue perhaps I hadn't anticipated, an issue that has seen the list of possible exemplars contract. As part of the recruitment process, I have spoken with principals to confirm interest in participating in the research (as described in ethics). In the process, I must ascertain the reliability of the online data which signals that the school has an intent to address dyslexia. Nonetheless, the data available in the public domain seems not always a reliable indicator of the current status of a dyslexia exemplar school.

Today I contacted a primary school following positive online data in the public domain which indicated the school's dyslexia exemplar practices. I spoke with a school principal [Mr Smith] who described the collapse of specialist practice following the departure of key staff. The principal presented a positive view of their specialist teacher [Mr Jackson] and the work he had done within the school. Unfortunately, as he had left the school was no longer able offer any 'specialist' programs or support.

The conversation with Mr Smith reminded me of a similar conversation at a secondary school the previous week, where the recent departure of the principal signalled the end of dyslexia exemplar practices. For ethical reasons, I was unable to probe these conversations further. Yet, these brief conversations yielded insights into non-participant schools and dyslexia exemplar practices that may change over time.

Extract #2
Today I visited [redacted] Primary for the first visit. On entering the school, I felt an immediate sense of openness. The principal greeted me warmly. It seemed that the principal was proud of the school and the staff team. He spoke with enthusiasm and candour. He was very specific with his responses to my questions. When I probed him for more information, he would give examples to illustrate the point or use school artefacts as a form of evidence. There was a strong theme of explicit and transparent practices flowing through his responses. Certainly, I had the impression that he expected his staff to be 'singing from the same hymn sheet'. I wondered if this would be reflected by teachers.

The participant narratives paint a picture of a school striving for unified explicit approach to teaching. As I explore each space in the school, from the office reception to the hallways and classrooms, I am greeted by examples of policy and practice that illustrates an explicit pedagogical approach. I see policies 'front and centre'.
The exemplary outward display speaks to school identity, what is expected of teachers and what is prioritised at the school. I wonder if there will be cohesion between what is expressed as a school identity and the perspectives of the teachers during interviews.
* pseudonyms used and gender pronouns or titles may be changed

Appendix K: Photography permission supplement

Dear [Principal’s name]

