COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO THE ADEQUACY OF SERVICES TO MEET THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S CHILDREN

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 10 JUNE 2009

Members

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan (Chairman)
Mr A.P. Jacob (Deputy Chairman)
Mr I.M. Britza
Mr A.P. O'Gorman
Mr T.G. Stephens

Hearing commenced at 10.05 am

AXWORTHY, MR DAVID
Executive Director School Support Program, Department of Education and Training,
examined:

CARNELLOR, DR YVONNE
ECE Co-ordinator, Curtin University of Technology,
examined:

JAY, DR JENNY
University Lecturer, Edith Cowan University,
examined:

LEE-HAMMOND, DR LIBBY
Senior Lecturer, Murdoch University,
examined:

MEARS, MS MAUREEN TERESA
Associate Dean, College of Education, University of Notre Dame,
examined:

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you all very much for coming; we really appreciate you appearing here this morning. I will start by introducing the committee, ask you to introduce yourselves, and then we will cover a small formality before we launch into proceedings.

My name is Alannah MacTiernan; I chair this committee.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Albert Jacob, member for Ocean Reef and Deputy Chair.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: Tony O'Gorman, member for Joondalup.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: Ian Britza, member for Morley.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Tom Stephens, member for Pilbara.

The CHAIRMAN: Please introduce yourselves and tell us where you are from.

Mr Axworthy: David Axworthy, Executive Director of School Support Programs at the Department of Education and Training in Western Australia.

The CHAIRMAN: What does that role involve, David?

Mr Axworthy: I am, I suppose, the chief adviser in terms of curriculum and support programs for professional development, policy development, resources and the raft of programs for children with disabilities, learning difficulties or other problems at school.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you deal with mainstream children as well or do you only deal with children with disabilities?

Mr Axworthy: No; mainstream cases as well—across the board.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Dr Carnellor: Yvonne Carnellor from Curtin University. I coordinate the early childhood education program.

The CHAIRMAN: And what does that involve teaching?

Dr Carnellor: From zero to year 3; that is, eight-year-old children—early childhood.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that the actual teaching of the teachers?

Dr Carnellor: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Dr Lee-Hammond: Hi; I am Libby Lee-Hammond. I am a senior lecturer in early childhood education at Murdoch University. I coordinate the early childhood program at the university, which caters for kindergarten to year 3 teachers.

Ms Mears: I am Maureen Mears from the University of Notre Dame. I am Associate Dean in the School of Education, which means I am in a leadership role which includes course structure and the quality of teaching in each of the degrees. Our early childhood degree is for teachers of children aged four to eight.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Dr Jay: Hello, I am Jenny Jay. I am the program director for early childhood studies at Edith Cowan University. Our program is housed on the Mt Lawley campus. The undergraduate program trains teachers to teach children aged zero to eight. We also have some graduate certificate courses in early childhood studies that we run and perhaps later on I will be able to explain some of those. I am also program director for the graduate diploma of early childhood studies, which trains teachers to work with children aged from four to eight.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I will just explain some of the context of this hearing. You would have seen the terms of reference for this inquiry. We established this inquiry because we were certainly very concerned about two things. Firstly, the evidence that we were getting of the number of children who were presenting at school seemingly not with the precursor developments necessary to acquire literacy and numeracy at an acceptable standard. Secondly, the anecdotal evidence—obviously quite clearly supported by the AEDI work that has been done to date in WA; at least the work that is being done in the Pilbara and in Armadale as that program is rolled out—supported by the Bolner and more recently the Naplan data that shows areas of very, very grave disadvantage and that quite clearly what we are doing is not working. We initially focused very much on what was happening to children before they came to school. We asked why they were displaying developmental vulnerabilities and how we might best deal with those vulnerabilities so that children could be better placed when presenting to commence their more formal schooling program aged four or five. In that process, we also came across an issue that concerns us deeply about whether the pedagogical style that is in vogue is in fact part of the problem. Is a particular style of instruction in basic literacy and numeracy—that is the whole-of-language immersion style of education—setting up some of these kids to fail and particularly, but not exclusively, disadvantaging children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds? We see absolutely disgraceful results in some areas, which tell us that some of the complacency about the standard of our education is wrong. We have also heard evidence from the people running the AEDI that our average education results are not really indicative of where we are going because we have an exceptionally long tail. If you look at our performance compared to places like Finland we do well on average but we have this huge long tail that indicates that the system is not working for a certain percentage of children. This is what we want to address. We will start with David because we are getting very contrary information about the education department's position on this. We see in a press article that the department is absolutely into phonics. We know that some teachers are teaching phonics and that some schools that have adopted it are teaching it directly and very aggressively. But we hear evidence from other sources such as UWA—although we do not have

anyone from UWA here today—that teachers hide their phonics books from district education officers when they go out to the schools because "that is not the way we teach". If you can, please start by telling us where the education department sits in this debate, what sorts of texts it provides for teachers and what the department requires of its teachers.

Mr Axworthy: Certainly. I was asked to come to possibly respond to previous testimony from Steve Heath and Mandy Nayton. Let me preface my remarks by saying that I would like to put on the record very clearly that both the department and I have huge respect for those two characters and that we have used both those people as consultants to help us understand what is going on in schools. We have funded research for Steve Heath. Mandy Nayton operates with us and we fund and support SPELD in the work that it does. There is no question here about me setting myself up to argue against people that the department respects and uses. I will say that Steve and Mandy are not spokespeople for the department and that some of their testimony was not accurate in terms of our policy position. However, what they reported is probably what they have seen in some places—but it may be the exception. I just want to put that on the record at the start and then say what our position is as a department.

[10.15 am]

The position that we have taken with respect to phonics, both recently and over the past 10 or 20 years, is that we regard phonics as an important part of, but not the sole part of, the teaching of reading. We believe that it has a place and that children must develop phonological awareness through the graphing-phoning linkage—to use that sort of terminology. We believe that there must be, as part of a balanced teaching of reading, an attention to phonics. That has been our approach for many, many years. There is some suggestion from the evidence that we have collated—some of that work has come from the work of Steve Hoath and Bill Louden's research into schools—that, possibly, in recent times, if you like, the instruction of phonics has not been as well developed as it could have been. As a result of that, we have developed additional resources and supports for teachers. We have not gone, and would not go, down a line that says that phonics is the only way of teaching children to read. But phonics is an important step, and an important first step and an early step. Children must learn that linkage.

The CHAIRMAN: Can we clarify that? Is a teacher in these early years—whatever year you do it, whether it is for five-year-olds or six-year-olds—required to start language instruction by developing a basic phonemic awareness?

Mr Axworthy: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: They are required to do it? That is not an option?

Mr Axworthy: That is a clear expectation. The committee can look at our syllabus materials. I have brought some along, and we can provide a whole lot of things here. In terms of our syllabus materials, our scope and sequence, in which we tell teachers what it is that children should know at the end of K, P, 1, 2, 3 and 4, they will see a developmental sequence that includes the development of phonics, phonemic awareness, phonic awareness, and certain other things as well.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Through the Chair, is that a mandatory requirement on a teacher? Can you make available to the committee that mandatory requirement, because the teachers and principals who we are coming across do not seem to be aware of that requirement?

Mr Axworthy: We have not mandated a particular teaching style. What we —

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I am sorry, David. I am not asking for the style. You have indicated that it is mandatory for teachers to be involved in phonological awareness and the teaching of phonics. I want the education department to provide evidence of that claim because your principals and teachers are not aware of it.

Mr Axworthy: Let me be very clear so there is no misunderstanding. We have not got a mandated syllabus.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: So they can do what they like?

Mr Axworthy: No. What we have in this state is a mandated curriculum framework that goes across government, non-government and Catholic schools. For department schools only, we have created a syllabus that says that in order to meet the mandated requirements of the curriculum framework, these are the things that we expect you to be doing. We say, "These are the things that we expect our children to learn and our teachers to teach." If the member wants to say that that is mandated, or is an expectation or a mandatory requirement, we could have some discussion about it. But from the viewpoint of what we are telling our school principals, what our directors of schools are managing their school principals on, and what we would expect our school principals to be doing with their teachers, it is to ensure that the essential learnings that we believe are critical for children in any year group, as specified, are being attended to.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Does the department mandate the testing of children upon arrival at school for their phonological awareness?

