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Knowing and teaching: the impact of teachers' knowledge on students' early literacy achievement

Janet Hunter
Edith Cowan University

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USE OF THESIS

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KNOWING AND TEACHING:
THE IMPACT OF TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE ON STUDENTS' EARLY LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

By

Janet Hunter
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Abstract

Children in rural and remote schools typically underperform in measures of literacy achievement (e.g., NAPLAN) from as early as year three. Data collected over time indicate that as children get older, the gap increases between those students who meet the national benchmarks and those who do not. Additionally, Indigenous children are over-represented in this group of students who are underperforming in measures of literacy achievement. This study seeks to explore the conditions surrounding this phenomenon and to tease out the complexities present in rural and remote contexts that might contribute to this underachievement.

One remote and six remote-rural schools in Western Australia were the focus of the study. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to collect data over three years. Qualitative data were collected using an ethnographic approach, through classroom observations and informal and formal interviews with students, teachers, school leaders, support staff and some parents. From these observations and interviews, teacher and student case studies were constructed. Quantitative data were collected from children through a range of early literacy assessment tasks. Around 60 children were assessed each year for three years. Approximately half of the children each year were Indigenous and half non-Indigenous.

The notion of educational criticism and connoisseurship (Eisner, 1985) was used as a way to describe, interpret and evaluate the literacy teaching practices which occurred in schools and classrooms. Habermas's (1971) "knowledge constituent interests" were used as lenses through which to interrogate the data. The quantitative data informed the technical interest, while the qualitative data were interrogated using the practical and critical lenses.

The study indicated that barriers to children's academic success may exist at a number of levels. First, many children enter such schools with limited knowledge to support the development of school English literacy, therefore particular attention needs to be paid to this during their first years of schooling. While all children are likely to make progress in developing school English literacy, for many children the extent and rate of progress is dependent on focussed and knowledgeable teaching.

Second, such schools are typically staffed by teachers in the early years of their career, who need support to develop their pedagogical, content and cultural knowledge to

the degree necessary for successfully teaching early literacy in such contexts. Additionally, the relative remoteness of the context in which they are working often makes it difficult for them to access ongoing professional learning and support. Third, school leaders are typically in their first position in that role, with the consequence that they may be less able to support new teachers at the classroom level.

This study is significant because it seeks to unravel the complicated web of factors that impact on the quality of literacy instruction that is provided for children in in remote and remote-rural schools in Western Australia. There needs to be available a range of measures at every level, that can be tailored to fit the needs of a particular school at any given time.

The declaration page
is not included in this version of the thesis

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Finally, but not least, I would like to thank the teachers in this study who so generously allowed me into their classrooms, and the children in this study who allowed me to be part of their lives for three years.

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

In September, 1997, Dr David Kemp, the then Federal Minister for Schools announced the results of the first National Literacy Survey in Australia for 16 years (DEETYA, 1997). This event signalled the beginning of an era of continued political and media focus on education, educational standards and in particular the teaching of literacy. In 1999, the State and Territory Ministers for Education met in Adelaide to agree upon and outline a set of goals for schooling in the twenty-first century (Adelaide Declaration, Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 1999). The Declaration outlined the eight major curriculum areas for study and made a commitment to social justice in education, including:

> 3.2 the learning outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students improve and, over time, match those of other students [and]

> 3.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students. (MCEECDYA, 1999)

Following the Adelaide Declaration, the Australian Federal Government and the State and Territory Education Ministers endorsed a National Literacy and Numeracy Plan. Among other initiatives, the plan supported the development of agreed literacy benchmarks for children in years 3, 5 and 7, and annual testing and reporting against these benchmarks. In Western Australia, testing and reporting against these benchmarks was undertaken through the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA).

A continued media focus on perceived low literacy standards and in particular, teaching methods employed to teach early reading culminated in an open letter addressed to the Federal Minister for Education in 2004. This letter, signed by a number of Australian psychologists and researchers in the field of reading, asserted that the reading instruction that was typically being carried out in schools was not based on evidence-based research of effective practice for teaching reading. This letter became the impetus for the establishment of a committee (National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy) to inquire into:

- the teaching of reading in Australian schools;
- the assessment of reading proficiency including identification of children with reading difficulties; and

- teacher education and the extent to which it prepares teachers adequately for reading instruction. (Rowe, 2005, p.3.)

In 2008, the State and Territory Education Ministers once again met to reaffirm their commitment to equity and excellence in Australian schooling through the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008). Their commitment to action included strengthening accountability and transparency through the collection of "reliable, rich data" on student performance (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 16) and all states and sectors working together to develop "national curriculum specified at the State, Territory and local levels" (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 13).

The year 2008 also saw the implementation of the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), which provided a common testing regime for all students across Australia in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in reading, narrative writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation and numeracy. Prior to this, each state and territory had been responsible for carrying out their own basic skills tests and setting their own benchmarks. For the first time, NAPLAN ensured that all children in Australia were measured using a common assessment and against common benchmarks. In 2009, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority was established to oversee the development of a national curriculum and standardised reporting procedures.

The political focus on literacy standards and the teaching of literacy has not been restricted to Australia. In Great Britain and the United States of America, high stakes testing, school performance and teacher accountability linked to funding, together with mandated curricula have also been part of the educational landscape over the last two decades. In America, the Federal Government commissioned the National Reading Panel to investigate the scientific research evidence for best practices in teaching literacy, resulting in the *Report of the National Reading Panel* in 2000, and in Britain, Sir Jim Rose was commissioned to undertake an inquiry into the evidence for best practices in teaching reading in the early years, resulting in the *Independent review of the teaching of early reading* (Rose, 2006). Both of these documents have been influential in informing literacy teaching practices across the Western world.

Despite these inquiries to identify evidence-based best practices for teaching literacy, there continues to be argument in the media and political arena about how literacy should be taught, and there is regular media and political comment when testing results are announced. While Brock (1998) suggests that outcry over low literacy standards

is a recurring phenomenon, the results of the National Literacy Survey (Masters & Forster, 1997) and subsequent testing regimes such as the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) and more recently NAPLAN have nevertheless reported on issues which deserve attention and continue to represent a challenge for schools and educators (Hill, 1997). The National Literacy Survey indicated that there was a wide range in abilities of students in year three (Masters & Forster, 1997), and that while all students could be expected to make some progress by the time they reached year five, the gap between those students performing at high levels and those performing at low levels would be expected to be much wider (Masters & Forster, 1997). Although over subsequent years, this gap has narrowed to some extent, the most recent NAPLAN data demonstrates that it still exists and that it is particularly evident for certain groups of students, including Indigenous students, students from low socio-economic status communities and students from rural-remote geolocations.

While there may not actually be a literacy crisis in our schools, clearly there is a group of students for whom a crisis exists. The relationship between lack of success in education and factors such as high unemployment, poorly paid employment, health problems and high crime rates has been well documented (Hancock, Carrington, Shepherd, Lawrence & Zubrick, 2013; Hill, 1997; Zubrick et al., 2006). Hill (1997, p. 4) argues that it is therefore "imperative that performance levels of low achieving students are improved significantly and that the gaps between high and low achievers are reduced".

Government attention to this issue, and its message of challenge was initially reflected in the initial policy document on literacy to be released from the Department of Employment, Education and Training and Youth Affairs; *Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools* (DEETYA, 1998).   The following statement demonstrates the Government's emphasis on the early development of literacy skills for all groups of children in Australia:

> The Government believes that schools should equip all children who enter education with basic literacy...skills. It is in the first years of school that children can be helped to acquire the foundation skills which will set them on the path of success in reading and writing. (DEETYA, 1998, p.7).

Ten years after the issue of this challenge, the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 15) still holds constant in its commitment to action:

Australian governments commit to working with all school sectors to:
- close the gap for young Indigenous Australians

- provide targeted support to disadvantaged students
- focus on school improvement in low socioeconomic communities

Background

The results of the literacy survey (Masters & Forster, 1997) echoed previous Australian studies of school English literacy. The 1992 Profiles of Student Achievement (Ministry of Education, Western Australia , 1993a) for example, demonstrated that literacy achievement was unequally spread among different social groups. Both studies report slightly higher performance for girls, a wider range of performance for Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students, and much lower performance for Aboriginal students. A subsequent re-analysis of the 1992 Monitoring Standards in Education data for literacy (Ministry of Education, Western Australia, 1993a) demonstrated lower performance for students in rural areas. Further analysis of these data (Ministry of Education, Western Australia, 1993b) indicated that social class differences between urban and rural areas accounts for much of the apparent urban/rural difference.

Many children attending rural and remote schools are Indigenous children, and Indigenous children are over represented at lower levels of achievement. The results of the 1996 National English Literacy Survey (Masters & Forster, 1997, p. 20) reported that students in the Special Indigenous Sample were achieving at levels of literacy three to four year levels below students in the main sample. While the cultural appropriateness of the tasks used to collect the data could be questioned, there is nevertheless evidence that generally the educational achievement of Aboriginal people is well below that of non-Aboriginal people in Western Australia (Western Australia, 1994).

This trend continues. Disaggregation of NAPLAN data collected from 2008 to 2012 consistently reports that significant numbers of students in what have been classified as "remote" or "very remote" geolocations fail to reach the benchmarks across all areas of literacy that are tested. Indeed, the data suggest that the further away from the metropolitan area a student resides, the less likely they will be able to achieve the benchmarks for their year level.

The remote and rural schools attended by these students are characterised by several other features which may have an impact on student performance. One such factor is the relative inexperience of staff. Remote and rural schools tend to be staffed by newly graduated teachers, or teachers in their first years of teaching experience. While these teachers bring with them an abundance of energy and enthusiasm, together with training

in the most recent developments in pedagogy, they have not yet had the opportunity to develop the depth of practical knowledge held by many experienced teachers. It is during these first years of teaching, the years of discovery and survival (Huberman, 1988) that new teachers develop their knowledge and pedagogical orientations to teaching. In addition, many of these young teachers are living away from home for the first time in their lives and in these contexts which are often challenging, are not only learning to become teachers, but at the same time are learning to become independent young adults.

A second factor which characterises these schools is the high transience of teachers. Typically, teachers remain in remote and many rural locations for only one or two years. These schools have traditionally found it difficult to attract higher achieving graduates (Western Australia, 1994) and those who do take up positions in these locations tend to move on after one or two years.

A third issue is teachers' inexperience in working with Aboriginal children, who are over represented in remote and rural schools. In more recent years, steps have been taken to address these issues. Aboriginal education has become a core unit of teacher education programs, rather than an elective, and the Education Department of Western Australia has worked to put into place salary and workplace packages to make these locations more attractive to teachers. However, schools in many rural locations that are classed as remote or very remote continue to be difficult to staff.

Purpose

The purpose of this study has been to look closely at the early literacy teaching and learning that currently occurs in remote and rural schools in Western Australia. Schools were chosen for the study on the basis of geographic location, and because they included a concentration of children from groups who typically achieve poor scores on assessments of school English literacy. The study sought to identify the teaching practices and conditions which seem to be most successful in developing young children's literacy achievement in these particular contexts and to support teachers to improve the literacy outcomes for these students. In attempting to do this, capturing the complexity of life for all participants in these rural schools became an unexpected, but significant feature of the study.

The study set out to ascertain how teachers might be assisted to develop their own knowledge about teaching and learning, and in particular, about young children's literacy development, with the assumption that this development of teachers' cultural, pedagogical and content knowledge would have a positive impact on the literacy outcomes of their

students. Diagnostic information was provided for teachers and school principals with the intention that they would be able, in collaboration with the researcher, to identify and select teaching materials and approaches most appropriate for their students, and differentiate their teaching according to the needs of individuals. Teachers were also offered assistance to construct professional teaching portfolios with the goal that they would later be given the opportunity to share their successful practice with other teachers.