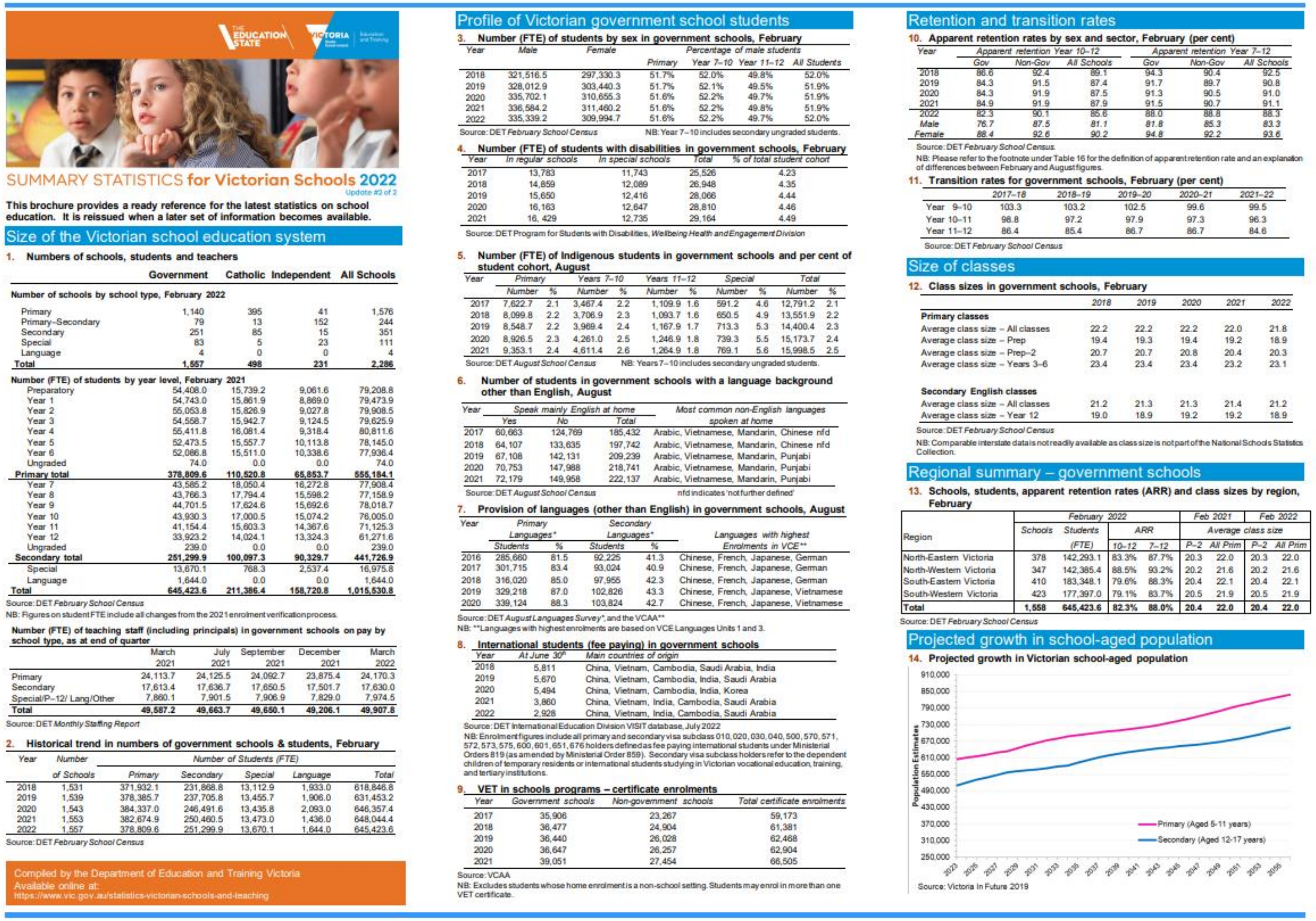
I photographed the following classroom display items while with [named teachers]. If you consent for me to using these images as part of my research, please sign. Otherwise, please strike out any images that you would like me to delete.

Thanks,

Rebecca

Signed________________________ Date___________________

Appendix L: Summary Statistics for Victorian Schools 2022



THE EDUCATION STATE
VICTORIA Education and Training

SUMMARY STATISTICS for Victorian Schools 2022

Update #2 of 2

This brochure provides a ready reference for the latest statistics on school education. It is reissued when a later set of information becomes available.

Size of the Victorian school education system

1. Numbers of schools, students and teachers

	Government	Catholic	Independent	All Schools
Number of schools by school type, February 2022				
Primary	1,140	395	41	1,576
Primary–Secondary	79	13	152	244
Secondary	251	85	15	351
Special	83	5	23	111
Language	4	0	0	4
Total	**1,557**	**498**	**231**	**2,286**
Number (FTE) of students by year level, February 2021				
Preparatory	54,408.0	15,739.2	9,061.6	79,208.8
Year 1	54,743.0	15,861.9	8,869.0	79,473.9
Year 2	55,053.8	15,826.9	9,027.8	79,908.5
Year 3	54,558.7	15,942.7	9,124.5	79,625.9
Year 4	55,411.8	16,081.4	9,318.4	80,811.6
Year 5	52,473.5	15,557.7	10,113.8	78,145.0
Year 6	52,086.8	15,511.0	10,338.6	77,936.4
Ungraded	74.0	0.0	0.0	74.0
Primary total	**378,809.6**	**110,520.8**	**65,853.7**	**555,184.1**
Year 7	43,585.2	18,050.4	16,272.8	77,908.4
Year 8	43,766.3	17,794.4	15,598.2	77,158.9
Year 9	44,701.5	17,624.6	15,692.6	78,018.7
Year 10	43,930.3	17,000.5	15,074.2	76,005.0
Year 11	41,154.4	15,603.3	14,367.6	71,125.3
Year 12	33,923.2	14,024.1	13,324.3	61,271.6
Ungraded	239.0	0.0	0.0	239.0
Secondary total	**251,299.9**	**100,097.3**	**90,329.7**	**441,726.9**
Special	13,670.1	768.3	2,537.4	16,975.8
Language	1,644.0	0.0	0.0	1,644.0
Total	**645,423.6**	**211,386.4**	**158,720.8**	**1,015,530.8**