Mr Axworthy: No.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: At what point will a teacher --

Mr Axworthy: I am sorry. At this point, no.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: At what point?

Mr Axworthy: Today, as of 10 June. However, we have announced that we will be doing just that as of 2010. We are currently in the business of procuring an appropriate assessment device that will be applied in preprimary. In the preprimary year there will be an assessment of what one could call children's pre-literacy skills, which will include phonemic awareness.

The CHAIRMAN: Will an individual test be applied to a child?

Mr Axworthy: To every individual child.

The CHAIRMAN: One of the concerns raised in some evidence to the committee—some schools are much more on the case in this and they are using PIPS, performance indicators in primary schools, on five-year-olds—given that 90 per cent of kids front at preprimary—

Mr Axworthy: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: — why would we not be looking at the four-year-old level rather than five-year-old level? Why would we delay that one year?

Mr Axworthy: What we want is that every child, when that child hits the compulsory attendance age, which is not P, it is 1—so it is six-and-a-half-years old—has been assessed by then. We have gone back to —

The CHAIRMAN: But you are talking about the test being at preprimary, are you not?

Mr Axworthy: At preprimary, yes; when they are attending school full time. There is no point assessing children if we cannot then do something about the results that we find.

The CHAIRMAN: I agree.

Mr Axworthy: Kindergarten is 11 hours a week at this stage. In future it will be moving to 15 hours a week. Preprimary is full time. If we assess children in preprimary then we have sufficient time. It is not about assessing children and putting them in a box and saying that they are destined to fail; it is about assessing children so that we can prevent them from failing and we can ensure that the appropriate provision is made for them.

The CHAIRMAN: It is slightly odd evidence, David, because it is actually suggesting that kindergarten is a waste of time in terms of developing —

Mr Axworthy: No, not at all.

The CHAIRMAN: You are saying that it is not enough time to do any significant developmental work.

Mr Axworthy: Sorry, no.

The CHAIRMAN: If you think about it, that is what you said.

Mr Axworthy: That is not how it was intended.

The CHAIRMAN: Think about the consequences then.

Mr Axworthy: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: The justification of not doing it is that there are not enough hours a week to make a difference. If there are not enough hours a week to make a difference, why are we bothering? I would have thought that 11 or 15 hours in a child's life could be fairly significant.

Mr Axworthy: Absolutely. You could mount an argument that we should be assessing at age two.

The CHAIRMAN: We have a four-year-old program and we have 90 per cent of kids fronting for that program.

Mr Axworthy: And we would like in that four-year-old program, as we have now developed resources, an extensive oral language program that is appropriate for four-year-olds.

I want to be very careful here because there is a tendency in educational debates to set things up as a dichotomy when they are not at all. There is some ridiculous notion that there can be either learning or enjoyment. That is an absolute nonsense. There can be learning and enjoyment, and there should be in our schools. Particularly in the area of early childhood, we often get trapped into the debate about whether it is formal learning or play learning. Through play we want learning. It is not one or the other. I do not want to set this up as being one of those sorts of arguments, especially not with my colleagues here.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Through the Chair, simply, I am in a situation where I am aware that Aboriginal education in the past 25 years has been neither enjoyable nor an educational experience. The reason I am upset about this whole thing is that I come out of a context of watching the education department preside over this disaster of Aboriginal education. I have watched teachers arrive who are unable to focus on the challenge and do not know how to do it. I have watched principals who are struggling, and there is nothing to guide them through the exercise. There is nothing mandated. It is neither an enjoyable experience for Aboriginal students nor an educational experience. It is a disaster that ends up with them in jails. With 27 years of experience in this role, I am cross about the ongoing unresolved debate and the failure of the education department to mandate something that works that is evidence based.

The CHAIRMAN: And that works for all children. Our concern is that there are children for whom play-based learning is great. They have stations for play and they will thrive and prosper. The evidence that we are getting from teachers at the pointy end—the teachers out there in the difficult schools—is that it is a luxury that is an absolute waste of time and these kids need more intensive work on the basic developmental issues, and that the immersion experience does not work for them.

David, we will get back to you, but I think perhaps we might ask the other witnesses for comment. You have heard the position put by my colleague, and the evidence. Can I say to you that when I look at the results from the schools in my area, what is going on is a bloody disgrace!

Dr Carnellor: Can I respond?

The CHAIRMAN: We need to address this. We need to question what we are doing. We are putting billions of dollars into education every year. We are not doing as well as the teachers are doing in the slums of India in terms of literacy and numeracy for some of these kids. What is going wrong? Perhaps we can get some commentary.

Dr Carnellor: Can I address the problem raised by the member for Pilbara? Three years ago I applied through every avenue available—to every government both state and federal, Aboriginal education, everything that I could possibly do—to appoint a part-time lady who I had identified as an absolutely exceptional Aboriginal early childhood educator. I could not get funding from anybody—nobody!

The CHAIRMAN: To do what? What are you talking about?

Dr Carnellor: To put into our training courses a person to work with our teacher trainees, because they are the people who, if they have the skills and knowledge, will go to these schools and do a good job. At the moment, we cannot get them to go to the schools because they do not have the knowledge.

The CHAIRMAN: What schools can they not go to? There is the issue of remote communities, but we are also looking at schools in the metropolitan area. What do you mean?

Dr Carnellor: That is right.

The CHAIRMAN: So what do you mean? They do go to schools. The schools all have their complement of teachers.

Dr Carnellor: They do not stay all that long—some of them. I just find it very difficult —

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: Can I pose a question? The evidence we are hearing is that we are getting teachers out of the universities who are going to schools and, basically, they cannot teach. They cannot teach the basics at preprimary, year 1 or year 2; they are not teaching basic English. They are not teaching the sounds, but some of these kids are going right through primary school and secondary school and are passing their tertiary entrance examination and getting into university; however, when they get to university—I have seen this myself—they have to be taken aside and taught how to write simple letters because they do not have the basics of the language or grammar or an understanding of spelling. These are very simple things. How can that be happening? It has been happening for well over 20 years, and we have never addressed it in our system. This committee is trying to address that right back to the very early years. Can you explain to me why teachers are graduating from universities and cannot teach the basics? It is not just in Indigenous schools; it is in white schools, and in every school in the state.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I think we have a witness who wants to respond.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you clarify two things that we want to know from each of the institutions? Where do you stand on this notion of direct instruction of phonemic and phonological awareness; and what do you do to skill your graduates so that they have a very good understanding of this basic task?

Dr Lee-Hammond: There are quite a few things that have come up that I would like to address. In response to that last item, at Murdoch we train students for kindergarten and preprimary to year 3 in our early childhood program. We have students who are enrolled in a primary degree, so they do English units in the primary degree. When they come to me in early childhood, we look specifically at some of Marie M. Clay's "Reading Recovery" strategies that are used very successfully in New Zealand. On entry to school, children are assessed for their phonological awareness—reading, writing, spelling, word recognition and all those sorts of thing. Our students undertake a full review of those materials; they get to use them and they know how to access them. We do lots of phonological awareness activities. One of their major assignments is to develop resources for

phonological awareness, which are things like rhymes and games, which are part of a play curriculum.

[10.30 am]

I will go now to my next point about play. I think there is a real problem in the way play is defined and the continual understanding of what that means. It is not a laissez-faire free-for-all whereby the teacher stands around drinking coffee while the kids go and do whatever they like. What we advocate in terms of play is that children need their hearts engaged as well as their minds, and young children respond to play. If parents spend their whole time at home directing their children to eat their dinner, go to their room, tidy up and do their homework, they would not get a response. However, if parents love their children and bring them into the community that is in their home, they will get a better response. It is like that in the kindergarten.

If we go down the path that the US and UK have gone down—very unsuccessfully—of making kindergarten more formal and structured, we will end up in an even worse situation. There is a lot of strong evidence from the US to support that—I sent that to Brian yesterday. It has been documented by some of the leading early childhood researchers in the world and it says that if we go down the path of testing young children in kindergarten, we will end up with a bigger problem than we have ever had. Part of the reason is that when children start kindergarten, they are at different stages of their development. In some Aboriginal communities we are looking at percentages of up to 40 per cent of children who have foetal alcohol spectrum disorder who are attending programs. Teachers are not starting with a generic group of children, and applying a one-size-fits-all phonics program is not appropriate.