Significance

As has already been identified, there are certain sectors of the Australian community who are over-represented at lower levels of literacy development, and this has the potential to impact on the future life-choices and achievements for these individuals. Many of the children who attend such schools are from low-income homes, experience problems with health, and frequently speak a different first language or dialect from that which is used as the medium of instruction at school. The teachers who staff these schools are characteristically young, inexperienced, not expected to stay long in that location and unfamiliar with the cultural differences which they encounter. It could be suggested that the current education system is not serving these communities well, and certainly the commitments that were made in the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008) have yet to be achieved.

This study is significant because it sought to provide support to the quality of literacy education in schools which continue to be characterised by these difficulties. It aimed to build on those structures already in place in the selected schools by examining what happened when literacy learning took place and identifying how literacy teaching and learning could be better supported by increasing teachers' knowledge, both in terms of young children's literacy development and the social and cultural issues which may affect young children's progress in literacy.

This study is particularly significant in that it pays attention to the complexity of life for school leaders, teachers and students in rural and remote schools. The proposition is that students' achievement is largely dependent on teacher quality (Hattie, 2003; Rowe, 2004) and by extension, teacher knowledge (Darling-Hammond, (2007) and that in order for teachers to become effective, this knowledge needs to develop rapidly in the early years of a teacher's career; this includes their pedagogical, content and cultural knowledge. However, there are multiple complicated factors that occur particularly in rural and remote schools and these conspire to impact, either positively or negatively, on the continued

development of teachers' knowledge. This study has sought to unravel the entanglement of factors which may contribute to students' lower levels of achievement by examining events from the perspective of all the participants.

The data for this study were collected over a two-and-a-half-year period from 1998 to 2000. It is acknowledged that some 15 years has elapsed since then; however, in some ways this has provided opportunities to view the picture from a more long=term perspective. Many of the observations and concerns that first prompted this study can still be made today. National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data collected annually since 2008 shows that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in remote, rural and provincial locations are consistently performing less well than their counterparts in metropolitan locations, and that the further they are situated from the metropolitan area, the less likely they are to meet the national minimum standard. In Western Australia, as many as 32% of all year three students, and more than half (51.5%) of Indigenous students in very remote locations fail to meet the minimum standards on at least one of the measures for literacy achievement.

2013 NAPLAN data (reported on MySchool.edu.au) for all of the schools who participated in this study indicate that with only one exception, literacy outcomes for the schools' populations were close to (one school), below (two schools) or substantially below (three schools) those for schools serving students from statistically similar backgrounds and substantially below those of all Australian schools. All but one of the schools report student attendance in 2013 to be less than 90%, with the average at around 74%.

In 1999, the Hon Bob Collins led a major review into Indigenous education in the Northern Territory. Many of the issues reported in this review were identified as issues for Indigenous education in Western Australia also. In a recent follow-up review, Wilson (n.d.) reports that since the Learning Lessons review (Collins, 1999) another generation of students has passed through the education system and that despite "substantial investment and considerable effort" (p. 7) the situation has not improved and in fact, may be even worse than it was then.

A recent study by Hancock, Carrington, Shepherd, Lawrence and Zubrick (2013), which examined the connections between school attendance and student achievement identified that both attendance and achievement were lower for students with lower socio-economic status, for students who were mobile, for students in remote and very remote locations and for Aboriginal students, that these patterns were well-established by year

three and unlikely to improve. They further identified that "the achievement for students with multiple disadvantages was particularly low" (p.253) and that the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students "…did not appear to close during the study period, and remain at similar levels to those observed in previous studies, such as the *Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey*…(Zubrick et al, 2006)" (p.253).

During the last five years, I have been involved in a study (Johnson, Down, Le Cornu, Peters, Sullivan, Pearce & Hunter, 2010)[1] which has investigated, amongst other things, the supports available to early career teachers in a range of contexts, including regional, rural and remote locations across Western Australia and South Australia. My involvement in this study has allowed me to add to the richness of the discussions here, and although the focus has been the teachers, rather than the students, our observations have also confirmed that many of the issues and concerns surrounding teachers which are discussed here are ongoing. Similarly, an audit of pre-service teacher preparation for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Moreton-Robinson, Sing, Kolopenuk and Robinson, 2012) conducted focus group surveys which indicated that many teachers felt under-prepared to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and further, felt that their pre-service and in-service training had not prepared them well in this regard.

Research Questions

The aim of this study was to investigate ways to support and extend the knowledge of the mostly newly qualified teachers who are responsible for the teaching of literacy to young children in remote and rural schools. Children in these schools tend to include high numbers of Aboriginal children who have different cultural orientations, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and children who typically perform at low levels in school English literacy.

By extending teachers' knowledge about the cultural needs of their students and young children's development in early literacy, it was hoped to support improvement in the educational outcomes in school English literacy for these students. The impact of teachers' knowledge on students' early literacy achievement was explored by investigating the following questions:

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[1] This research was supported by the Australian Research Council's Linkage Project funding scheme (LP 0883672), 2008-2012.

1.1 What did young children in the rural, regional and remote schools know about school English literacy at ages 5 and 6 years, and how did this knowledge develop over time?

1.2 What did the case study teachers know about young children's early literacy development, and how did this knowledge change over time?

1.3 How did teachers shape and adjust their pedagogical practices in response to the context in which they were teaching, specifically, to meet the needs of their students both culturally and in school English literacy development?

1.4 How are schools and teachers in these contexts supported or constrained to develop and extend teachers' pedagogical, cultural and content knowledge?

CHAPTER 2:
MY STORY

When I graduated from university, I wanted to have a classroom like the one that was described in *Towards a Reading-Writing Classroom*, by Butler & Turbill (1987). They described a busy classroom where all children were immersed in a print-rich, literate environment and were engaged in self-directed, purposeful reading and writing activities. In this classroom, the teacher worked with individual and small groups of students at their point of need.

I was drawn to this description of literacy learning as a result of my own experiences and those of my daughter (who learned literacy before I was a teacher). I do not remember learning to read or write; according to my mother, I was able to do so before I went to school. My own daughter easily developed the ability to read and write, and appeared to learn without any explicit teaching, so this model "fitted" well with my experiences.

My first teaching positions, however, gave me a different perspective. As a new teacher, I was mostly posted to "difficult to staff" schools in low-income areas, with high numbers of students for whom English was a second language, and a significant population of Aboriginal students who spoke English as a second dialect. Students who spoke English as a first language generally spoke a vernacular which differed significantly from academic English or the literate language of books. Outside school, the children were unlikely to be exposed to school-like literacy practices, so they did not have this knowledge to build on when they came to school.

Through a process of trial and error, through working alongside teachers who were highly effective in such communities and through further study which focussed on my classroom practice, I gradually came to understand that in addition to a literacy-rich environment filled with high-quality literature, what worked best for this group of children was explicit, systematic instruction which made evident to them what they needed to learn in order to be successful users of literacy at school. Continued reflection on my teaching practice, supported by my further studies and the mentorship of highly effective teachers helped me develop the procedural, pedagogical and cultural knowledge I needed to sustain me and allow me to effectively support my learners in teaching appointments that were sometimes quite challenging.

My very first appointments were as a "casual" or "relief" teacher, employed on daily or weekly contracts to temporarily fill in for regular teachers who were away from their classrooms because they were taking sick-leave, short-term leave or undertaking professional development. Initially, this involved working at a large number of schools in a variety of locations and I was struck by the differences I experienced in school culture and teacher support. In one school, (where I had never worked before) I reported to the school registrar, who gave me the key to the classroom and asked a passing child to show me where it was. For the rest of the day, I was left to my own devices, until I returned the key to the registrar at the end of the day. No-one showed me where the staff room or the toilets were, where I might find resources or a photocopier, and there were no lesson plans, timetable or program available. Fortunately, the class roll was on the teacher's desk, and the students were very helpful in supplying the times for recess and lunch. This is contrasted with another school where I was greeted by the deputy principal, who escorted me to the classroom herself, on the way pointing out the location of any services I might need, and supplying me with her own photocopier number. At the same school, the teacher I was replacing had supplied detailed lesson plans and a timetable, and all the equipment needed for the day was organised and ready to hand. The deputy principal introduced me to the teacher next door, who was equally welcoming and told me to let her know if I needed help. Later in the day, the deputy principal popped her head in the classroom door to make sure everything was going well.

I soon discovered that I needed to arrive at an unknown school with few expectations and a day's worth of lessons suitable for any age group. I also learned that there were some staff rooms where visitors were welcomed and treated as colleagues and others where a strange face was met with silence, or even suspicious looks. After a term or so, there was enough work to allow me to narrow the number of schools I worked at down to two or three. Unsurprisingly, these were schools where I had been welcomed and supported, and schools such as the first one described here were not on the list.

Some years later, I was employed as a research assistant on a longitudinal project, and in this role, for approximately three years I regularly travelled to a remote community school to collect data. This was my first experience in a remote community. While there were plenty of people ready and willing to give me advice about what to expect in a remote community school, I decided to keep an open mind and not to have any expectations, but to take things as I found them. Working in this location with predominantly young and inexperienced teachers, I found myself reflecting on my early experiences as a teacher and

the influences and supports that had sustained me through my first appointments and which had helped me build my professional knowledge.

How this Document is Organised

The focus of this study was to examine the practices that typically surround teaching literacy in the early years of formal education for children in rural schools, in an attempt to identify those practices which best support learning for these particular groups of children. In doing so, it has become important to capture the complexity which surrounds the situation of early literacy instruction, particularly from the point of view of the children and their teachers, but also to examine the factors which may work to support or not support literacy teaching and learning in these contexts. The next chapter presents a review of the literature related to the definition and early learning of literacy in rural and remote settings where there are high enrolments of Aboriginal children.

Chapter four outlines the methodology which was used to conduct the study, along with the theoretical framework which underpins the approach to collecting, analysing and reporting the data. Chapter five introduces the reader to the communities and schools in which the data were collected. Demographic and contextual information is provided for each of the communities, followed by a description of each school setting and organisation together with issues of school policy and management.. In chapter six, an attempt is made to describe school events from the perspective of the teachers. To do this, four case studies have been constructed, producing a snapshot of life in classrooms for the teachers involved. In chapter seven, some of the events reported in the teachers' case studies are recycled in case studies which have been constructed around four children. This chapter attempts to represent life in schools from the point of view of the children. This is followed, in chapter eight, with the presentation and interpretation of the assessment and school attendance data collected from children across the three years of data collection. In chapter nine, I attempt to distil the discussions of the previous data chapters and identify the supports and barriers that enabled or prevented children, teachers or school leaders from acquisition of the desired outcomes in literacy. Finally, in chapter ten, I draw some conclusions and make some recommendations for more focussed support at all levels, with the aim of further supporting children's literacy development in such contexts.

A note about the case studies

It was originally intended to select four teachers around whom case studies would be constructed, and then from each of their classes to select a child (total four children)

around whom a case study could be built that demonstrated their experiences over the three years of the study, as they progressed from pre-primary, through year one and into year two. It was anticipated that there would be some transience amongst children, and also that it might be difficult to secure ongoing informed consent for some children to be involved in the study over three years. However, it was thought that it should not be too difficult to identify one child in each of four pre-primary classes for whom ongoing informed consent could be secured and who would be at school when the assessments were carried out.

What had not been anticipated was the degree of transience that occurred amongst teachers. The combination of both teacher and student transience made it impossible to carry out the original plan for selecting case study teachers and students. As a result, the criteria for selecting case study teachers and students became the degree to which their experiences reflected and provided opportunities to discuss the range of issues that impacted on the lives of teachers and children in the study. In addition, there were some incidents and events which are worthy of discussion and add to the richness of the data, but which did not directly occur as part of the case studies. These events have been presented as vignettes and form part of the general discussions around teachers' and students' experiences.