Source: DET *February School Census*

NB: Figures on student FTE include all changes from the 2021 enrolment verification process.

Number (FTE) of teaching staff (including principals) in government schools on pay by school type, as at end of quarter

	March 2021	July 2021	September 2021	December 2021	March 2022
Primary	24,113.7	24,125.5	24,092.7	23,875.4	24,170.3
Secondary	17,613.4	17,636.7	17,650.5	17,501.7	17,630.0
Special/P–12/ Lang/Other	7,860.1	7,901.5	7,906.9	7,829.0	7,974.5
Total	**49,587.2**	**49,663.7**	**49,650.1**	**49,206.1**	**49,907.8**

Source: DET *Monthly Staffing Report*

2. Historical trend in numbers of government schools & students, February

Year	*Number*	*Number of Students (FTE)*				
	of Schools	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Special*	*Language*	*Total*
2018	1,531	371,932.1	231,868.8	13,112.9	1,933.0	618,846.8
2019	1,539	378,385.7	237,705.8	13,455.7	1,906.0	631,453.2
2020	1,543	384,337.0	246,491.6	13,435.8	2,093.0	646,357.4
2021	1,553	382,674.9	250,460.5	13,473.0	1,436.0	648,044.4
2022	1,557	378,809.6	251,299.9	13,670.1	1,644.0	645,423.6

Source: DET *February School Census*

Compiled by the Department of Education and Training Victoria
Available online at:
https://www.vic.gov.au/statistics-victorian-schools-and-teaching

Profile of Victorian government school students

3. Number (FTE) of students by sex in government schools, February

Year	*Male*	*Female*	*Percentage of male students*			
			Primary	*Year 7–10*	*Year 11–12*	*All Students*
2018	321,516.5	297,330.3	51.7%	52.0%	49.8%	52.0%
2019	328,012.9	303,440.3	51.7%	52.1%	49.5%	51.9%
2020	335,702.1	310,655.3	51.6%	52.2%	49.7%	51.9%
2021	336,584.2	311,460.2	51.6%	52.2%	49.8%	51.9%
2022	335,339.2	309,994.7	51.6%	52.2%	49.7%	52.0%

Source: DET *February School Census* NB: Year 7–10 includes secondary ungraded students.

4. Number (FTE) of students with disabilities in government schools, February

Year	*In regular schools*	*In special schools*	*Total*	*% of total student cohort*
2017	13,783	11,743	25,526	4.23
2018	14,859	12,089	26,948	4.35
2019	15,650	12,416	28,066	4.44
2020	16,163	12,647	28,810	4.46
2021	16, 429	12,735	29,164	4.49

Source: DET Program for Students with Disabilities, *Wellbeing Health and Engagement Division*

5. Number (FTE) of Indigenous students in government schools and per cent of student cohort, August

Year	*Primary*		*Years 7–10*		*Years 11–12*		*Special*		*Total*	
	Number	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*
2017	7,622.7	2.1	3,467.4	2.2	1,109.9	1.6	591.2	4.6	12,791.2	2.1
2018	8,099.8	2.2	3,706.9	2.3	1,093.7	1.6	650.5	4.9	13,551.9	2.2
2019	8,548.7	2.2	3,989.4	2.4	1,167.9	1.7	713.3	5.3	14,400.4	2.3
2020	8,926.5	2.3	4,261.0	2.5	1,246.9	1.8	739.3	5.5	15,173.7	2.4
2021	9,353.1	2.4	4,611.4	2.6	1,264.9	1.8	769.1	5.6	15,998.5	2.5

Source: DET *August School Census* NB: Years 7–10 includes secondary ungraded students.