We teach our students to observe children in a play context where their ability can shine. If a student comes into a strange environment—for example, an Aboriginal child attending school for the first time with a white teacher who is inexperienced—and that teacher sits that child down and makes that child do a formal test, the teacher will not get the best out of that child. If the teacher sets up experiences in which that child can show the teacher what he or she knows, what sounds he or she can make, and if the teacher sings songs and plays games that can show the teacher that he or she understands rhyme, that is a much more accurate assessment of where he or she is at. It is from that point that the teacher has to make a professional judgement about the next step. I believe that we give our students that information. However, they get a lot of pressure when they start, especially in early childhood education, from principals—I am sorry to say—who do not understand early childhood pedagogy and who insist that early childhood teachers prepare documents that are more suited to a primary curriculum. Those teachers fall apart because they start to doubt what they have learnt. They think, "This is what the principal expects; this is what the year 1 teacher expects these children can do when they get to year 1, so I had better start to make it more formal." There is no evidence that that is successful.

The CHAIRMAN: Obviously, there is some dispute about this, and I suppose it is a question of the level of formality and what can be introduced to four-year-olds and how we test them et cetera. People have been teaching reading for a long time. We would have thought, by now—recognising that children will be at different developmental levels--that there should be a pretty good, received understanding about how to go about this. What we are being told by principals is that the young teachers who are arriving at their school have no capacity and that the educational institutions are telling principals that they give them a general education and if the principals want them to teach in a particular style then it is their job to teach them! We have had one school that has told us that the deputy principal is working full time in the classroom with young teachers teaching them how to teach. Your institutions are producing students who are teaching four to eight-year-olds, but do graduate teachers come out with a defined and clear understanding of how they should teach students to read?

Dr Lee-Hammond: Certainly, but at the same time —

The CHAIRMAN: So you do?

Dr Lee-Hammond: We do, but we give them a range of strategies. We do not say, "This is how you teach reading," because there is not "a" way of teaching it.

The CHAIRMAN: Are there some basics? When someone becomes a motor mechanic, that person has to understand the basic stuff. What are the basics here? There must be some basic information. It cannot be entirely open ended. We have been writing for a few thousand years, but at least a hundred years in WA.

Dr Lee-Hammond: We do not advocate a particular phonics program like Jolly Phonics or Letterland; we do not advocate commercial programs. We give our students a three-pronged approach. We talk about semantic, syntactic and graphophonic understanding. Semantic is about reading something and what it means. If a child knows only the sound a letter makes and the child is trying to understand a sentence, that information is not necessarily going to help the child because letters make different sounds.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: How do you get to the point of children being able to read the sentence in the first place? Your assumption is that the child has the words, the letters and that sort of thing to read a sentence. How does the kid get to that point in the first place?

Dr Lee-Hammond: It varies from child to child. Some children start school reading books, while other children need a lot more assistance and support with phonological awareness. It is like a doctor having 30 patients in a waiting room and all of them are going to present with different problems. One of the teacher's roles is to diagnose where a particular student is coming from, what the student can do and where the student needs to go. Students need to understand the meaning, the grammatical structure and what the letters look and sound like in that word in that sentence in that text.

The CHAIRMAN: But not in themselves? You would contest that the first thing you do is actually teach the fundamentals of the code?

Dr Lee-Hammond: No, I would not contest that. I would argue that phonics are not the first thing that you teach. Oral language is the number one thing for phonological awareness. Sadly, what I hear a lot of teachers saying is that children present in kindergarten with very limited oral language and the teacher refers them to speech therapy and the children do not get assessed; there are no speech therapists. The children wait and wait, and some are in year 2 and they still have not seen somebody.

The CHAIRMAN: Presumably, part of the work of those people who are teaching is to develop that oral language. What I think the committee is a bit concerned about is that all these options are presented to teachers, and we all would have thought there would be something a bit more tangible. That is remembering and acknowledging that there are different levels and rates at which children are going to progress. However, the evidence that we are getting from principals is that teachers are graduating without a clear teaching strategy. They have learnt theory, but they have not got a clear teaching strategy. The fact that the department does not have a detailed syllabus—it has a curriculum framework—means that we are having to rediscover the wheel over and again.

Mr Axworthy: Can I interrupt? We do have a detailed syllabus. There is a detailed syllabus.

The CHAIRMAN: That is interesting because schools are telling us that they are developing their own.

Mr Axworthy: I can show you here.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Maybe you can table that and we can juxtapose it?

The CHAIRMAN: It does not look very detailed.

Mr Axworthy: I do not know what kind of detail you want. If I take phonological awareness of K-P, it includes word awareness, including distinguishing between --

The CHAIRMAN: But these are outcomes. They are not strategies for doing it.

Mr Axworthy: This is for teachers who are professionals to tell them what is expected to be taught to children. I will be quite clear: our expectation is that we are writing this for our professionals who have come out and who have been trained. In the teacher training institutions or the tertiary institutions, they have learnt a range of strategies in order to put this into practice. Clearly, this is not to turn a person off the street into an instant kindergarten teacher; it is not that kind of manual.

The CHAIRMAN: I understand that. We are seeing that some schools are now developing a comprehensive document that steps through what has to be done. I find this very interesting to think that you believe that teachers are coming out equipped. Obviously, when one is a first year teacher it will be more challenging—in any profession. However, it seems to us, and in the evidence given to us, that they are given this theoretical understanding of all these different strategies that are available, but they are not given a basic modus operandi of how to go in and how to make adjustments because some kids are gifted and some will be developmentally vulnerable. They are not told, "Here is a clear program; get stuck into this!"

Dr Jay: There is not just one program, which is part of the issue of the perspective that you have been given. I want to go back a couple of steps. I want to reinforce that the early childhood sector does not support, and has not for many years supported, the whole language approach. That is something that needs to be cleared up straightaway.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Does not support it?

Dr Jay: No, it has not. We have not taught it or supported it for over 10 years.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Do you oppose it?

Dr Jay: We take a balanced approach. We take the best of it, because children need to have experience of literacy within a context that makes sense to them.

I would also like to point out that the 11 hours spent in kindergarten is not a waste of time. If we believe that phonological awareness is the only thing that children need at four years of age, those four --

The CHAIRMAN: No, we are not arguing that. You cannot argue that there is no point in testing. Our point was —

Dr Jay: They are tested by the teachers as they come in. Teachers all have tools for listening and observing children and giving them activities, so they know what is their phonological awareness. We need to keep in mind that children of four years of age are not just about learning phonological awareness.

The CHAIRMAN: That was not our claim. We were concerned about the notion that you would not test four-year-olds because they were going to be in the classroom for only 11 hours a week and you could not do anything about it anyhow.

Dr Jay: You are talking about a formal sit-down, one-on-one test. We are saying that children are monitored and assessed by teachers, who have strong components of all the things that children need for learning.

I get back to Tony's point: how does a child learn to read a sentence? Members must remember that learning to read is not a linear process. First, we learn a letter, a sound, a word and then a sentence. We have to have all of those components in balance. While the teacher might be doing some focused teaching around letters and sounds on the mat session, she might be reading a story and pointing out those sounds they have talked about; she might be introducing songs that encourage children to hear the sounds in the words. My personal experience is around a four-year-old who is

particularly competent in phonological awareness, but he has been given phonological awareness tasks around words that he cannot say yet, because orally he has not developed. If we lose sight of the fact that children need a strong oral language basis to build their literacy skills on then four-year-old, kindergarten and those prior-to-school experiences are extremely important. I suggest that if we consider how important oral language is to begin with for children in Indigenous communities who might be coming to school with one, two or even three languages then we have to be careful about not demonising teachers as not doing a good job. They have lots of challenges there. That has to be taken into account. A child does not end up in jail just because he does not learn to read in kindergarten. We need to be careful about saying that.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: If you do a literacy test at the jails, you will understand what I am on about here.

Dr Jay: But more things would have contributed to that illiteracy. That is what I am trying to say.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: A significant part of it is the fact that the classroom environment is not one that takes children from an understanding that there is an oral language challenge to a pedagogical style. Within those classrooms, teachers must move from an oral language challenge to a pedagogy that works. This is a reliance by teachers on the referral of a child with an oral language challenge to a speech pathology process —

Dr Jay: It is not there.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: — that is not there. There is something wrong with the pedagogy or the systems that deliver teachers who think that the solution lies with another professional.