CHAPTER 3:
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the literature relating to early literacy learning, including a definition of literacy as it relates to this study and a discussion of how an account of children's early literacy development might be developed. This is followed by a discussion of the literature relating to effective practices for early literacy instruction and finally, a discussion of issues that relate to learning in rural schools, including issues that relate specifically to Aboriginal children learning literacy in such contexts.

What is Literacy in this Context?

Defining "literacy"

As was signalled in the introduction, this study is specifically concerned with what I have termed "School English Literacy"; that is, the literacy that children will need to enable them to succeed at school. In theory, academic success equates to gainful employment, which leads to financial security and control over one's life and destiny. While both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children bring to school with them a range of literate practices, dialects and languages that serve them well in their homes and communities and are crucial to the development and maintenance of their cultural identities, it is also crucial to their academic success and their ability to participate in the broader Australian and global context that they become literate in the Standard Australian English literacy and literacy practices which are used in schools, government and bureaucracy. Yunupingu (1999, p. 1) referred to the ability to operate in two cultures, or discourses, as "double power".

The concept of literacy has been described as "slippery" (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 1992; McGarry, cited by Hollindale, 1995). A term that was once unproblematically used to describe the interpretation of the alphabetic code has evolved to have a much wider meaning. The term "literacy" has moved beyond the written text to include the negotiation of meaning through a variety of media in a variety of contexts. This shift in meaning has given rise to notions of "plural literacies" (Hollindale, 1995) "multiple literacies" (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 1992) and "multiliteracies" (New London Group, 1996).

These terms acknowledge the growing diversity of ways and purposes of communication in different social contexts in a rapidly changing world. It is recognised that

very young children are exposed to greater or lesser degrees to a variety of literacies before they enter school (Heath, 1983; Taylor 1983), and that their competence with these different literacies contributes to a greater or lesser degree to the ways in which young children are able to take up the kinds of literacies which are offered to them through formal schooling (Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland & Reid, 1998b).

Notwithstanding this view, official policies tend to take a more functional view of literacy. The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (DEET, 1991, p.5) defines literacy as follows: "Effective literacy is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing." This definition of (school) literacy is reflected in the reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing strands that make up the English curriculum profile for Australian schools (Australian Education Council, 1994).

The *Statement on English for Australian Schools* (Australian Education Council, 1994, p. 4) states that:

> while respecting students' home languages,...teachers have a responsibility to teach the forms and usages generally accepted in Australian English, [which]... should be treated as an extension of, and an addition to, a student's home language. The goal should be to ensure that students develop an ever-widening language repertoire for personal and public use.

The stated aims of the Australian Curriculum: English (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA],) are to ensure that students:

- learn to listen to, read, view, speak, write, create and reflect on increasingly complex and sophisticated spoken, written and multimodal texts across a growing range of contexts with accuracy, fluency and purpose
- appreciate, enjoy and use the English language in all its variations and develop a sense of its richness and power to evoke feelings, convey information, form ideas, facilitate interaction with others, entertain, persuade and argue
- understand how Standard Australian English works in its spoken and written forms and in combination with non-linguistic forms of communication to create meaning
- develop interest and skills in inquiring into the aesthetic aspects of texts, and develop an informed appreciation of literature

While there is acknowledgement of the range and variety of text forms and ways of being literate, the main aim of the literacy curriculum in the education system is to provide children with the literacy skills they will need to be able to operate fully in the wider

Australian society, and this involves a major focus on print-based literacy in Standard Australian English.

Multiliteracies

The term "multiliteracies" was originally proposed by a group of eminent literacy educators who came to be known as the "New London Group" (Anstey & Bull, 2006). They met in New London, New Hampshire, in 1994 to consider how changes in technology were impacting on literacy practices and how literacy pedagogy should respond to these changes. "Multiliteracies" draws strongly on the notion of literacy as a social practice (Luke, 1994; Maybin,1994) and the idea that we draw on a range of practices for communicating with different groups of people in a variety of contexts, and that when we communicate, we make choices about which practices will be most effective in each particular context and with that particular group of people. In this paradigm, the term "text" is meant to refer to any piece of communication, whether it is spoken, written, presented through images and whether it is presented using paper, oral, gestural or electronic modes of communication. The New London Group (Cope and Kalantzis, cited in Martello, 2002) identified six overarching "design elements", or modes of conveying meaning: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial and the sixth mode, multimodal, being a combination of any or all of the first five modes.

The multiliteracies, or as they have been more recently termed, "new literacies" (see, for example, Lankshear & Knobel, 2011) are ways of including and validating more diverse and less formal communication practices, such as texting on mobile phones, non-traditional spelling conventions, or of embedding multi-modal texts into a communication.

This view of literacy does not necessarily involve being able to decode print in the traditional sense, as messages can be conveyed effectively through the use of non-alphabetic symbols such as emoticons, through visual images or even through music or recorded speech. It could be argued, therefore, that in order to be **fully** literate, one must be able to use a full repertoire of literate practices, including decoding print, successfully operating new communication technologies, constructing and making meaning from a range of text media and the capacity to critically interrogate a text and to use texts for our own social and political purposes.

Indigenous literacies

If the view of literacy is extended to include spoken and representational communication such as images and body language, there is scope to acknowledge

particular forms of communication that might be termed "Indigenous literacies". Hanlen (2007) defines Indigenous literacies as part of the set of communicative social practices that children may engage in as they grow up in their communities. While these practices may not involve writing, they are still communicative, meaning-making practices and therefore come under a broader view of literacy. Hanlen acknowledges that since European invasion/colonisation, some of these practices may have evolved as they have been influenced by more Western practices, or in some cases may only still occur in more traditionally oriented communities.

Hanlen (2007) identifies two broad sets of Indigenous literacy practices: inspirational and environmental. Inspirational practices refer to methods of communicating ideas, events, practices, messages and thoughts in decontextualised ways through such means as drawings and paintings, body markings, dance, oral story and song. Environmental literacy practices refer to the ways in which people "read" the natural world, for instance, interpreting natural landmarks, using animal tracks and markings, their knowledge of climatic conditions, understanding of flora and fauna and their specific uses, in order to navigate or meet needs for food, water and shelter. Although these practices may be widely considered to be associated with more traditional life-styles, they continue to be practiced by many Indigenous people, with or without modifications, even by people who live in urban and regional locations (Hanlen, 2007).

As Hanlen (2007, p. 234) points out, "Indigenous Australians live at the interface of their own culture and that of mainstream Australia", so in order to operate successfully at this interface, they need to be competent users of a much broader range of literacy practices as they occur in both worlds.

It is acknowledged that these broader views of literacy provide a useful lens through which to view the broad range of practices that form the backdrop to the skills and knowledge that children may bring with them when they enter the formal schooling system, and these skills and understandings make a useful starting point for learning about Standard Australian English literacy, which is the literacy that will support them through their school lives and in the broader Australian community.

Perspectives of Early Literacy Development

The current view of children's beginning literacy is generally referred to by using the umbrella term "emergent literacy" (Clay, 1991; Crawford, 1995; Solsken, 1993; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; 1989). However, as Crawford (1995, p. 71) points out, "emergent literacy has

come to mean different things to different people." What follows here is an explanation of the notion of reading readiness, which informed pedagogy in the earlier part of the twentieth century, and an attempt to synthesise current perspectives of early literacy learning and the epistemological orientations on which each perspective draws.

Reading readiness

During the 1920s until around the 1950s, maturational readiness theories drew heavily on the work of Gessell (Crawford, 1995; Teale & Sulzby, 1986) and Froebell (Crawford, 1995). Readiness for reading was viewed as a kind of "neural ripening" (Teale & Sulzby, 1986) which could not be hurried, and it was thought that any reading instruction should be delayed until the child had reached a mental age of 6 years and 6 months (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Because of this view, the emphasis was on teaching, rather than learning (Solsken, 1993), and assessment was conducted using IQ tests and standardised tests, which were considered to be "rigorous and objective" (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Teaching literacy focussed on teaching reading skills, as the ability to read was thought to be prerequisite to writing.

In the 1960s, theories of readiness began to be modified by a more developmental view. This view of readiness still asserted that children should be "ready" before reading instruction commenced, but believed that "readiness" could be nurtured by providing appropriate experiences (Crawford, 1995). The emphasis still remained on the teaching of reading, but it was thought that intervention was possible. This view led to the initiation of compensatory intervention programs such as Head Start and DISTAR. The focus remained on mastery of skills rather than growth, and teaching programs were highly structured and sequenced. This structure and sequence was reflected in the basal readers of the time, and to some extent this influence remains today in some commercially produced reading series.

Emergent literacy

During the 1960s, the work of Marie Clay significantly contributed to a shift in thinking about the way in which young children became conventional users of language and print. Clay's findings indicated that young children knew a great deal about reading and writing long before they received any formal instruction, as they actively sought to make sense of their encounters with print. Clay spoke of young children's developing understanding and knowledge about print as "emergent literacy", a term which implied growth of knowledge over time (Crawford, 1995).

At the same time, the notion of literacy was extended to acknowledge the interactive nature language development and the relationships between reading, writing and oral language (Teale & Sulzby, 1989). Efforts were made to look at literacy development from the perspective of the child, and the focus shifted from teaching to learning. This developmental perspective focused on children's ever-growing knowledge about the technology and processes of written language. Instruction sought to identify children's existing knowledge and provide optimum environmental conditions to support their further development (Solsken, 1993).

This perspective of children's early literacy learning as the cognitive construction of knowledge is largely informed by the theories of Piaget, cognitive and developmental psychology (Crawford, 1995) and developmental psycholinguistics (Solsken, 1993).

Crawford (1995) has identified a perspective which she calls the "connectionist" perspective, and which appears to fit somewhere between reading readiness and her definition of emergent literacy. According to Crawford, the connectionist view shares many of the principles of developmental readiness in that although immersion in a print-rich environment is thought to be valuable in teaching children to read, learning to read is facilitated through the explicit teaching and mastery of the alphabetic code. Crawford (1995) cites Adams as a major proponent of this view.

Literacy learning as a social practice

The social construction of literacy (Solsken, 1993), or socio-constructivist (Crawford, 1995) perspective of early literacy also positions young children as active learners, seeking to make sense of print and language events in their environment, but from this perspective, the emphasis is placed less on cognitive development and more on the purposeful interactions which support children's literacy learning. The socio-cultural view of early literacy learning recognises that language events are contextualised, functional, purposeful and transactional. Children's understandings about language and print are developed within the context of meaningful language encounters which serve social purposes.

This perspective of early literacy development is informed by the theories of Vygotsky (Crawford, 1995) and research in this area is grounded in cultural anthropology and socio-linguistics (Solsken, 1993).

According to this view, young children's literacy learning begins at a very early age when they are immersed in and begin to approximate the literate events which occur in

their own homes and communities (Bissex, 1980; Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983). In some instances, parents and older siblings take up young children's attempts at literacy and provide support (Bissex, 1980; Taylor, 1983) which "scaffolds" the children's approximations as they become more refined (Vygotsky, 1987).

When children begin formal schooling, and the literate events which take place in the home and community are not congruent with those which occur in schools, learning is interrupted because the "school-like" literacies do not sit well on the different literacy foundations which have been built in the home and community (Auerbach, 1989; Heath, 1994; McCarthey, 1997).

Literacy learning from a socio-political perspective

Although Crawford (1995) and Solsken (1993) identify this perspective as distinct from the socio-cultural perspective, the critical theory perspective (Crawford, 1995) or "literacy as social status and identity" (Solsken, 1993) could be seen as an extension of the thinking which informs the socio-cultural perspective.