6. Number of students in government schools with a language background other than English, August

Year	*Speak mainly English at home*			*Most common non-English languages spoken at home*
	Yes	*No*	*Total*	
2017	60,663	124,769	185,432	Arabic, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Chinese nfd
2018	64,107	133,635	197,742	Arabic, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Chinese nfd
2019	67,108	142,131	209,239	Arabic, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Punjabi
2020	70,753	147,988	218,741	Arabic, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Punjabi
2021	72,179	149,958	222,137	Arabic, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Punjabi

Source: DET *August School Census* nfd indicates 'not further defined'

7. Provision of languages (other than English) in government schools, August

Year	*Primary Languages**		*Secondary Languages**		*Languages with highest Enrolments in VCE***
	Students	*%*	*Students*	*%*	
2016	285,660	81.5	92,225	41.3	Chinese, French, Japanese, German
2017	301,715	83.4	93,024	40.9	Chinese, French, Japanese, German
2018	316,020	85.0	97,955	42.3	Chinese, French, Japanese, German
2019	329,218	87.0	102,826	43.3	Chinese, French, Japanese, Vietnamese
2020	339,124	88.3	103,824	42.7	Chinese, French, Japanese, Vietnamese

Source: DET *August Languages Survey**, and the VCAA**

NB: **Languages with highest enrolments are based on VCE Languages Units 1 and 3.

8. International students (fee paying) in government schools

Year	*At June 30th*	*Main countries of origin*
2018	5,811	China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Saudi Arabia, India
2019	5,670	China, Vietnam, Cambodia, India, Saudi Arabia
2020	5,494	China, Vietnam, Cambodia, India, Korea
2021	3,860	China, Vietnam, India, Cambodia, Saudi Arabia
2022	2,928	China, Vietnam, India, Cambodia, Saudi Arabia

Source: DET International Education Division VISIT database, July 2022

NB: Enrolment figures include all primary and secondary visa subclass 010, 020, 030, 040, 500, 570, 571, 572, 573, 575, 600, 601, 651, 676 holders defined as fee paying international students under Ministerial Orders 819 (as amended by Ministerial Order 859). Secondary visa subclass holders refer to the dependent children of temporary residents or international students studying in Victorian vocational education, training, and tertiary institutions.

9. VET in schools programs – certificate enrolments

Year	*Government schools*	*Non-government schools*	*Total certificate enrolments*
2017	35,906	23,267	59,173
2018	36,477	24,904	61,381
2019	36,440	26,028	62,468
2020	36,647	26,257	62,904
2021	39,051	27,454	66,505

Source: VCAA

NB: Excludes students whose home enrolment is a non-school setting. Students may enrol in more than one VET certificate.

Retention and transition rates

10. Apparent retention rates by sex and sector, February (per cent)

Year	*Apparent retention Year 10–12*			*Apparent retention Year 7–12*		
	Gov	*Non-Gov*	*All Schools*	*Gov*	*Non-Gov*	*All Schools*
2018	86.6	92.4	89.1	94.3	90.4	92.5
2019	84.3	91.5	87.4	91.7	89.7	90.8
2020	84.3	91.9	87.5	91.3	90.5	91.0
2021	84.9	91.9	87.9	91.5	90.7	91.1
2022	82.3	90.1	85.6	88.0	88.8	88.3
Male	*76.7*	*87.5*	*81.1*	*81.8*	*85.3*	*83.3*
Female	*88.4*	*92.6*	*90.2*	*94.8*	*92.2*	*93.6*

Source: DET *February School Census.*

NB: Please refer to the footnote under Table 16 for the definition of apparent retention rate and an explanation of differences between February and August figures.