The CHAIRMAN: Our teaching style does not work for these kids; therefore we have to change them so they are ready for our teaching style.

[10.45 am]

Dr Jay: It is not —

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I will turn to you in a moment, but I will finish with this: in the areas that I represent, a very significant number of children arrive in the classroom with oral language challenges but there is an absence of the skill of the teachers arriving to do anything else other than the referral. They are not equipped with a pedagogy that takes them from that observation to an evidence-based strategy that delivers a response to that challenge. The reliance upon speech pathologists, where they do not exist, is not an adequate strategy. I would love your comments.

Dr Jay: I do not think they rely on speech pathologists who are not there, because if the speech pathologist is not there then the teacher still teaches the child. I would like to speak about our courses at ECU. The early childhood undergraduate program has four units of study in literacy, starting with oral language for zero to threes, looking at emergent literacy and language, going on to look at the teaching of reading and writing in the early years, and then finishing off with assessment and looking at the ESL strategies. Our whole program is about talking about the types of different strategies they can use. I am sorry I did not bring a list of those because they are extensive; in fact, there are so many that we have to choose which ones we will use and which ones we will not, and we pick out the best of those. We have always told our students and given the students the skills to produce a balanced literacy and language program that includes direct teaching and includes focused direct teaching based on their own assessments of the children. That will include oral language as well as phonics, phonological awareness, awareness around print and talk around books. Because they are early childhood specialists, they will also recognise the importance for children to practise those skills. You cannot practise skills when you are sitting in a formal class doing a work sheet or chanting back in a direct instruction approach. You need the opportunity to practise as well. We recognise that children are coming to school with many more problems than we have seen in a very long time. Some of that is around their life experiences. I have had children come to school who do not even know how to conduct a conversation because nobody has spoken

to them. It takes a lot of work to get them up to being able to orally converse, as well as teaching them to read and write at the same time. I am sitting with esteemed colleagues here —

The CHAIRMAN: Please do not believe that we do not understand the importance of oral development—we do. I guess our point is that we cannot presume that children are at a particular level and therefore a particular teaching style should apply, but, rather, a teaching style has to be developed that is going to deliver to children an education. We are putting a lot of resources into it. I go back to this point: we are not just talking about remote Aboriginal communities—they have obviously got their problems and we recognise the foetal alcohol problem—but we are looking here at schools in the metropolitan area at which up to 50 per cent of kids are not reaching the minimum standard.

Dr Jay: But if the teaching was the only factor that influenced that then I would —

The CHAIRMAN: No; it is not the only factor.

Dr Jay: That is what we need to keep in mind.

The CHAIRMAN: Of course it is not the only factor. We do not see massive social failure but we see massive failure in the school. Obviously, we recognise that there are things that need to be done to improve parenting. It cannot just be that. The levels of non-performance are so great. Do you not query yourself: "If I am getting these results, what can we do with our teaching?" Are we equipping these people to teach?

Ms Mears: At Notre Dame we are very aware of poor literacy standards at all levels of education. We see this, from what you are saying, with our tertiary students. We question: how have these students gained entry to a tertiary institution when their literacy skills are poor? We congratulate this committee on actually raising the issue and looking for ways of improving literacy across the board. On entry, every single student who comes into Notre Dame, into education, must sit a literacy test. They have to get a 70 per cent pass, whether or not they have done TEE. The TEE may be a very good course but it does not address functional literacy, from what we are seeing coming into tertiary institutions. If these students do not get 70 per cent on this entry literacy test, they are immediately enrolled in a literacy competency unit. They must pass that. They can have a second go; if they do not, their course is terminated. We are really working at improving our students' literacy; so much so that we have introduced a policy that, on any assignment, students cannot gain a grade higher than the literacy component. If they have got a distinction, high distinction, for, say, content, presentation et cetera, and if their literacy is a pass or a C—a credit—that is the only grade that they can get. It might sound a bit draconian, but it is so important. We want to get this through to the students.

The CHAIRMAN: Is this in the educational faculty?

Ms Mears: Yes, in education.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: Over many years I have seen teachers who are not teaching English but are teaching maths, home economics or many other subjects in which they use answers to questions that are essay types or need some reasonable grammar to actually answer it. Many times those teachers do not correct the grammar or spelling in those things—why is that? They say that it is the English department's domain.

Ms Mears: Yes, or "It's not my problem. They should have taught them in primary." As a parent myself, that really annoyed me when my children would come home from school with a society and environment assignment with all these spelling and grammar mistakes. Of course, as a mother, I would sit down and circle and circle and go through them. I think with the universities, and particularly at our university, like Edith Cowan, we have four discrete units on English throughout the four-year degree. It is not just early childhood. We have the same four units in early childhood and primary because we believe that primary teachers need the skills to recognise the learning difficulties in the area of English. They also need the strategies to help that student move forward.

However, they are not lumped together. They may have the same content, but the early childhood people have specific workshops and tutorials in which they get the strategies that are appropriate for that age group—and the primary people do as well. On top of those four units, which cover everything from grammar, semantics, phonics, oral language, viewing, technology and writing, we cover the whole lot. Like everybody has said, we believe in a balanced, evidence-based approach to the teaching of English. I do not like to just say reading because it is much more than that.

The CHAIRMAN: Numeracy as well?

Ms Mears: Writing.

Dr Lee-Hammond: Speaking and listening.

Ms Mears: On top of those four units, our students have an option of specialising in either S and E, maths or English, which means that they take an extra four units in those areas. If they choose English—because it is a choice depending upon which area they are interested in—they could come out with eight units of English.

The CHAIRMAN: Is teaching of reading a compulsory unit?

Ms Mears: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: That is a compulsory unit?

Ms Mears: Yes. The four units include one called Essential English and it looks at their personal literacy—what is a verb; how do you teach about verbs; how do you teach grammar? They have reading and viewing, they have children's literature and they have oral language and writing. It is very comprehensive. I believe that the teaching of reading is very complex. I think that teachers need to be given the flexibility to implement strategies that are well grounded in theory but are appropriate to the needs of the children. The needs of the children are very different even in the one class.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: In teaching zero to three-year-olds and zero to four-year-olds, what is your strategy for teaching that age group? There is play based and there is —

Dr Jay: For teaching reading, for teaching writing?

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: For teaching them to get to the stage at which they can actually read simple books that a child of that age would read.

Dr Jay: Significantly, across early childhood you can see the growth from zero to eight is massive in terms of literacy development. But, certainly, if we are really focusing on that age group and not three to four, the best thing that can happen for children who are zero to three—this message needs to be given very clearly to parents—is the more you talk to your children, the more you read to your children, tell stories, sing songs and do the oral language ground work, the more those foundation blocks are put in place so that the children grow up understanding and hearing their language and are comfortable with their language and then are also comfortable with the notion of books and the notion that when we say something and write it down somebody else can read it. That is the code. The verbal code is put into a written code. It is that life experience that they need to then bring to the three-year-olds when they start to get interested in letters and sounds. The parents or the adults in their lives begin to talk around the books, the pictures and the words—"Here is the same letter that your name starts with. This is the way I write 'mummy'" and so on. For zero to three, it is very much immersing them in as much language and literacy experience as we can. When we get more towards the three, four and five-year-olds we really need to start to build on their letter sound knowledge, their phonological awareness, their understanding of the concepts of print—stop me if it is getting boring—and how people use the written word in daily life. They need to see role models, people reading and writing around them —

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: Can I stop you there. Now we are at the point at which children come to formal school and we are expecting that the teacher is going to be able to teach them. If the children

get from zero to four or zero to five and they have not had the very basics, how is that addressed? Is that when we start talking about specialist teachers and speech therapists? In fact, one of my schools is telling me that children are actually showing up at school and they have not had basic toilet training.