This perspective is grounded in critical and feminist theories and draws upon the work of Freire (Crawford, 1995). A socio-political perspective of literacy learning seeks to examine the pedagogical practices and institutional systems by which status and power relations are regulated within communities, as individuals' life-histories are constructed and played out through institutions and institutional practices. This view attempts to "...identify the social practices by which schools, families and individuals reproduce, resist, and transform hierarchies of social relations and their positions within them." (Solsken, 1993, p.7)

One example of the ways in which school practices regulate power and status is through classroom texts and talk. Children's worlds, lives and identities are constructed though classroom texts and classroom talk (Baker & Davies, 1993; Baker & Freebody, 1988a). Classroom texts show the world in particular ways, and the classroom talk which operates around these texts often compounds to this construction (Baker & Freebody, 1988a). Classroom talk produces particular ways of relating to texts and organises knowledge and authority among teachers, students and texts (Baker, 1991; Baker & Freebody, 1988b).

Gee (1994, p. 168) defines literacy as "a set of Discourse practices, that is, ...ways of using language and making sense both in speech and in writing." Gee uses a capital D to identify this interpretation of the term as distinct from its use in linguistics, to mean any

piece of communication. These Discourse practices are embedded with the beliefs and values of particular cultural groups and communities and are therefore integral to a person's sense of self and identity. Gee (1990) defines Discourse as more than the linguistic act; rather "a sort of 'identity kit' which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize." (p. 142). In this respect, acquiring a secondary Discourse becomes much like Bourdieu's (1979) notion of "habitus". The Discourse of western-style schooling would be one where the student arrives in good time for the morning bell, showered and breakfasted, wearing a clean school uniform, who listens attentively to the teacher and other students, who speaks in turn and when (s)he is called upon to do so and who can effectively navigate the question-answer-evaluation patterns of interaction. This is just the start – there are also other aspects at play: for example, knowledge about books or knowledge about particular kinds of texts.

The Discourses that are used in schools are those of the dominant culture, which Fairclough, cited by Walton, (1993, p. 41) claims come to be seen as "natural, common-sensical and universal". Therefore, access to the dominant culture as well as the minority culture is needed, and indeed, desired, (Delpit, 1988) in order to be socially and economically successful in the wider society (Gee, 1994).

Children are naturally socialised into their primary Discourse (Gee, 1994). However, when the dominant school and institutional Discourses are different to those in which the child normally operates, unless they are provided with explicit access to this secondary Discourse, the child may be unable to interpret what is meant and a breakdown in communication occurs, which in turn, further limits the child's access to the dominant Discourse (Delpit, 1988; Heath, 1983; 1994). The problem here is that because Discourses are so culturally embedded, they are not apparent unless they deviate from the norm. Discourses are learned implicitly within cultural groups (Delpit, 1988; Walton, 1993) and because of this, power is maintained by the dominant cultural group and access denied to others (Walton, 1993). In order for different groups to gain access, the dominant Discourse must first be made visible (Gee, 1994; Walton, 1993).

This review of the literature relating to perspectives of early literacy development has identified one historical and three current broadly different orientations to early literacy learning. However, these different views of early literacy learning are by no means exclusive; for example Clay's (1991) work, although clearly connected with the cognitive perspective, recognises the value of the social perspective in fostering early literacy

development. Clay & Cazden (1990) conducted an analysis of Clay's (1979; 1985) Reading Recovery program according to Vygotsky's principles for learning, and concluded that the teaching routines that were employed in introducing the new book and in writing the story – a collaborative exercise carried out by the teacher and child together – were examples of scaffolded instruction which resulted in "a shift from [Teacher/Child] interindividual functioning to increasingly complex intraindiviudal functioning by the child". (p. 206). Similarly, the National Reading Panel (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998), while placing an emphasis on the cognitive aspects of literacy development, acknowledge the part played by socio-economic and socio-political factors in children's early literacy development. Additionally, it seems that teachers' understandings about the nature of literacy development are influenced by their own life histories and the context of their teaching situations (Hunter, 1977) and it is likely that teachers draw in an eclectic way from their own experience and knowledge as well as their theoretical understandings about the ways in which the children they teach appear to develop.

Solsken (1993) also suggests that emergent literacy perspectives and socio-cultural perspectives are not mutually exclusive; emergent literacy "incorporates a notion of social context" (p. 5). "A number of studies merge the two perspectives in examining beginning literacy, adopting the assumptions of both to some degree and seeking to explain the interaction of social and cognitive factors in literacy learning."

Freeebody (1992) has brought these themes together by identifying four roles which must be adopted for a reader to successfully negotiate texts. The first is that of the code-breaker, who must be able to successfully engage with the technology of how the text has been encoded. The second role is that of the text-participant, who brings his or her understanding of the world, and of textual constructions of the world, to the text in order to create meaning. The third role which must successfully be adopted is that of the text-user. The successful text-user understands how texts are constructed differently for different functions and is able to use each text purposefully. The final role is that of the text-analyst. The text-analyst looks carefully at the relationship which is set up in the text between reader and writer and asks how (s)he is positioned as a reader. Luke and Freebody (1999a; 1999b) later re-conceptualised the roles as resources, that can be drawn on by literate persons to varying degrees and in different ways, according to the demands of the text in question and the socio-cultural context in which it occurs. This re-conceptualisation appeared to be in response to a number of teaching materials and supports which took up the idea of the roles in somewhat prescriptive ways rather than the

more fluid and dynamic approach that was originally posited (Luke and Freebody, 1999a; 1999b).

Freebody's (1992) four roles, later re-termed resources (Luke and Freebody, 1999a; 1999b) as a literate person appear to relate to all three current perspectives of early literacy learning which have been discussed above. Unlocking the code of the printed text clearly places some cognitive skill demands on the reader, acting as text participant and text user draws on the socio- cultural perspective of early literacy learning, and the role of a text-analyst requires a critical awareness which is grounded in the socio-political arena.

The three perspectives of early literacy learning identified by Crawford (1995) and Solsken (1993) clearly all interact and impact on young children's early literacy development, and this could be more particularly the case for those children who are members of cultural minority groups. It seems that children's early literacy learning needs to be examined from each perspective to discover a more complete picture of this development, and to identify those factors which contribute to or interfere with successful school literacy learning.

How can we Present an Account of Children's School Literacy Development?

Technical aspects

Much, but not all, of children's early school literacy development focuses particularly on the development of technical aspects of learning to read and write, which involves getting to grips with the complexity of the code which is used to represent the sounds of the English language. This allows them rapid access to being able to focus on meaning-making and the capacity to use this as a tool for learning more about language and other key learning across the curriculum. A number of skills contribute to the eventual mastery of this code, and these are described below. Paris (2005) identifies many of these skills as "constrained" skills, meaning that they are constrained conceptually and developmentally because "they are [generally] learned quickly, mastered entirely, and should not be conceptualized as enduring individual difference variables. P.184). For instance, there are 26 letters of the English alphabet, each with upper and lower case representations. Once all of those representations have been learnt, there is nothing further to learn. Learning the letters of the alphabet, therefore, is a constrained skill. Paris (2005, p. 187) suggests that "letter knowledge, phonics and concepts of print are highly constrained, phonemic awareness and oral reading fluency are less constrained and vocabulary and

comprehension are least constrained". Because there is a ceiling effect, the constrained skills are more easily measured than some of the other aspects of early literacy development which will continue to develop throughout schooling and according to students' literacy experiences.

Environmental print

It is suggested that for many children, reading begins in the preschool years when they are exposed to print in the environment, through printed packaging, signs, or advertising materials (Goodman & Goodman, 1979; Harste, Burke & Woodward, 1982; Goodman & Altwerger, cited in Masonheimer, Drum & Ehri, 1984). An alternative view (Chall, 1967; Gough & Hillinger, cited in Masonheimer, Drum and Ehri, 1984) proposes that reading does not begin until children have acquired certain pre-requisite skills, such as letter knowledge, phoneme segmentation and left-to-right orientation of print. There is evidence to suggest that pre-readers who are proficient users of environmental print are in fact reading the context rather than the print itself (Masonheimer, Drum and Ehri, 1984) and that for a transition to be made between children reading context to reading print is purposeful talk that causes children to take note of the actual print, rather than the context; for instance, pointing out that the *M* in Mcdonald's is the same as the *M* in the name Michael. Immersing young children in print and using this immersion as a "bridge" to learning the code is a popular approach to introducing children to the code, particularly in classrooms where a more naturalistic approach to learning is followed.

Concepts about print

Through interaction with various forms of texts, children begin to realise that print is organised in certain ways; for instance, that books work from front to back, one page after another (Clay, 1979; 1991; Holdaway, 1979; Morrow, 2009) and that print works according to rules of serial order and directionality. In order for emergent readers to efficiently process text, they must become aware of rules of directionality so that they know what to attend to, and in what order (Clay, 1991; 1993b).

Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) observed that even very young children who were still at the "scribbling" stage made distinctions between the scribble they produced as "writing" and that which they produced to represent pictures. When young children are frequently exposed to responses to print, they very quickly become able to make decisions about what can be read and what cannot (Adams, 1990) and in what order it should be attended to (Clay, 1991; 1993b).

As familiarity with print increases, children begin to identify words as "unique visual patterns" (Mason, 1980, p. 222). They need to be helped to understand that words are made up of groups of letters, and that written words make a one-to-one correspondence with spoken words Clay (1979). Emergent readers are sometimes confused by syllables or letters as they match speech to print (Clay, 1991).

Letter recognition and naming

Before children can begin to attach names to individual letters, they must be aware of them as individual entities, distinct from other letters, numbers or symbols. (Adams, 1990; Clay, 1979, 1991; Mason, 1980). A chicken-and-egg situation appears to exist here, because while children must see letters as individual entities in order to assign names, alphabet knowledge and an analytical approach to print is thought to help children make generalisations about the various ways in which one letter can be represented (different fonts; upper and lower case representations), and at the same time see subtle differences between letters which may look similar, but have different identities, for instance C and G; Q and O (Adams, 1990; Mason, 1980).

More than sixty years of research has confirmed that knowledge of letter names is one of the best predictors of success in learning to read (Bond & Dykstra, cited by Adams, 1990; Chall, 1967; Mason, 1980; Durrell, cited by Clay, 1991). However, the accumulated research suggests that while letter-name knowledge is a good predictor of successful reading acquisition, it is not enough to simply teach children the names of the letters of the alphabet, but that other, related and inseparable skills become more finely tuned when children know the letters of the alphabet (Adams, 1990; Ehri, 1983) and thus lead to more proficient reading.

Phonemic awareness

Tunmer and Hoover (1992) found that children with high letter-name knowledge combined with high phonological awareness performed better than other groups of children when generalising phoneme-grapheme correspondences. It is suggested that children who are highly familiar with letter names may more easily discover phoneme-grapheme correspondences, because the names of many letters contain the phoneme which is usually represented by that letter (Adams, 1990; Ehri, 1983; Tunmer & Hoover, 1992).

The ability to discriminate between individual phonemes has also been identified as one of the best predictors of early reading achievement (Adams, 1990). This skill is necessary to allow beginning readers to segment sounds for spelling and writing, and blend

sounds for reading, but needs to be supported by the other skills that have been discussed here; it is not sufficient on its own. The development of this ability allows emergent readers to progress from Frith's logographic phase to the alphabetic (Goswami and Bryant, 1990; Byrne, 1992). As soon as children begin to articulate sounds they begin to develop a basic phonological awareness (Adams, 1990; Clay, 1991), but at this stage, this awareness is not in a form which can easily be accessed (Clay, 1991). In order for children to access this information, they need to be able to analyse what they hear (Adams, 1990), and paradoxically, this skill appears to be advanced by reading and spelling instruction (Cataldo & Ellis, 1988; Adams, 1990) and interactions with print (Clay, 1991).