11. Transition rates for government schools, February (per cent)

	2017–18	*2018–19*	*2019–20*	*2020–21*	*2021–22*
Year 9–10	103.3	103.2	102.5	99.6	99.5
Year 10–11	98.8	97.2	97.9	97.3	96.3
Year 11–12	86.4	85.4	86.7	86.7	84.6

Source: DET *February School Census*

Size of classes

12. Class sizes in government schools, February

	2018	*2019*	*2020*	*2021*	*2022*
Primary classes					
Average class size – All classes	22.2	22.2	22.2	22.0	21.8
Average class size – Prep	19.4	19.3	19.4	19.2	18.9
Average class size – Prep–2	20.7	20.7	20.8	20.4	20.3
Average class size – Years 3–6	23.4	23.4	23.4	23.2	23.1
Secondary English classes					
Average class size – All classes	21.2	21.3	21.3	21.4	21.2
Average class size – Year 12	19.0	18.9	19.2	19.2	18.9

Source: DET *February School Census*

NB: Comparable interstate data is not readily available as class size is not part of the National Schools Statistics Collection.

Regional summary – government schools

13. Schools, students, apparent retention rates (ARR) and class sizes by region, February

Region	*February 2022*				*Feb 2021*		*Feb 2022*	
	Schools	*Students (FTE)*	*ARR*		*Average class size*			
			10–12	*7–12*	*P–2*	*All Prim*	*P–2*	*All Prim*
North-Eastern Victoria	378	142,293.1	83.3%	87.7%	20.3	22.0	20.3	22.0
North-Western Victoria	347	142,385.4	88.5%	93.2%	20.2	21.6	20.2	21.6
South-Eastern Victoria	410	183,348.1	79.6%	88.3%	20.4	22.1	20.4	22.1
South-Western Victoria	423	177,397.0	79.1%	83.7%	20.5	21.9	20.5	21.9
Total	**1,558**	**645,423.6**	**82.3%**	**88.0%**	**20.4**	**22.0**	**20.4**	**22.0**

Source: DET *February School Census*

Projected growth in school-aged population

14. Projected growth in Victorian school-aged population

Source: Victoria In Future 2019

DET (2022) *Summary statistics for Victorian Schools 2022*, the Department of Education Victoria, Retrieved December 2, 2022, from https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/brochure2022_Update2of2.pdf

Appendix M: Statement of policy intent - media release DET

Media Release
The Hon James Merlino MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Education

VICTORIA
State
Government

Sunday, 3 April, 2016

IMPROVING EARLY YEAR SCREENING FOR LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

The Andrews Labor Government is improving how Victoria screens for learning difficulties at the start of school, with a new early years literacy assessment tool for all Prep children helping teachers identify and support children with learning difficulties.

The Labor Government is delivering the improvements as part of its Special Needs Plan, which aims to ensure that students with disabilities and additional needs get the same chances as other students.

The early years of schooling are crucial to building lifelong learning, wellbeing and success, and the improved process will be the first step in the early detection of learning difficulties, so that children could get the support they need sooner.

Literacy is widely understood as the foundation of learning and development in the early years. As a required literacy assessment tool for all Prep children in government schools, the English Online Interview is a key first step in identifying potential learning difficulties.

Improvements are being made to the English Online Interview tool, based on world-leading research on child development, which will help teachers get a better understanding of an individual's literacy abilities and potentially identify learning difficulties and disorders.

New resources for teachers to support the English Online Interview are also being developed, containing information on additional assessment options and further steps in screening processes to recognise learning difficulties, such as dyslexia.

The revised and improved English Online Interview and supporting resources will be part of a suite of tools for teachers to assess and monitor learning in the early years of school.

The enhanced tool will be ready for schools and teachers in Term 4 of 2016, ahead of

the 2017 school year. For more information on the Special Needs Plan visit:

www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/specialneeds.aspx?Redirect=1

For more information on the English Online Interview visit:

www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/assessment

Quotes attributable to Minister for Education James Merlino

"The Andrews Labor Government is delivering the Education State, and that means properly supporting students with additional learning needs so they get the opportunity at a great education."