Dr Lee-Hammond: There are so many issues here that are very complex. I think it is a really tall order to ask an individual teacher to address the raft of problems that a child might present with. Going back to your earlier comment about the teacher being able to respond without calling on specialist help, I will use the analogy of the GP again. If I go to my doctor and I am not feeling well but I am not sure why, the first thing he does is refer me for blood tests. I can get them that day. I do not go on a waiting list for two years to find out whether I have a blood disorder. If I do, he is going to refer me to a specialist because he acknowledges that there is a limit to what he can do within his capacity as my GP. I think we expect far too much from individual teachers when the home and community supporting the child are really making it difficult.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Can I tell you what I am expecting of the school environment? I expect that it have an evidence-based response to that classroom available to the teacher, the teacher knows how to draw on that, and that that evidence base is for the best outcome for the largest number of students in that classroom. At the moment, when classrooms present with large numbers of children with oral language difficulties, the teachers appear to be left with an education that is a general education, a range of approaches, but no confidence about that which is the best evidence-based approach to respond to that set of circumstances. They do not have the pedagogy for it. The associate professor used the word "balanced"—I am not after a balanced approach because I do not know what you want to balance it with other than the evidence. Where is the evidence for what works for the largest number of students? Does the teacher simply draw on his or her educational experience? Is the teacher required by the education department to deploy that in that classroom instead of me going from classroom to classroom across regional Western Australia, with teachers who have the best will but are not equipped with the training or the requirement to teach in a particular way that works? We have had evidence to suggest that there is an evidence-based approach to this but it is resisted in the system.

[11.00 am]

Ms Mears: There is not just one way; it is a combination. When I talk about "balance", you are not going to have just phonics and you are not just going to have whole language; it needs to have some aspects of each of those elements in your approach to teaching.

The CHAIRMAN: We wonder whether or not there really is enough activity going on out there, by the teachers' college and by the education department, looking at which systems are working and in what context. We understand totally. This is not our main approach. Our main approach is developing and strengthening parents, getting more language-rich environments and getting parents more aware of their developmental needs. We absolutely understand that. We are not saying that we are going to lumber all of this onto teachers. The clear evidence we are getting is that there is not enough skilling of teachers who are coming into these environments. It is great to train teachers who are going to be able to work well in leafy green suburbs, but there should also be a recognition that many of our suburbs are not completely dysfunctional. These are people who work and pay taxes, and their kids are going to school and are not learning to read and write. I want to know how active the education department and the educational institutions are in going out there and looking at this. Are they going into Armadale schools and saying, "God, real failure here! What has gone wrong?" rather than saying, "We've got to have five million speech pathologists." In some of my schools, 57 per cent of kids have been resolved to speech therapy. I do not think a great genetic mutation has taken place in Armadale. If every child is going to need a speech pathologist, we are going to go bankrupt pretty soon. There must be some way. Are you going out there and saying,

"When we've got kids at this level of language development, which we would like to be working to help, what is the best way to teach these kids?" What sort of research are you doing?

Dr Jay: At the moment Edith Cowan is involved in partnership research based on the growth of schools work that Bill Louden did and released last year. We got funding through DEEWR to look very specifically at early literacy development. We call it the field study. We are working in eight low socioeconomic schools that are in the AISWA group.

The CHAIRMAN: In the what group?

Dr Jay: AISWA—independent schools.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Which has low socioeconomic schools as well.

Dr Jay: They do. We are working in Kwinana, we are working in Middle Swan, and we are working in Thornlie—places like that. We are hoping that that study will develop into something bigger because it is just a pilot at the moment to develop resources and some locally generated research that will help to do exactly what you are asking, which is about screening the children. We have been in and screened the children in these preprimary schools. Then we are sitting with the teachers and helping them with focused intervention in early literacy development. That is also looking at phonics and at oral language and phonological awareness, concepts of print, and all of the different parts that we have been talking about. That is one area of research that we are involved in.

Can I also mention at this point that we have a Fogarty Learning Centre based at Joondalup that is supported through the Fogarty Foundation. It offers scholarships to teachers—in-service teachers, not preservice teachers—to undertake further studies in literacy teaching. They can do a graduate certificate in literacy or a graduate certificate in learning difficulties. We are very keen to support in-service teachers and upskill them. That is a very successful program. The Fogarty Learning Centre also offers reading recovery for in-service teachers. They can do a further qualification in reading recovery strategies that Libby has already mentioned. We also offer a literacy coaching program for our undergraduates in both early childhood and primary education. A group of preservice teachers is trained by the reading recovery teacher and children are brought to the centre, they are assessed and they are coached individually to assist with literacy. We are extremely concerned and we are also quite proactive in helping to raise the literacy teaching and the teacher quality in this state.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you get feedback from principals? As part of your job, as part of the ethos of your institution, do you go out and talk to principals about the performance of —?

Dr Jay: Me personally, no; but the Fogarty Learning Centre does monitor those programs. We have very deep and sustained engagement with schools' principals and teachers. They work in partnership there. Part of the DEEWR funding that came through for literacy and numeracy pilots last year, working with the department, is a project called the Para project. It is working with paraprofessionals and preservice teachers in individual coaching in schools. Up to 20 of our early childhood and primary undergraduates—so they are getting specific training—are working in places like north Balga, Balga and Girrawheen. They are going into schools two half-days a week and helping to support teachers and also learning about very specific coaching for literacy and numeracy. The feedback has been excellent on that program, too.

Mr Axworthy: That program has two parts. It is the training of paraprofessionals to look at how paraprofessionals can work with individual students rather than full classes of students to engage. One point you mentioned was the teachers before they have graduated; the other part of that is Indigenous education workers. That is another part of the program whereby, again, through training, we are working with individual children and individual families. Again, there is some research going on to try to increase things. I would have to say that as a department we are concerned about literacy. We were very concerned about the NAPLAN tests. I want to caution that that was the first

year that there had been a national test. Typically, the first year of any national testing program produces some anomalies. We were especially concerned that our year 3 students in the NAPLAN test performed so poorly because historically our year 3 students, on tests of reading and writing, nationally have performed highly. We are concerned. We have looked at possible explanations. We have taken on board many of the recommendations that have come out of both the national and the local research reports. We have had reports nationally, both in literacy and numeracy, but in terms of literacy the Rowe report that came out looked at issues to do with literacy and drew attention again to possibly a lack of phonic teaching and phonic awareness by teachers of —

The CHAIRMAN: Whose report was that?

Mr Axworthy: This was a national report that came out. Professor Rowe from the ACER was the chair of that group.

The CHAIRMAN: He identified that as probably one of the reasons?

Mr Axworthy: As an issue, which is consistent with reports that have come out of America and the States along the same lines. Whilst every state and every territory and every system talks about a balanced approach and talks about the importance of phonics, maybe phonics was not given as much oomph as it could have been. We have responded to that. We had our own review here. We got from Bill Louden's report a series of —

The CHAIRMAN: When did that come out?

Ms Mears: It was 2006.

Dr Jay: It is called "Teaching for Growth".

The CHAIRMAN: Hold on. You are talking about your response to the NAPLAN results that came out last year or this year?

Mr Axworthy: The NAPLAN results came out last year.

The CHAIRMAN: Bill Louden's report was?

Mr Axworthy: There are two reports—one was the —

The CHAIRMAN: It was the earlier one.

Dr Jay: "In Teachers' Hands"—is that the one, David?

Mr Axworthy: "Teaching for Growth" is his latest piece of work, which came out at the beginning of this year. It was a follow-up to other work that he had done previously.

The CHAIRMAN: But it tried to devise a response to the NAPLAN?

Mr Axworthy: No, not specifically. We had already commissioned his work to look particularly at early childhood areas. Basically, his research was to look at where we could see highly effective preprimary teachers, or teachers who were producing highly effective results, and at where there were less effective results and to try to look at what it was about the teaching style, the pedagogy—whatever you want to call it—that was occurring in highly successful classes compared with those classes that were less successful.

The CHAIRMAN: What were the fundamentals of his findings in that?

Mr Axworthy: Again, in those classes that had good results, we had a strong emphasis on phonological awareness, oral language and the teaching of synthetic phonics.

The CHAIRMAN: This is the evidence base?

Mr Axworthy: This is the evidence base.

The CHAIRMAN: Then what did your department do?

Mr Axworthy: The follow-up to that has been that we have produced, as supplementary material to that broader curriculum, sequence documents—quite detailed information about what children should be learning and what teachers should be teaching. I will take you through an example of graphophonic knowledge in K. There are some teacher notes. Here is a sequence of sounds that need to be taught as in blah blah blah blah. Here are some suggested strategies and here are some resources and lesson plans that can help you. All of that is linked on the website for teachers to be able to see what is expected, in its broader sense, that children should be able to learn these things. Here is a way of sequencing my teaching program to teach those things. Here are some lesson plans and some examples of how to teach those things. There are some resources that show things.