Familiarity with letter names and sound/symbol relationships develops an organised and analytical approach, (Mason, 1980) as well as a degree of automaticity to processing print (Adams, 1990). Skilled readers scan print systematically and pay attention to details (Clay, 1991; Adams, 1990). They realise that the smallest details can make a difference, that there are smaller patterns within larger patterns, and they begin to discover how much detail they must attend to in order to read without error (Clay, 1991).

Writing

Close observation of children's writing and writing behaviours conveys a great deal about what they understand about print; what inferences they are making about how print operates and what features of print they are currently attending to (Sulzby, 1990; Clay, 1993a). Sulzby (1990) suggests that although there are varied patterns of development, children's emergent writing progresses though a series of loosely definable stages as they reorganise their understandings about print.

At the earliest stage of writing (Sulzby, 1990), children's scribble begins to differentiate between scribble to represent drawing and scribble to represent writing. Eventually the scribble for drawing becomes representational drawing and the scribble for writing turns into letter-like symbols. At this stage, the child may or may not attach a message to this print. Eventually, due to increased interactions with print, these symbols begin to approximate real letters, but have no phonetic relationship to the intended message. These nonphonetic letter strings fall into three categories (Sulzby, 1990): random letter strings; patterned letter strings, in which certain patterns, most often alternate vowels and consonants, occur frequently; and "name elements", in which letters of the name are used in various patterns. This phase roughly equates to the precommunicative spelling phase described by Gentry (1984).

Once the child begins to have some familiarity with letters, invented spelling appears. Sulzby (1990) categorises invented spelling into two subcategories; syllabic spelling, in which the child uses one letter to represent a syllable, and fully invented spelling in which the child uses one letter for each phoneme. These phases roughly equate to Gentry's (1984) semiphonetic and phonetic stages. While the semiphonetic stage indicates a growing familiarity with letters, the phonetic stage reflects a more well developed understanding of sound and symbol relationships.

Clay (1993a) attends to three aspects of writing: directional principles, language level, which deals with the linguistic organisation of children's writing; and message quality. Clay's (1993a) language levels begin at the lowest level with letters only, then progress through stages of any recognisable word, any two word phrase, a simple sentence, a "story" of two or more sentences to a story of two or more themes. Message quality begins with a concept of signs, progressing to the concept of conveying a message, copying a message, use of sentence patterns, the child recording his or her own ideas, and finally, successful composition.

Book reading behaviours

Written language has different features and functions to that of spoken language (Holdaway, 1979; Sulzby, 1985; Mason, 1992). Familiarity with books, reading books, and discussion of books and stories with proficient readers facilitates understanding of the features and functions of the written language encountered in storybooks (Sulzby, 1985; Mason, 1992). Holdaway (1979) reports children as young as two years using elements of book-like language and syntax as they interact with favourite storybooks, and further claims that this book-like language becomes more sophisticated as the child matures.

Sulzby (1985) identified a hierarchy of emergent reading behaviours. At the earliest stages, the child's responses are governed by the pictures in the book. The child responds either by labelling objects in the pictures using nouns, or at a slightly more advanced level, by "following the action" (Sulzby, 1985); a more extended commentary on the picture which would use both nouns and verbs. At both these levels, each page is dealt with in a discrete manner, with no sense of the continuation of a storyline through the book. At some stage, the extended commentary becomes a more formed story, but still represents oral language (still level 2).

As development progresses, the story commentary takes on the structures and vocabulary of written language (level 3), but at this stage there is little, if any, attention to the printed text. This transition to book-like language is an important step however,

because it signals the development of several concepts which are related to print: print can be turned into speech; print carries a message, and the message is constant; some words and phrases are more likely to occur than others, and the picture gives a rough guide to the message (Clay, 1991).

As the child begins to be more attentive to the print, (s)he may attempt to use known letters or words in an attempt to decode the print (level 4). Sulzby (1985) refers to this as "reading aspectually". Eventually, more efficient decoding leads to independent reading (level 5).

Book levels

There are a number of educational publishers who produce basal readers which they claim to be levelled according to text difficulty. Not to be confused with Sulzby's (1985) reading behaviour levels which describe the sequence of typical behaviour demonstrated by emergent readers as they become aware of and begin to use the written code in picture books, the idea of levelling texts according to difficulty was initially introduced by the Reading Recovery program, and, as the pedagogical approach of Guided Reading became more popular, the idea has been taken up by most, if not all publishers of texts for reading instruction, particularly at the emergent, beginning and early reader stages. This approach organises texts into levels of difficulty, based upon such criteria as text layout, language patterns and vocabulary, predictability of text and the degree to which the text is supported by the illustrations (Peterson, 1991). Typically, texts at levels one and two rely quite heavily on children's knowledge of the most high frequency words (for instance, *the, and, I, it, is*) and depend upon readers picking up the pattern of the text and using the illustrations to supply words where there is a change in pattern. As the levels progress, there is less reliance on sentence patterns and illustrations and more reliance on the need to decode print. Although these criteria are given attention when assigning books to levels of difficulty, there is no clear formula, which means that there is no clear interval between the levels (Peterson, 1991; Iversen & Tumner, 1993) and this in turn has resulted in some criticism of the reliability of book level measures (Robinson, cited by Center, Wheldall, Freeman, Outhred & McNaught, 1995). Nevertheless, book levels appear to adequately describe the differences in whole-task reading ability observed among young children.

Sight word vocabulary

The term "sight word" is used to describe a word which a reader can recognise immediately, without having to decode the symbols or blend the phonemes. For experienced and fluent readers, almost every word they encounter is a sight word, and

they only have to slow down occasionally to decode a word that they have not previously encountered. The more frequently a word is encountered by a reader, the more quickly the reader will recognise it on sight, without the need to decode, and this word then moves into the reader's bank of known sight words. One child's sight word vocabulary will differ from that of another, due to their varying encounters with print; for instance, a child's surname, the names of their friends and classmates, or frequently encountered brand names may be part of their sight word vocabulary. However, there will be a corpus of frequently occurring words which would be common to all children's sight word vocabularies.

For emerging and beginning readers, it is helpful to consciously build a bank of sight words, especially those that are frequently encountered (words such as *and*, *the*, *it*, *is*), because this helps to make the reading more automatic and fluent. The 220 most frequently encountered words account for more than 50 per cent of words found in reading materials at all levels (Konza, 2006), therefore being able to instantly recognise these words significantly supports reading development, leaving more "cognitive space" for comprehension and attention to decoding unfamiliar words. In addition, a large proportion of high-frequency words have irregular spellings which make them hard to decode, for instance, the high-frequency words *one*, *was*, *you*, *said*, and *what* are all difficult for emerging readers to decode, although some of these words become more easily decidable as children's knowledge of English orthography (phonics knowledge) becomes further developed.

Socio-cultural and Political Aspects of Children's Literacy Development

Aboriginal English

While there are differences amongst Aboriginal cultural groups and people, according to cultural group, geographic location and socio-economic status, the majority of Aboriginal people speak a variety of Aboriginal English as their first dialect (Eades, 1993; Tripcony, 2000), particularly in the context of their own family or social group. Aboriginal English differs from Standard Australian English at every linguistic level (Eades, 1993; Malcolm, 1995), including accent, grammar, vocabulary and pragmatic use. At the phonological level, some of the phonemes that are used in Standard English do not occur in Aboriginal English, for example, words such as *the*, *there*, *that*, tend to be pronounced in Aboriginal English as *de*, *dere* and *dat*, and the phoneme /v/ is usually pronounced /b/, so that *video* becomes *bideo* and *even* is pronounced *eben*. The syntactic structure of

Aboriginal English differs from that of Standard English in a number of ways so that a sentence such as "*he is going to the shop*" may become "*he goin' to shop*", or even "*go shop*". At the lexical level, some words carry a meaning in Aboriginal English which is quite different to the ways in which they would be interpreted in Standard English; for instance, the term "deadly" in an Aboriginal English context would have very positive connotations, whereas in Standard English the connotations might be quite negative. However, it is interesting to note that some terms such as "deadly", as it is used in Aboriginal English, are slowly making their way into the vernacular Australian English. This is indicative of the fluid and dynamic relationships between different varieties of English.

Teachers who are unaware of the differences between Aboriginal English and Standard English may fail to see Aboriginal English as a legitimate dialect and simply dismiss it as "bad English", in need of correction (Eades, 1993). Berry and Hudson (1997, p.7) point out that "Sometimes understanding what Kriol/Aboriginal English speakers are saying is more difficult **because** of the English base. It can lull the unwary into a false sense of security because similarities are heard and differences are missed."

The most important issue then, is to ensure that both the teacher and the students are aware that Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English are two legitimate, but different language systems or codes. The FELIKS (Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools) approach (Berry & Hudson, 1997) aims to make these differences clear, to teach Standard English to Aboriginal children for use in appropriate contexts, and to explicitly teach them which dialect is appropriate for different contexts. By doing this, learning Standard English becomes a meaningful activity for Aboriginal children, and gives them a clear sense of achievement (Berry & Hudson, 1997).

Central to the FELIKS approach is the notion of the "Code-switching stairway" (Berry & Hudson, 1997), which involves four steps in the acquisition of control over both codes. The steps are first, **awareness** that Standard English and Aboriginal English are different codes and these are two of many different codes. The second step in the stairway is **separation**, where the differences between the two codes are made explicit and evident and students can identify the differences between the two. By the time students are introduced to the third step, **code-switching**, they should be gaining some confidence and proficiency with the use of Standard English. In this step they continue to gain proficiency and identify the social situations in which each code would be used, leading to the final step, which is **control**. When students reach this stage on the stairway, they are able to switch unconsciously between codes as the situation demands.

Cazden (2011), citing the work of Dell Hymes around the notion of "communicative competence", offers a note of caution; even though Indigenous children may be operating with Aboriginal English as their primary Discourse, there will still be variation amongst them in the ways they are able to access secondary Discourses, because there will still be a degree of variation in the ways they have been socialised, their early experiences of the world and the extent to which they provide access to the dominant Discourse. Cazden, (2011) refers to the distinction Hymes made between the terms *reservoir* and *repertoire*: the *reservoir* being the potential degree of competence and the *repertoire* being the actual degree of competence.

There is considerable evidence (Frecker, 2001; Tripcony, 2000) that the Aboriginal community wants and expects their children to acquire competence in Standard Australian English so that they are able to participate fully in Australian society and beyond. Parents do not, however, wish for this competence in Standard English to occur at the expense of children's own culture and language. Nakata (1999) suggests that competence in English literacy is not only necessary for Indigenous people's participation in the wider Australian culture, but that the "primary principle of its incorporation into [their] lives is as a political tool" (p.17). However, he makes the observation that, all too often, the teaching of English literacy occurs at a functional level only, because that is the degree to which Indigenous people may be seen to need it. He suggests (2003, p. 9) that explanations of children's inability to achieve expected standards because of cultural difference "stands to provide a convenient explanation of student failure that exonerates teacher practice." Similarly, former Queenslander of the Year and chairman of the Stronger Smarter Institute Chris Sarra has argued that Aboriginal children, including those in remote communities, should be measured alongside their non-Aboriginal counterparts and that a tendency towards lower expectations for this group of students due to their culture is misguided and would potentially render them dysfunctional in the broader Australian society (Sarra, 2014)

What Do We Know About Effective Early Literacy Teaching?

It seems that there has always been discussion and debate about the most effective way to teach reading. In 1967, Jeanne Chall reported that this issue had been debated for well over a decade, by "self-styled reading specialists and laymen" in popular books, magazines and newspaper articles, and by reading specialists, educators and school leaders in the professional literature, and that the debate was beginning to take on "political proportions" (p.1). Commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation of New York to visit

classrooms and undertake an analysis of the reading instructional practices current at the time, together with analysis of research into early reading instruction, Chall (1967) reported that there was a strong positive correlation between letter knowledge and attention to sounds and early reading achievement, and that this occurred regardless of children's IQ or socio-economic status. She further reported that beyond the third grade, although there was a strong correlation between low levels of phonological and phonic knowledge, well developed phonic knowledge did not correlate as strongly with superior reading achievement, suggesting that once the code is mastered, other skills become increasingly important.