"To improve our English Online Interview tool, we examined the latest thinking and best practices from around the world to ensure our kids get access to the best assessment tools as possible as part of a screening process for learning difficulties and disorders.

Quote attributable to ACER Chief Executive Officer Professor Geoff Masters AO

"We know that students start school with very different levels of literacy knowledge and understanding. Improving the English Online Interview will provide additional important evidence, which used among other data, can help teachers identify students with potential learning difficulties."

Quote attributable to President of SPELD Jason Henham

"SPELD Victoria is delighted to see the English Online Interview being improved to better identify students at risk of having learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. The potential benefits that early identification of risk factors provides

Appendix N: Media Reporting — Dyslexia Screening Initiative

Publication	Article Title	Article snapshot
The Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC)	Online English skills tool upgrade to screen preps for learning difficulties (Dyett, 2016)	The article states that tens of thousands of students (in their first year of school) in Victoria "are set to benefit from a new online screening tool which will check for learning disabilities like dyslexia" (para. 1). Education Minister James Merlino is quoted "it's absolutely critical that we identify, engage and support students with additional needs at the very earliest important opportunity" (para. 5).
The Age	Every prep child to be screened for dyslexia under new program (Cook, 2016)	The article asserts that the new Victorian Government dyslexia screening program "will lead to more learning difficulties being detected earlier" (para. 2). The article is accompanied by a picture of student with dyslexia who "received specialist tutoring and is now full of confidence". The author states that "parents and disability advocates have welcomed the move".
The Herald Sun	Victorian prep students to be tested for dyslexia, learning difficulties (Davies, 2016)	The article reaffirms the headline stating that all children in their first year of school "will be tested for dyslexia and other learning difficulties under a new State Government program" (para. 1). Education Minister James Merlino is quoted "we examined the best practices from around the world to ensure our kids get access to the best assessment tools as possible, as part of a screening process for learning difficulties and disorders," (para. 4).

Appendix O: Search results for the term dyslexia DET website

Search results for the term dyslexia DET website

Filter search results

Your search for '**dyslexia**' returned **8** results in the category

1. **Understanding types of learning difficulty**
   Key understandings related to reading difficulties and **dyslexia**.
2. **Resources for learning difficulties**
   A range of online resources & tools that support students with reading difficulties & **dyslexia**.
3. **Professional development**
   Professional development resources to help educators support students with learning difficulties, disabilities and additional learning needs.
4. **Assessment Prep to year 2 (ages 5-8)**
   Dyslexia assessment ages 5-8.
5. **Assessment years 3-6 (ages 9-12)**
   Dyslexia assessment ages 9-12.
6. **Assessment years 7-10 (ages 13-16)**
   Dyslexia assessment ages 13-16.
7. **Learning difficulties**
   Advice, guidelines and tools to help schools meet the unique needs of students with learning difficulties and **dyslexia**.
8. **Assessment – Prep to year 10**
   Advice and tools to support in the identification and assessment of students with literacy learning difficulties and/or disabilities, such as **dyslexia**.

Retrieved November 29, 2022, from https://www.education.vic.gov.au/

Appendix P: Preliminary Irlen (Dyslexia) questionnaire

Preliminary Irlen Questionnaire

(When reading for information or working on a computer)

1. Do you get a headache?
2. Do you feel sick in your stomach?
3. Do words wriggle, move or change places?
4. Do words ever look blurry or faded?
5. Do words ever change shape or play tricks on you?
6. Do you ever feel dizzy when reading?
7. Do you prefer to read in dim light?
8. Do you find sunlight too bright?
9. Do your eyes itch, hurt or feel sleepy?
10. Do you feel restless or fidgety?
11. Do you avoid reading?
12. Do you have trouble remembering what you have read?
13. Do you have spelling difficulties?