In addition, we have commissioned Dr Mary Rohl, who worked with Bill Louden on this, to develop a program, which I have here, about the specific aspect of phonics in K and P. However, it is not to be assumed that what we are saying is, "If you did all of that, that would be sufficient." It is not to say that you would need to explicitly teach all of this to every child because some children will pick it up automatically. This is the problem with mandating an approach. If you like, there is a mandated approach. The mandated approach is that teachers should have a balanced approach to this. They need to have an emphasis on this bit, this bit and this bit. By those "bits", I mean the oral, the phonemic awareness, the graphophonic connection, the semantics and the syntactics. They need to address all of those things in their program. Some children will struggle with one bit of that. If they are struggling with it, you do not just move on; you have to be quite explicit. That is when you get into the direct teaching. There is no argument from me. The concern about mandating something is what we have done in the past—we have mandated a "bit". Really what I am saying is that we have got to mandate the whole thing—the whole bit.

The CHAIRMAN: We are not saying have every minute of a teacher's day scripted, but if we have done that work that you have said—gone into the classrooms and worked out where they do well and what is the difference between the ones who do well and the ones who do not do well—why do we not do what some of the schools are doing? It does require enormous resources to do it—to actually create a document that a young teacher can get. It is not playing around on the web, pulling a bit here and pulling a bit there; it is providing a basic plan for a couple of hours' instruction each day. We had evidence from the regional director in the Pilbara region. The point we are concerned about is that schools now have to put together these manuals, but there will be individual kids. There will be very bright kids and there will be very challenging kids who will need other attention, but for the basic strategy in the classroom, give them the document based on absolute best practice.

[11.15 am]

Mr Axworthy: I would argue that it is there; it is given to teachers. Every new teacher that comes into our system is given that package on their induction day.

The CHAIRMAN: But they cannot go in and say, "Okay, on day one this is what I'm going to do; on day two this is what I'm going to do".

Dr Jay: But then that would assume that every child in the state is exactly the same.

The CHAIRMAN: No, it does not. What you are saying is that every teacher has to reinvent it; they have to come up with their own plan.

Dr Jay: No, they do not.

Dr Lee-Hammond: I think it is very concerning, to take an approach like that—very concerning.

The CHAIRMAN: Obviously each teacher has to have a plan. How do they develop their plan? They have a plan for at least a term in advance.

Dr Jay: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Most teachers I have seen have a plan for a year.

Dr Jay: Yes, and they will have a timetable that will include some directed instruction with children sitting on the mat in the kindergarten or preprimary, or sitting at their desks.

The CHAIRMAN: I am saying that each individual teacher is required to develop their own plan.

Dr Lee-Hammond: Yes, and that is absolutely appropriate because every group of children is different. So the first thing the teacher does —

Dr Jay: What works in the Pilbara is not going to work here.

Dr Lee-Hammond: Sorry, but if I say to my students, "When you start kindergarten, on day one this is what you do", that might work for some kids, but be totally inappropriate for others.

The CHAIRMAN: Would that not work? Any plan that the teacher develops is going to be fruitful. If I am in a particular school and I go and develop my plan, there will be some kids that will be at either end of the spectrum.

Dr Lee-Hammond: Right. One of the things that we spend a lot of time in our course on is giving students strategies for assessing where the children are in their class, so that they can develop a program that is appropriate. They might do something generic to begin with, but it would be very inappropriate for them to continue to do that because they are getting information and feedback from the kids that that is obviously too difficult, or this bit's missing. It is that diagnostic thing that happens. It would look completely different in Cottesloe from how it would look in Carnarvon.

The CHAIRMAN: Do we put a first-year graduate out in Carnarvon and she has to work all this out?

Dr Lee-Hammond: No, because she has had the preparation during her course to know how to do it.

The CHAIRMAN: No, because she has to work out a plan; she is not given a plan stating, "This is a plan that is appropriate for the school in Carnarvon".

Ms Mears: We hope that when our students leave university they will have confidence because of the strategies and the evidence-based research that they have been exposed to, and they can then implement that in the classroom. I hope they would feel confident.

Dr Jay: That would be around how to develop that program from day one. I have worked and looked at schools in the Kimberley, and you could not get those children to sit on the mat for two hours—you just could not. It is not appropriate. You would need a specific program that would see them doing focused work, mixed in with doing active work and then mixed in with doing focused work, and our students will definitely understand and know that.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Are you surprised that we have received evidence from principals that are receiving teachers on arrival from the universities who they are having to teach how to teach?

Dr Carnellor: Yes, I am.

Dr Jay: I am, too. Actually, I would like to know who those teachers are.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: You have not received that feedback?

The Witnesses: No.

Ms Mears: In fact just recently we reviewed our suite of English units based on the NAPLAN testing, the WALNA previously, and the low standard of literacy in Western Australian schools. We used the national English framing paper as a source, we used Bill Louden's work, and we used the national inquiry into teaching literacy. During that process we actually brought in tutor teachers and principals from our prac schools and interviewed them and asked, "How do you find our students on prac?" Our students have 32 weeks of prac, which is a good —

The CHAIRMAN: We have had some positive feedback about the approach that your institution is taking.

Ms Mears: Thank you. We brought those teachers and principals in and asked them, "How are you finding our students?", and probably one of the most frequent responses was that they said that they felt the students were confident in the teaching of literacy, however it was their personal literacy of some that needed attention, and we have tried to build those recommendations in.

But I think what we have to realise, too, is that we produce teachers—to use the word Jenny's used when we had a conversation the other day—that are fledgling teachers. Teaching is a craft that will develop over a long period of time. All teachers, regardless of whether they are first year out teachers or teachers with a lot of experience, need time to revisit pedagogy and to reflect on current trends and issues and what is good practice. Therefore, I think that ongoing professional development is so important, and I believe that the systems and sectors need to put resources into this ongoing development.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: My difficulty is that for most of the schools in my electorate, the teachers are there for maybe 12 months and then they leave, so that if they have not got the skill when they arrive, by the time they learn at the pedagogy, or the craft, if that is a 12-month experience, then I will not see them again and they will be somewhere else.

Ms Mears: They do have skills when they arrive; I am convinced that they have skills.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I am sure that they do.

Dr Jay: Are you saying that is all of the teachers in the schools in your electorate?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: No.

Dr Jay: And all of the new graduates?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: No, absolutely not. I am saying that there is an education crisis across regional Western Australia.

The CHAIRMAN: That is right—across Western Australia.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I am trying to detect that in the department and I am trying to detect it in the universities. I want you to understand that there is a crisis.

Dr Jay: Yes. We send our students out to those schools all year, and we know schools well.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: In a situation where the policymakers, or the parliamentarians, are aware of the crisis, we are trying to bring that crisis to your attention and we hope that there is some focus on the issues raised from the evidence base and some of the evidence that we have received as a committee; people that are suggesting that strategies which have been proved to be reliable in the past need to be redeployed in the present. We cannot detect any universal experience of that being on offer.

Dr Jay: Are you talking about a particular program that one person is selling?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: No.

The CHAIRMAN: No, we are not. I am just a bit concerned that our concerns are being trivialised. Of course we understand that within any classroom there is a range of abilities, but that does not stop there being teaching syllabuses having a direction. We also are aware that Carnarvon will be different from Cottesloe. But we are saying that putting first-year graduates out and saying, "Will you develop all of your own teaching materials? We'll give you some guidance", is naive, particularly when students come into a school for a year. It is not beyond the wit of the department and the professionals to develop—just as they do for motor mechanics; if you are working on a Holden, this is what you do; if you are working on an Audi, this is what you do—a basic, detailed strategy that is set down for this school or this cluster of schools. There will be a range of variables to take into account, but there are socioeconomic constants which will enable the strategy to state, "This is an approach that works for this school. We are going to class this school as this type of school, and this is a program that we want you to use for those first couple of hours in the day". As

you say, teachers will become more sophisticated as their craft develops, but we are not seeing the teachers that so often are coming into these difficult schools for the first couple of years before they can get a transfer to a leafy green area, and quite manifestly the quality of education that is being delivered is not working.