Chall (1967) further observed that individual teachers and classroom climate, including student engagement and expectations seemed also to impact on children's success in learning to read. Classroom teachers who were willing to take on new approaches seemed to be innovators; they were reflective, responsive to children's needs and adapted new approaches to take into account what they already knew to be successful for their particular students.

The First Grade Studies, first reported in 1967 and re-published in 1997 (Bond and Dykstra, 1997), was a collaboration of 27 individual research projects which investigated approaches to early reading instruction across the United States of America. The 27 individual projects used common measures and methodology so that their results could be compared. The aim of these studies was to scientifically investigate which approach to teaching reading was most effective. The study compared reading programs that each employed a different methodological approach: basal readers; basal plus phonics; phonics plus linguistics methods; the initial teaching alphabet; linguistic methods; language experience methods and individualised methods.

The results of the study were generally inconclusive about the best approach to teaching reading. It seemed that no single approach was superior to another across the range of reading skills that were investigated. Each of the sites reported a wide range of achievement. Bond and Dykstra (1997, p.415) concluded that different approaches might be suitable for different children, according to a range of factors such as pre-school literate knowledge, experiences, general intelligence and disposition: "Reading programs are not equally effective in all situations…factors other than method, within a particular learning situation, influence pupil success in reading". The authors did, however, conclude that reading instruction was open to improvement, and that adopting certain specific features from each of the approaches would be a useful way to begin this improvement. Further,

they suggested (p.416) that "it is necessary to train better teachers of reading rather than to expect a panacea in the form of materials".

This statement implies the importance of teacher knowledge in the selection of materials and approaches to teaching young readers. In their analyses, Bond and Dykstra (1997) investigated the relationship between teacher experience and reading achievement. A slight, but not significant, positive correlation between teacher experience and children's reading achievement was demonstrated. It is not stated how teacher experience was measured; whether this was measured as length of service, or the degree of qualification or subject-specific knowledge held by the teacher in relation to teaching reading.

Pearson (1997, p.429) reports Dykstra's comments that "Data from the co-operative Research Program in First-Grade Reading Instruction tend to support Chall's conclusion that code-emphasis programs produce better overall primary grade reading and spelling achievement than meaning-emphasis programs".

Ecological balance

It seems that the pendulum constantly swings back and forth, and it could be argued that in order to keep moving forward, there must be some degree of swing to keep up the momentum. Pearson (2004) suggests an alternative to this constantly swinging pendulum would be one of ecological balance or "complementarity" that "respects the wisdom of practice" and "retains the practices that have proved useful from each era but transforms and extends them, rendering them more effective; more useful and more supportive of teachers and students" (p245). He further claims that "studies of exemplary teachers…consistently find that they exhibit a balanced repertoire of instructional strategies. Teachers who are faced with the variations in achievement, experience and aptitude found in today's classrooms need, and deserve, a full toolbox of pedagogical practices" (p.245).

Pearson (2004, p. 243) suggests that "a balanced approach will privilege authentic texts and tasks, a heavy emphasis on writing, literature, response, and comprehension, but it will also call for an ambitious program of explicit instruction for phonics, word identification, comprehension, spelling, and writing."

The politicisation of literacy instruction

Pearson (2004, p.238) suggests that "when research travels to the land of policy, often only the headlines make the journey". During the latter half of the twentieth century, Chall's (1967) "Great Debate" somehow turned into the "Reading Wars" (Ewing,

2006; Kim, 2008; Pearson, 2004) and at the beginning of the twenty first century, the discussion has indeed taken on political proportions as both politicians and the popular press have joined the discussion as the governments of the United States of America (National Reading Panel, 2000), Australia (Rowe, 2005), and the United Kingdom (Rose, 2006) have commissioned reviews of research to once again investigate the most effective approaches to reading instruction. These reviews seem to have fired the debate once again, but it seems that this is largely a result of politicians and the popular press paying attention to only part of the story.

These meta-analyses, which examined only what was identified as "scientific" research, confirmed what was largely already known and generally uncontested; that it was essential to teach the skills (phonological awareness and phonics knowledge) that would allow readers to "crack" the alphabetic code, but that these skills alone would not be adequate for effective reading without attention to other areas such as strategies for comprehension, building fluency, and developing vocabulary. The National Reading Panel (2000) identified five areas for early reading instruction: phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The Rose Review in the UK (2006) explicitly focussed on the teaching of early reading and resulted in a switch from the use of the "searchlights" model (Rose, 2006) as a conceptual framework for the teaching of early reading to Gough and Tunmer's (1986) simple view of reading. The "searchlights' model drew heavily on the work of Clay (1998; 1991) and Clay and Cazden (1990) in foregrounding early readers' use of four sources of information (phonological, syntactic, semantic and visual or graphic) to make meaning from texts. The simple view of reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990) conceptualises reading as the product of two sets of skills; word recognition processes and language comprehension processes. Cain (2010) explains that the important distinction between these two conceptual frameworks is that the simple view sees reading as the *product* of the two skill sets, rather than an additive view. This means that *both* skill sets must be in place for effective reading to occur. If the reader can decode the text in question, but does not have the background knowledge or vocabulary to understand what they have decoded, the reading is not effective.

The Rose Review (Rose, 2006) also signalled the importance of phonological and phonics instruction as foundation skills for reading and advocated for a synthetic approach, rather than the embedded or analytical approaches that were more commonly used in naturalistic or immersion approaches to early reading instruction. A follow-up report from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted, 2010) examined

the literacy teaching practices at twelve outstanding schools in the UK to identify best practice. Although there were differences across the schools, there were also notable commonalities. These common features included: high expectations and shared purpose in teaching literacy, highly trained teachers and teacher assistants who had a well-developed understanding of literacy processes, consistently high quality teaching informed by effective assessment and extra support where needed, a rigorous, systematic phonics program as the approach to decoding print and effective leadership from committed and knowledgeable school leaders.

The recommendations of the National Inquiry into the teaching of Reading in Australia (Rowe, 2005) seemed to have a broader developmental scope than the Rose Review; however the focus was on the teaching of reading, rather than a broader view of literacy. The Inquiry made a number of recommendations about the teaching of literacy, a small number of which have been implemented or are in the process of implementation, and others that seem to have been left to individual schools to put into place in an ad hoc manner.

Although the Inquiry (Rowe, 2005) made a total of 20 recommendations, the one that made the headlines at the time was the second recommendation, "…that teachers provide systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction so that children master the essential alphabetic code-breaking skills required for foundational reading proficiency". (p. 14). Many of those reporting the results of the Inquiry failed to include the second part of the same recommendation: "Equally, that teachers provide an integrated approach to reading that supports the development of oral language, vocabulary, grammar, reading fluency, comprehension and the literacies of new technologies" (p. 14) .

Pearson (2004) points out that there has not been the same focus on writing as there has on reading. Politicians, parents and journalists seem quite happy for this to happen in a holistic environment, without the same calls for direct instruction. In the Australian press there are beginning to be mutterings about the issues of grammar and spelling (as a result of the release of national testing data), and predictably, the critics in the press (and some politicians) claim that the answer to this is to return to the decontextualised teaching of parts of speech and "rules", rather than teaching grammar as a tool for making meaning.

Teaching approaches and support programs in Western Australian schools

First steps

The First Steps literacy teaching and assessment resources (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994) were developed by the Education Department of Western Australia to facilitate literacy learning for students who were perceived to be "at risk". Now in its second iteration through the development of new resources and a second edition (2004; 2005; 2006; 2008), the project has resulted in system-wide professional development for teachers in Western Australia, and the subsequent marketing of the program interstate and overseas. First Steps teaching and assessment resources, and the neo-constructivist philosophy of teaching and learning literacy which underpins these resources, are highly visible in many Western Australian schools, and less so in others, but the professional development and the resources provided by First Steps has clearly impacted to varying degrees on the ways in which many teachers in Western Australia teach literacy (Hunter, 1997).

Central to the First Steps philosophy is the idea that literacy learning is a developmental process, and that given appropriate guidance, all children can make progress. With this notion in mind, developmental continua were developed for various modes of literacy development: reading, writing, spelling and oral language (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994a, b, c, d). In the second edition of the materials (Steps Professional Development, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008), the spelling continuum has been subsumed into the writing, and a new continuum has been developed to cover viewing. The purpose of the developmental continua is to provide teachers with a map of the territory of literacy development in each of four areas of literacy development: reading, writing, speaking and listening and viewing. Each developmental continuum is made up of a series of "indicators", or milestones that children can normally be expected to reach as their progress in literacy develops. The indicators are grouped into broad phases of development consisting of achievements which may normally occur around the same time.

By plotting children's progress on the developmental continua, teachers are able to monitor children's progress in literacy and direct their teaching at the appropriate level for the children they teach. Linked to the developmental continua are resource materials of teaching ideas and strategies which provide a practical link between assessment and teaching (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994e, f, g, h; Steps Professional Development, 2004; 2005; 2006; 2008). The teaching ideas and strategies which are included in the resource materials are examples of practice which draw on both

developmental and socio-cultural views of early literacy learning. For children who do not seem to be making progress, close scrutiny of an individual child, using the developmental continua, can provide more refined, diagnostic information which can then inform intervention.

The politicisation of literacy instruction as it was manifested in the need for teachers to be accountable was largely responsible for the misuse of the First Steps Developmental Continua as a measurement of teacher accountability rather than as a tool for monitoring student progress. Although many teachers used the teaching approaches and ideas from the First Steps materials, they did not use the developmental continua as a tool for monitoring and diagnosis of student needs.

The most recent edition of the First Steps materials has been re-shaped to make links with the Western Australian Curriculum Framework and the Learning Area Statement for English (School Curriculum and Standards Authority, 2012. In each of the four areas, indicators have been assigned to the categories of use of texts, contextual understandings, conventions and processes and strategies. These categorisations make it difficult for teachers to align the indicators with the strands and sub-strands of the Australian Curriculum in English. The Western Australian Curriculum Framework, emerging as it does from a developmental-constructivist approach to learning, is epistemologically at odds with the current national agenda of benchmarks and national testing.

Reading recovery

Reading Recovery was developed in New Zealand by Clay (1993) and has been used extensively in New Zealand, the Eastern states of Australia, some states of North America and Canada and some areas of Great Britain (Center, Wheldhall, Freeman, Outhred & McNaught, 1995; Farmer-Hailey, 1996; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Currently in Western Australia, a number of schools in the Western Australian Catholic Education system who identify as "RAISe" schools also use Reading Recovery as a way of supporting their lower-achieving early readers.

Reading Recovery is an approach to intervention which provides intensive additional one-to-one reading instruction for those children who are experiencing difficulty with reading towards the end of their first year of school. This instruction takes the form of daily, thirty-minute lessons over a period of 12-20 weeks, and these lessons are provided in addition to the child's classroom literacy instruction. The lessons follow a structured format: daily assessment during reading a familiar text, reading a new text, writing time, work at the letter or word level and specific instruction directed at the child's point of need

as the child reads, writes and works with letters or words. The main focus in reading the new text is supporting children to combine the use of graphophonic (visual), semantic (meaning) and syntactic (structure) cues to read for meaning and to learn to automatically cross check the cues against each other to monitor and self-correct when meaning breaks down.

Reading Recovery is highly labour-intensive and therefore costly to put into practice. Because of the intensive and structured nature of the instruction, it is also difficult to effectively put into practice with children whose attendance at school is spasmodic or highly irregular.

Although a (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2013) report to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Literacy and Numeracy found more support for the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of Reading Recovery than for any other intervention program, Tunmer, Chapman, Greaney, Prochnow and Arrow (2013, p. vii) have suggested that for Māori and Pasifika children, who like Australian Aboriginal children are over-represented at the lowest levels of literacy achievement, "little or no progress has been made in reducing the literacy achievement gap because the constructivist/multiple cues model…is fundamentally flawed." They have further recommended that "Reading Recovery needs to be replaced with an intervention program that is based on contemporary theory and research on reading intervention and targets children who are most at risk of failing to learn to read (pp. ix-x). Their rationale is that the multiple cue approach used by Reading Recovery to problem-solve unknown words privileges the use of semantic (meaning and Syntactic (structure) information above the graphophonic (visual). As evidence, they cite Clay's warning that a child can be paying too much attention to the letters, thereby blocking the reader's ability to primarily pay attention to the meaning. Tunmer et al (2013, p. ix) refer to a study by Connor, Morrison and Katch (2004) which claims that for "low literate cultural capital children, better fitting instructional patterns (i.e., teacher-managed, code-focused instruction) resulted in a difference of more than *two full grade equivalents* in end of year reading scores compared with poorly fitting instructional patterns" (their emphasis).

THRASS

THRASS (Teaching handwriting, Reading And Spelling Skills) (Ritchie & Davies) is an approach to teaching phonics which teaches students the most common and multiple representations for each of the 44 phonemes on English. The approach is supported by a variety of teaching materials and resources, most notably the "THRASS chart" which lists

the most common representations for each phoneme. Although the web site lists a number of research studies confirming the efficacy of the approach, the full references are not given, and a search of the international and local literature has been unable to find any research either in support of or against its use.

Aboriginal literacy strategy

The Aboriginal Literacy Strategy is an initiative that was introduced in 2005 by the Department of Education and Training, Western Australia. It was initially introduced for use in remote schools, but since then, other, non-remote schools have also opted to use this approach. The purpose of the approach is to maintain consistency in pedagogy in the face of high teacher turnover and student mobility. Key features of the approach are a literacy session with consistent routines, based on the work of Crevola and Hill (1997), a two-way approach to learning which draws on the work of Malcolm (1995) and a gradual release model of instruction (Pearson & Gallagher, 1984). The literacy session includes a suggested five minute print walk, 20 minutes shared reading, 30 minutes guided reading, followed by 40 minutes writing instruction that included modelled writing and independent writing and finished with a 15 minute plenary for sharing and review of learning goals. From the documentation (Department of Education, Western Australia, n.d.), phonological awareness and phonics work appears to be embedded in the print walk and the shared reading components of the session. Teachers are directed to activities drawn from the first and second editions of the First Steps Resource Books (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994; Annandale et al., 2004; Annandale et al., 2005). An evaluation of The Aboriginal Strategy has been carried out, but this information is not publicly available.

National Accelerated Literacy Program

The National Accelerated Literacy Program draws on the work of Brian Gray (2007) and Wendy Cowey (2005). This approach has been used mostly in the Northern Territory and in South Australia, but has also been used in some independent community schools in Western Australia. The Accelerated Literacy approach uses age-appropriate examples of high quality literate texts that are typically well above the reading level of the students, but the teaching procedures work to "unlock" or "scaffold" (Gray, 2007) the texts for the students through orientations to and deconstruction of the text. The teaching sequence of low, followed by high order literate orientation, transformations, spelling and writing aims to give the students access to the literate Discourse of the texts they are reading so that they are able to understand the writer's intentional language choices, and at the end of the teaching sequence, use these in their own writing, by using the texts as models.

Cowey (2005) suggests that when a more traditional teaching approach of using simple, patterned basal readers is used, children "…sometimes come to the conclusion that reading depends on memorising the text. If there is a word the student cannot read then the illustrations, not the printed word, provide the solution" (p.7). Gray's approach sets out to replicate the "patterned routines" of parent/child interactive reading that supports emergent readers in highly literate households:

> Developing an awareness of various sets of intentionalities around the production and response to text is fundamental to the acquisition of control over literate discourse and making explicit the relationship between intentionality and the range of literate language choices employed within the texts studied becomes the focus for teaching in the NALP program. (Gray, 2007, p.19).

Although the teaching sequence does pay attention to spelling, it does so by looking at the patterned nature of English orthography, rather than having a focus on the alphabetic (sound/symbol representations). According to Bear, Templeton, Invernizzi and Johnston (2012), there are three layers of information that need to be given attention in spelling, and these occur in a developmental sequence: alphabetic, pattern and meaning. Attending immediately to the patterned layer and missing out the alphabetic layer means that the important skills of recognising, blending and segmenting phoneme/grapheme relationships are not taught in this approach.

An evaluation of the approach in the Northern Territory (Robinson et al., 2009) appeared to be somewhat inconclusive because different measures in different contexts had been used to record the progress of students; therefore direct comparison was not possible. The evaluation also identified that not all teachers had received the recommended amount of professional development. Further, it was identified that early childhood teachers in particular were unsure about how to incorporate the teaching of early literacy skills such as "phonological awareness, letter/sound knowledge, word attack skills and spelling" (p.7). In their review of individual evaluations carried out across a number of states, ACER (2013) noted that the evaluations provided "limited evidence of gains for participating students" (p.29) but also made the point that the approach may be more effective for students in year four and beyond than for those in the early years.

Principals as literacy leaders

The Principals as Literacy Leaders project (PALL) was initiated by the Australian Primary Principals Association in 2008 and funded by the Australian Government's Literacy and Numeracy Pilots in Low SES Communities. The project commissioned a research team,

drawn from three Australian universities, to develop a two year program to support principals in these schools as key leaders of teacher and student learning. The team drew on research-based evidence around the links between school leadership, the development of teacher professional knowledge and learning and improved student outcomes (Dempster et al., 2012) to provide five professional learning modules to support principals to carry out action learning in their schools. Dempster et al. (2012) drew on the "compelling body of evidence" (p. 4) from research over the last forty years to develop a framework termed "the Big Six", which they describe as a "research-based synthesis of the critical elements of reading development" (p. 29). These elements were oral language and early experiences, phonological awareness, in particular phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading fluency and comprehension. The framework provided a focus for teachers' and school leaders' professional development to develop their understandings about the reading process, the contribution of each of these elements to the reading process and identification of best practice. A Literacy Practices Guide was developed to help principals observe literacy events in their schools and to provide indicators of what good literacy practice should look like in junior primary, middle primary and upper primary classrooms. Dempster et al. (2012) collected evidence relating to student outcomes and improved teacher practices, and reported that these data indicated favourable impacts on both measures.

The Yorke and Mid-North literacy Project was developed to "value-add" to the PALL project in the Yorke and Mid-North Region of South Australia, a region with rural schools, low socio-economic status, high enrolments of Aboriginal children, an over-representation of new teachers and generally below average performance in reading on NAPLAN assessments . Konza (n.d.) reports that the purpose of the project was to develop in the region a critical mass of teachers who were skilled in teaching synthetic phonics. Teachers and School Support Officers (SSOs) received professional development in the areas of cultural awareness, oral language development, the reading process and the "Big Six" framework, the use of assessment tools to monitor oral language (Crévola & Vineis, 2004), phonological awareness (Mallen, 1994) and letter/sound knowledge (Konza, 2012). Participants were also supplied with *Letters and Sounds* (Department for Education and Skills, 2007) materials, decodable readers, and an instructional guide which included a synthetic phonics instructional sequence and the scope and sequence for synthetic phonics instruction. Teachers were supported to implement the synthetic phonics instruction within the framework of a morning literacy session that also addressed other elements of

reading from the "Big Six" framework and interactions with high quality children's literature. Participating teachers were further supported by school visits from the research team four or five times during the year.

The implementation of this project in the Yorke and Mid-North region appears to show promising initial results. Konza (n.d.) reports that over the course of the project there was improvement in the professional knowledge, confidence and efficacy of the teachers and more particularly the School Support Officers (who entered the project with a lower knowledge base around the teaching of reading). Classroom observations indicated that teaching practices continued to improve through the duration of the project and as a result of feedback from the observations, indicating the importance of a coaching or mentoring and feedback process. Despite this strong growth, there were still some confusions evident at the end of the project (for instance, confusion in use of the terms *letters* and *sounds*), indicating the potential usefulness of longer-term coaching and opportunities for feedback. In terms of improved student outcomes, Konza reports that there was statistically significant or statistically highly significant growth in reception (pre-primary) and year one students' growth in phonological skills, alphabetic knowledge and blending, and year two students' phonological skills and blending. The growth in development of Aboriginal students in the project generally mirrored the growth of their non-Aboriginal peers. In oral language development, statistically significant growth was evident in reception, year one and year two students, and in the reception year, the Aboriginal students out-performed their non-Aboriginal peers in terms of growth, indicating the value of early instruction.

Konza (n.d.) suggests that the researcher visits and opportunities for coaching were a critical aspect of the project and recommends five to six observations over the course of a year, with the majority of visits in the first half of the year for optimum effect. In terms of using a synthetic phonics program with Aboriginal children, Konza also suggests that the sequence in which the phoneme grapheme correspondences are introduced may need to be adjusted. When children speak Aboriginal English as their first dialect, they may have difficulty discriminating the sounds /s/ and /a/, which are typically the first phoneme grapheme correspondences to be introduced. She suggests that "constructing and trialling a teaching sequence that begins with phonemes that are common to both languages may assist Aboriginal students to develop alphabetic knowledge more easily (p.55).

This part of the literature review has examined a number of approaches which have been used to support lower-achieving students in Western Australian schools, and one approach which has been used in South Australia as a "value-added" support to Principals

As Literacy Leaders project (Dempter et al., 2013), which is also used in Western Australian schools. Key characteristics which are common to all of these support programs are *close and careful monitoring* of student progress to facilitate *explicit instruction* at the point of need, and *skilful scaffolding* that allows children to independently and successfully succeed at tasks which are challenging. Approaches such as Reading Recovery, the National Accelerated Literacy Program and Principals As Literacy Leaders also have an explicit focus on the development of teacher (and in the case of PALL, school leader) professional knowledge about reading and the reading process.

Instructional routines for early literacy

Instructional routines are important for young learners because they provide predictability and structure to the events of the school day. Across Australia, various aspects of literacy are usually taught during a "literacy block"; a block of time dedicated to literacy learning, usually occurring in the morning and lasting from one to two hours. The idea of the literacy block is that it allows the teacher to attend to all aspects of literacy and to ensure that there is a balance of whole class, small group and individualised learning (Hastings, 2012). The literacy block is modelled on the notion of the gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) and usually includes shared or modelled reading and writing events (demonstration), small group instruction in reading and writing, based on children's individual identified needs (targeted instruction and guided practice), and opportunities for individual application of concepts recently mastered (individual practice).

The small group guided instruction component of the literacy block is an important one, because it provides the opportunity for teaching which is targeted towards children's particular instructional needs and allows the teacher to provide scaffolding to support the children in successfully reading or writing a text that would normally present some degree of challenge. The skill of the teacher in selecting the text for reading and putting into place appropriate scaffolds is paramount to the success of this approach. The teacher will need to preview the text carefully and rehearse unknown vocabulary and language structures with the children before they are offered the opportunity to read the text independently (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). A careful orientation to the text also supports children's independent reading and comprehension (Briggs & Forbes, 2009). During reading, the teacher can use prompts to support children's use of appropriate strategies to problem-solve unknown words (Clay, 1993b; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Guided Reading is described as the "indispensable component" (Antonacci, 2000, p. 22) or the "heart' (Fountas and Pinnell; 1996) of the literacy program. Antonacci (2000)

compares guided reading to what she calls a "traditional" small group approach, where children are placed in fixed-ability groups, usually low-, middle- or high-ability groups and remain with that group for the whole of the school year. Antonacci (2000) cites Allington, who observed that a consequence of this type of grouping was that "low-ability groups received the kind of instruction that focused on isolated skills, while spending very little time actually reading".