We know that the schools that are starting to do well have developed that detailed instructional manual. We would like to know why we cannot do that in a more systematic way, to provide guidance to these young teachers.

Dr Lee-Hammond: Can I comment on that? I think what schools are doing in terms of developing a program for their school in that context is entirely appropriate. I do not believe it is the role of universities to prepare students for every possible context—how many students do we have in government schools in Western Australia?

Mr Axworthy: Approximately 250 000.

Dr Lee-Hammond: It is not an achievable task, in a four-year university degree, to prepare students for every possible scenario and give them a program for each.

Dr Jay: But we do give them strategies that they can choose from. I would be extremely surprised if a new graduate walked into a classroom and said, "I do not know what to do".

The CHAIRMAN: No, but if a first year graduate goes to Carnarvon Primary School and is there for one year, she develops a plan; then she goes and next year a new first year comes in.

Dr Jay: But that is not the universities.

Dr Lee-Hammond: The school should be providing an orientation to that area for the first-year graduate. I have worked in some rural and remote schools where the teachers have no induction or cultural awareness about the people they are working with. But I cannot do that from Perth, because I do not know that community, but the school that is there has a responsibility to prepare students for that situation.

Dr Jay: I think the department has long recognised the role of mentors for new graduates, and they have got a very strong program in place.

Dr Lee-Hammond: Yes, definitely.

Dr Jay: Just the fact that we recognise that new graduates need mentors shows that we do not expect them to have every single skill when they leave university. I think that is an important point to make.

Now, you referred to the schools in Armadale, and I think that is a very good example of us going back to that school environment and recognising that it is not just about teacher quality; some of it is about teacher quality but some of it is about resources and how they are deployed. Some of it is about education assistance; some of it is about the ongoing training that teachers have taken on board; some of it is about those school structures that you talked about and the programs that are available; sometimes schools make a conscious decision to take a particular approach. Maybe they are some of the questions that need to be asked.

Mr Axworthy: And some of it is about attendance.

Dr Jay: Some of it is about the community, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Referring to the resourcing issue you mentioned, I know that when we were in government, literacy was a problem. We put a lot of resources into these schools to improve literacy and try to get the teaching of it right, but the impact was very minimal.

Dr Jay: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Then the question is have we gotten to the source of the problem. Speech therapy cannot be the only solution.

The Witnesses: No.

Dr Jay: No, I do not think it is. It is for particular children; it is not for all children.

The CHAIRMAN: Except it is getting to the absurd state now that over 50 per cent of kids from one side of the railway line in Armadale have been referred for speech therapy. That is never going to be achievable.

Dr Jay: But is that a question back to the school, an accountability-type question?

The CHAIRMAN: It was a question back to, for certain socioeconomic clusters which do not change year from year, whether or not we need to have a different approach to the way in which classrooms are being operated.

Dr Jay: If we had a specific program, though, there are no guarantees that a particular program will be able to counterbalance all of those other things that we have talked about as well. It has got to be our responsibility to train the teachers and produce good quality new graduates. I believe that within the constraints of our four-year program we do that very well. I then think that on top of that there are the other layers of things that we need to look at.

The CHAIRMAN: But if we return to the research that David was talking about, it worked out which classrooms performed well and which did not perform well. It worked out what was successful and what was not successful. Do the educational institutions scour that research and ask themselves how they can adapt?

Dr Jay: Yes, and our research is based on those results. The field study is based on that particular bit of research. We have actually recreated it with those schools to see what we can do about it.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: The evidence the committee has received from Dr Steven Heath of SPELD at the University of Western Australia was that there were some approaches that could be adopted for pedagogy that the evidence suggests will produce very positive results in a classroom environment if mandated.

Dr Jay: They are very directed phonics approaches. We have all said that we believe that there is a place for that, but it should not be the only thing that happens.

Ms Mears: If I could just quote from the recommendations from the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, it recommended very strongly that there should be —

> **… systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction —**

Dr Jay: We agree with that.

Ms Mears: But the recommendation further states that, equally, teachers should provide a balanced approach —

> **… that supports the development of oral language, vocabulary, grammar, reading fluency, comprehension …**

as well as writing and technology.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Does that quote include the word "but"?

Ms Mears: I imagine; I do not know. I did not take it straight out of the report.

Dr Lee-Hammond: There is also another paper that was sent through yesterday to Brian, which is a really excellent submission from 2005 to the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. I would really encourage you to read it.

The CHAIRMAN: Which one is that?

Dr Lee-Hammond: It is headed "Submission to the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy", by Emmitt, Hornsby and Wilson. This outlines very clearly what we are talking about, I think. If you go to page 13 of that document—it is a very, very well written and strong paper.

The CHAIRMAN: I wonder if they were directly taught!

Dr Jay: Bound to have been!

Dr Lee-Hammond: The fourth paragraph on page 13 refers to opportunities for teaching phonics in a context. The fourth paragraph states —

> The whole curriculum provides ongoing opportunities and contexts for the teaching of phonics; fifteen or twenty minutes a day on an isolated program can never achieve the same result. An externally determined teaching sequence cannot cater for the diverse needs found in any one classroom. It's the teacher making professional decisions at the point of need which ensures relevancy of the teaching and maximises success for learners.

For me and my colleagues at Murdoch who teach in the English program, that is where we are coming from. This paper outlines strategies, and there is a sequence in it about the ways to approach a procedure for teaching modelling and demonstrating reading and writing strategies for children, and then how to teach children, through shared practice, about constructing text until they become—well, it talks about mastery of those things. I think the strategies are in place, and it is —

[11.30 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: But they are obviously not working.

Dr Lee-Hammond: No. That is really concerning for us, because we are all very passionate about it and feel the weight of the responsibility of what we are doing and take it very seriously. I have grappled over this and lost sleep over it because I can see children that I have worked with on research projects over the years failing in school. There are also some fundamental things about the more formal strategies that actually alienate kids. A lot of children are disengaged at a very early stage from school because they are made to sit and write on worksheets.

The CHAIRMAN: That is interesting. One of the schools we went to visit was Challis in my electorate, which has, in my view, very enlightened and very switched-on teachers who appear to be achieving better results than other schools in a similar socioeconomic group, although they are not happy with their results. But they say that their children are responding better if they are left in a sort of unstructured environment—I think that is what they were saying. They also took the view that these kids are coming with such a level of need that they needed such enhancement that—I do not think they were just talking about worksheets—direct teaching was absolutely necessary to give these kids any chance of catching up.

Dr Lee-Hammond: I would not disagree with that one bit. I am not saying that is not right. Direct teaching is part of what teachers need to do; nobody would shy away from that.

The CHAIRMAN: It is a question of balance, though, is it not?

Ms Mears: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: I note in this report that you stated that compared to OECD results, we are doing really well. We were earlier discussing the evidence we got from the educational specialists who stated that that story is not quite correct, and that, firstly, Australia is slipping, and, secondly, that what Australia has got is this very long tail. Whilst, on average, we are doing okay, the equity issue is really important. This is what our focus is on.

Mr Axworthy: Seriously, that is not quite accurate. That was the situation with the results of the OECD PISA testing the time before last; in the more recent PISA testing, Australia's tail was much shorter and comparable with other similar countries.

The CHAIRMAN: We will follow that up because that was not the evidence we were given.

Mr Axworthy: It is different from Finland, where there is quite noticeably a remarkable similarity between all schools because it is a state system and there is no independent system. But in the Australian context, the tail and the amount of equity that is now being shown has improved, because

there is a scale that they use about the notion of benefit and equity. In the last round of testing Australia was assessed on the scale as being both a high achiever and having a high equity, so I just point that out.

The CHAIRMAN: We will double-check that; thank you for that. But WA did actually do worse than the national standard, did it not?

Mr Axworthy: Sorry, not on the OECD PISA testing; WA did the best of all of the states, in actual fact, second only to the ACT. That is the PISA testing. On the NAPLAN testing that you are talking about which takes place in years 3, 5, 7 and 9, we did not do as well; we were below the Australian average. We performed better than Queensland and better than the Northern Territory consistently across all the various things, but below the Australian average because of being below New South Wales and Victoria.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: Have you done any research or encountered any research that shows that for kids who have not had the oral language at home and have not developed to the stage where they can come into a school and pick up and start learning through the systems that are in place, that for them direct teaching actually lifts their level at a faster rate than if you just left them in a classroom where they have to catch up themselves?

Dr Jay: Not specifically about direct instruction, but there is a lot of work done in England that is longitudinal now called the EPPE study, which looked at the effect of quality early childhood programs and their impact on children's learning. They did not only look at direct instruction, but they acknowledged that it was part of a high-quality early childhood program.

Dr Lee-Hammond: The learning environment is so important. The Challis example is a good one because what they have done really well at Challis is develop relationships with families. In the research I have done in rural schools with Aboriginal families, we have had results that showed a 20 per cent increase in school attendance of this particular cohort of kids whose parents we have worked really hard with to develop relationships with the teachers. The overall attendance at the school has gone down, but this group of kids' attendance has gone up 20 per cent. It is about the relationship between the teacher and the family. From the information we are collecting in this study, it appears that that has a more profound impact on how well the children achieve at school than any other thing.

The CHAIRMAN: It is interesting you say that, because after having worked on that, particularly in the last two years, they give very great emphasis to the development of a very highly structured curriculum that guides these teachers, particularly in the literacy and numeracy area—they are not talking about oral—as to precisely how they will deliver the education. There is not a situation where each first and second year graduate is coming out and floundering and having to go to websites and cutting and pasting and putting together a program.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: They also noticed graduates with uneven experience coming from different universities. Challis has had the experience that some universities produce teachers with the best capacity to flourish in that environment, and others do not. That is evidence we have also received from another region. That leads me back to the question to be put to the universities. I am seeing that teachers are coming from all of these places into our schools; I am hoping that this dialogue, just as it helps me to hear from you, it will also be helping you and will inform our report.

Ms Mears: Yes, yes.

Dr Jay: We have to recognise the partnership between schools and the university as well and work on that whole issue. We have a strong partnership program, but it is also very difficult for us to partner with the Pilbara, which is a long distance away, at a very deep level, as we do with schools in the Swan district or the West Coast district; we are always in their schools researching that sort of stuff.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: We first started this because we were interested in children aged zero to three years old. Having, at my age, my own 22-month-old child —

The CHAIRMAN: Stop boasting!

Mr I.M. BRITZA: I am hopeless! But it has made me pick up more than what I did with my first two children 30 years ago. I have listened to what you have said, and I am sorry that it has been confrontational because that has not been our heart. What has happened is that what we have seen on the coalface has been almost a completely different picture to what we are hearing from you. There was a joking comment made by either a teacher or a principal who said, "We hide our manual around here when testers come". It was only a jovial comment, but that is indicative of teachers going back to what is tried and true because they have found that what they have been learning is not practical. For me, that has formed a question, and that is why we have needed to hear your views. We have not meant it to be confrontational because we just saw this, and from my perspective we had to hear the other side of the story because what we were hearing was contradictory to what we have heard today.

Ms Mears: We appreciate that, and we are very pleased to have had this opportunity to address it. As I said at the very beginning, whatever we can do collectively to improve literacy standards, not only in Western Australia but nationally, we are very, very keen to be able to improve those standards.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: Libby just mentioned that if relationships are fostered with parents the attendance and the performance increases significantly. To what extent do the universities educate their student teachers to involve the parents? You mentioned the partnership between schools and universities, but the learning experience is a partnership between the parents, the teachers and the student.

Dr Lee-Hammond: Yes, I agree.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: To what extent is that taught in your course?

Dr Lee-Hammond: It is very heavily emphasised in our course. Unfortunately, what students see when they go out on prac, for example, is that in pre-primary parent involvement is very often for them to come in and cut up the fruit. That is considered parent involvement. When I try to explain to students that it can look different to that, they do not see it operating when they are on prac. They think it is a pie-in-the-sky idea. For example, as with the project I have done, if parents were brought on board and shown some of the strategies that the teachers were using in classrooms, they might say, "Wow! Now I can help my child with their homework. I don't feel like an idiot when I'm trying to help them read a book. I know what things I need to point out". It is like a chicken and egg thing, because whilst we might be advocating things, if students do not see them in practice and there is no particular emphasis on it in the school, then it undermines the good work we are trying to do.

The CHAIRMAN: Our focus is on the areas where things are not working, so do you support the idea of programs for children aged zero to three years old whereby parents are brought to the school site and given support in developing and understanding how they communicate with their child and how they stimulate their child's development? Do you think that is the sort of intervention required? Also on that: there is a move to make preprimary a compulsory year; do you think that would be of benefit? Also, do you think we should be having a three-year-old kindergarten facility in areas where there is clear underperformance?

Dr Jay: Can I respond, and then maybe Libby can? We actually think that the three-year-old groups are a great way to contact parents and to support parents. I have a small research project working with Aboriginal playgroups in urban areas, and I am a little bit concerned sometimes that they are always to be seen on school sites. Parents access services in many different forms, and I think we need to respect that they might or might not be comfortable, but they should still have access to

those groups. I strongly urge this committee to recommend that those groups are resourced properly, because at the moment we are seeing them mushroom into schools; we think the teachers are fantastic, but they are doing it for nothing and they are putting in their time and energy.

My view on the pre-primary year being made a compulsory year is that considering that 90 per cent of children attend pre-primary anyway, at this point, in terms of resourcing, I do not know that it would make that much difference to make it compulsory. I do not see that bringing it on as a compulsory year will make that much difference. However, we need to, once again, make sure that it is understood that it is not the first very formal year of school, and that it has elements which allow children at that developmental level a time to play and time to investigate, a time to talk, a time to practice skills and a time to be taught. Once again, it must be appropriate for the group that is there.

Ms Mears: I would like to support Jenny's comments about the need for funding and resources. The Catholic system has introduced three-year-olds into schools.

[11.45 am]

My real concern is that because it is not funded and the parents are paying it is children in low socioeconomic areas who really need this stimulation and support who are missing out.

Dr Lee-Hammond: Finland has an excellent model with fantastic services for children under three and no explicit formal teaching is done until the child is seven. Finland is leading the world in literacy because the children are having life experiences that they can then use to inform the reading and writing that they do. The children see reading and writing as a big deal and look forward to going to school to learn something that they do not know. They are not fatigued by having had "ay" sounds like "a" flogged at them since they were two.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Do you know how that applies to the experiences of the Laplanders in Finland?

Dr Lee-Hammond: With the Sami?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Yes.

Dr Lee-Hammond: They are struggling like the Aboriginal people in Australia.

The CHAIRMAN: Although that philosophy works well for middle class language-rich people, we are concerned about the many people who have been let down by the process.

Dr Carnellor: I just think that our responsibility is to make sure that our students have a suite of strategies and the ability to look at individual schools and children and apply the best of what they have learnt. I will leave these documents here for you. We have tried to provide a list of ways and things that teachers can do to teach reading. We tell them it may not work for one student but it may work for another—try it.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Earlier I was trying to say to you that the evidence that we have heard suggests that an unsystematic eclectic approach to the teaching of literacy and language is the problem. That is, providing teaching students with the opportunity to treat their teaching classroom as a delicatessen from which they can pull down any range of options that are not necessarily evidence-based, is the problem. I am sorry that you are summarising your concluding remarks in that way because the evidence that we have heard is that there are some solid evidence-based approaches that can be adopted and that should be mandated in the system rather than giving to teachers a range of options so that they can then adopt an unsystematic eclectic approach—picking bits and pieces that do not work and that do fail. You compound my disappointment.

The CHAIRMAN: We very much appreciate you coming in and telling us where you are at. Obviously, we are in a period of transition. We would like to speak more to the education department about how we intervene here and have a more structured approach because we think there has got to be a more structured approach in these schools that are not performing well.

Obviously the delicatessen approach is not the answer in these schools that are not performing well and there needs to be some more prescription; so, we will have further discussions with the education department on that. However, we urge you to understand that we have to remain very, very aware of these places that are failing and that business as usual cannot be the response. Although a solution is not only your responsibility—there has to be a suite of things—early education has to play a big part.

Once again, thank you very much for coming. You will receive a transcript in the next couple of days. If we have made any errors in what you have said, you can correct them.

Hearing concluded at 11.48 am