Similarly, in a guided writing lesson, the teacher will select a small group of children who she or he has identified with a common need. The guided writing lesson may take the form of a "mini-lesson" (Rog, 2007; Spandel, 2012), with each child working on their individual writing tasks, but problem-solving a common need, such as sentence construction, or using a variety of time connectives in their writing. Once again, the teacher will need to carefully consider what scaffolds are needed to support the children to successfully do the task independently.

To be effective, guided lessons need to be directed towards children's specific and individual needs, so this is highly contingent on close and careful monitoring of children's progress, using instruments and observation tools that will supply fine-grained diagnostic data, and competent interpretation of the data to inform teaching. To this end, groups should be flexible and dynamic, constantly considered and re-considered around children's needs. This would be especially important where there is a significant variation in both children's attendance at school and children's abilities and progress in literacy.

The Context for Teaching Literacy in Rural Schools

As was signalled in the introduction, rural schools are typified by a number of characteristics which can impact to varying degrees on the teaching and learning that occurs, and which in turn can have the capacity to affect student outcomes. The next section of the literature review aims to examine these typical features and considers the potential for these features to present barriers to teaching and learning.

The nature of rural schools

Data collected in 1999 (Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000) indicate that rural and remote schools provide education to approximately 33 per cent or one third of government school students in Western Australia. The National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education (HREOC, 2000) identified a number of factors that are characteristic of rural schools. Rural schools generally have smaller enrolments than their typical urban counterparts, and in general, class sizes are smaller. While smaller schools

and class sizes can be an advantage in that they are more personal, the disadvantage is that classrooms are likely to be multi-age and therefore teachers are likely to have to cater to a much broader range of ability. The Inquiry (HEROC 2000) also identified issues such as rural schools being more difficult to staff, having a higher turnover of staff, employing younger, less experienced teachers, having more limited access to quality professional development for staff and reduced access to specialist supports such as occupational therapy or speech pathology.

Country students are less likely to complete 12 years of schooling, with males being less likely than females to complete, and rural school graduates are less likely to participate in tertiary education (HEROC, 2000; Sidoti, 2000). In addition, rural students are likely to have fewer options available to them at secondary and tertiary levels than their metropolitan counterparts, unless they are willing to travel to or board in more populated areas. For some students and their families, the associated costs are prohibitive.

Many rural communities include significant populations of Aboriginal students. As has already been identified in chapter one, rural-remote students generally and rural-remote Aboriginal students in particular are over-represented at lower levels of achievement on all measures of educational outcomes. A number of factors have been identified as being associated with Aboriginal students' lower performance in mainstream education. These include attendance and participation, attitudes to formal education, health, language and cultural issues.

Aboriginal participation in schooling

Zubrick et al (2006, p.48) state that "in pre-school years, there are lower proportions of Aboriginal children enrolled when compared with non-Aboriginal children" and that Aboriginal pre-school attendance at that time was approximately 88.8 per cent. It is not clear whether this figure is attributable across all of Australia, or just in Western Australia. However, a briefing paper for the Australian Education Union (Kronemann, 2007, p.6) suggests that "analysis of data from the National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training 2004 indicates that an estimated 56.4% of 4-5 year old Indigenous children attend preschool, compared to the general preschool participation rate of 83.4%". Kronemann (2007) further cites census data for each individual state or territory which estimates that in Western Australia, pre-school enrolments for Aboriginal children were 1,387 out of a total 3 and 4 year old Indigenous population of 2,830, making participation rates 49 per cent. The same set of data report Indigenous participation rates across the

country to range between 32 per cent (Tasmania) and 60 per cent (ACT). Walker (2004) reports that participation in Kindergarten programs for all children in Western Australia in 2002-3 was 71.7 per cent. Both Kronemann (2007) and Walker (2004) have commented on the difficulty of obtaining accurate data for pre-school participation, due to inconsistent reporting procedures and measures across various states and systems.

Historical perspectives

Historically, the relationship between Aboriginal people and the formal schooling system has not been a good one, or one that has served Aboriginal people well. Beresford (2012, p.85) states that "poor [educational] provision for Aboriginal children has resulted in generations of uneducated, or partly educated, Aboriginal people." The first Aboriginal school in Australia was established as early as 1814. The earliest education for Aboriginal people was established to "civilise" them and convert them to Christianity, and the first unsuccessful attempts were later taken up by missionaries, some of whom began the practice of forcibly removing young children from their families (Beresford, 2012). Fuelled by theories of social Darwinism, the prevailing view was that Aboriginal people were somehow inferior, destined only for occupations such as domestic service and unskilled labour, and could not be educated beyond the equivalent of around year three (Beresford, 2012; Price, 2012).

Periods of protection, followed by segregation and later assimilation all responded to four forces identified by Beresford (2012), and conspired to limit access to educational provision for Aboriginal people. The forces identified by Beresford were first, fear that Aboriginal people would intermarry with white people and that there would then be an increasing population of people with mixed descent; second, theories about the racial inferiority of Aboriginal people which justified limited access to education; third, community views about the morals and hygiene of Aboriginal people (which were a result of being confined to inadequate housing on reserves) which warranted their segregation. The fourth force was the official policy to eventually assimilate the Aboriginal population into the broader Australian community, meaning that in order to have any rights, Aboriginal people were forced to disassociate themselves from their own culture and live in the same way as white people. As part of this goal of assimilation, the practice of forcibly removing children from their families continued, and many children were sent to missions, where they endured harsh treatment and received little education.

The legacy of the Stolen Generation remains for most families. For many, schools and their representatives are still seen as representative of the "authorities" and are still

viewed with mistrust. Even after the 1970s, when governments began to take some responsibility and Aboriginal children had access to mainstream education, they were still subject to covert racism and teachers' low expectations. Still today, schools mostly operate around Anglo-centric ideas and ways of thinking, which are so commonplace that they are accepted as normal and not questioned, but which can serve to alienate others who have not been socialised into such practices.

Attendance

Collins (1999, p. 19) states that "Poor attendance at school, for whatever reason, remains the most significant direct cause of poor learning". In their study of 2737 school age children in Western Australia, Zubrick et. al. (1997, p. 27) suggest that students with nine or more days (18 half-days or 20 per cent of the school year) unexplained absence from school would be at "educational risk"; that is, they were more likely (3:1) to be performing at below age level in academic performance than those who had lower levels of absence. The implication from this benchmark is that children who missed less than this amount of school would be able to catch up with missed content fairly readily. More recently, however, modelling carried out by Hancock et al (2013) suggests that there is no "safe" threshold and that "average academic achievement on NAPLAN tests declined with any absence from school and continued to decline as absence rates increased" (p. 251). In other words, reduced learning correlates with the extent of the non-attendance.

Hancock et al's (2013) study also showed that children's attendance patterns become established early in their school career and tend to remain relatively stable across the years of primary school, with a tendency for certain groups of students' attendance patterns to reduce markedly during the secondary years. Hancock et al (2013) also concluded that student-related factors such as mobility and Aboriginality, together with socio-economic factors, were strongly associated with attendance patterns.

Zubrick et al (2006) found that Aboriginal children were more likely to attend school regularly if they had attended pre-school or kindergarten, or had spent some time in day care. Although surprisingly, health generally was not a correlating factor, children were more likely to be absent from school if they experienced difficulty in getting sufficient sleep. Other health factors did not appear to have an impact.

Carer-related factors that appeared to correlate with children's lower attendance at school included their carer having been forcibly removed from their family as a child, their carer having a limiting medical condition, having lower levels of education, being unemployed or at some time having been in trouble with the police (Zubrick et al, 2006).

Culturally appropriate education

One of the most frequently identified issues for Aboriginal children, around which there is a large body of literature, is the cultural mismatch between the ways in which learning generally occurs in mainstream schools and the ways in which children may have been socialised to learn in their home life.

There are several terms used to describe models of education which are considered to be culturally appropriate to Aboriginal people in Australia. Commonly used terms to describe these models include "Both Ways education" (Daniels & Daniels, 1991; Groome, 1994; Heitmeyer, Nilan & O'Brien, 1996; Lanhupuy, 1987; McTaggart, 1988; Yunupingu, 1991), "Two Way Learning" or "Two-way Schooling" (Harris, 1988; 1990; McConvell, 1982; Malcolm, 1995), "Two-way cultural exchange" (McConvell, 1991), "Right Way schooling" (Vallance & Vallance, 1988), "Bidialectal education" (Malcolm, 1995), but the understandings which underpin these various models can vary according to who is using the term. Ovington (1994, p.30) comments that "The diversity of terms underlines the multiplicity of meanings in which the concept has been used."

From these various perspectives, two dominant models may be distinguished which are considered to "represent the most innovative, influential and prima facie, conflicting attempts to grapple with the complex, theoretical and practical issues of Both Ways education" (Ovington, 1994, p.30).

Cultural domain separation

Harris (1988; 1990) maintains that Aboriginal and western cultures and ways of thinking are so different that they work in direct opposition with each other. Success in the dominant culture can only be achieved at the expense of maintenance of the other, minority culture. Harris (1988; 1990) suggests that cultural domain separation, or compartmentalisation of knowledge, is the most effective way to deal with this dilemma. In the cultural domain separation model, a clear boundary is drawn between Aboriginal and western knowledge so that each exists separately, but in parallel. Therefore Aboriginal and western knowledge are kept for different purposes, taught in different ways, by different people, even in different physical spaces.

The cultural domain separation model of education has drawn criticism from several sources. McConvell (1991) claims that Harris's model is based on neo-Whorfian ideas, the basic tenet of which is an association between grammatical and lexical forms of language, habitual thought and culture; that which may be termed "world view". As an example, McConvell (1991) suggests that neo-Whorfians would claim that because there is no clear

distinction between the words *if* and *when* in Aboriginal languages, as there is in English, this could be taken to mean that Aboriginal people are unable or unused to speculating, making predictions, or forming hypotheses.

McConvell (1991) suggests that the notion of cultural domain separation demonstrates yet another case of white people defining what constitutes Aboriginality, and Aboriginal ways of thinking and knowing. Aboriginal culture is described in "terms imposed by Western discourse about non-Western cultures" (McConvell, 1991, p.21). This "denies Aboriginal people the right to create and define their own indigenous identity and culture." (Ovington, 1994, p. 33). No allowance is made for differences in ways of thinking, knowing and being between different groups of Aboriginal people or between individuals (McConvell, 1991). The notion of compartmentalisation itself is a western way of thinking and in opposition to Aboriginal "relatedness" (McConvell, 1991).

Harris's model suggests a view of traditional Aboriginal culture as something to be preserved or "reified" (Ovington, 1994). A static view of Aboriginal society measures contemporary Aboriginal culture against traditional Aboriginal culture and fails to take into account the different contexts for Aboriginal culture. This view restricts innovation (McConvell, 1991) as Aboriginal culture is portrayed as "existing independently of human activity, particularly socio-political activity" (Ovington, 1994, p.33).

Harris (1991) responds to McConvell's criticism by stating that his model does not seek to resist change, rather to place control over change in the hands of Aboriginal people. He further suggests that the Aboriginal domain should incorporate aspects of Western culture in which Aboriginal people have become deeply involved, for example, sport, health, land rights. However, it could be argued that these shared aspects of Australian culture would never have moved into the "Aboriginal domain" under Harris's model, because they would initially have been placed exclusively in the "Western domain".

Negotiated meaning

The term "negotiated meaning" has mostly been used by researchers from Deakin University in relation to teacher education programs which they have established at Bachelor College in the Northern Territory. McConvell (1991) claims that negotiated meaning is also related to neo-Whorfism but from the opposite perspective.

Negotiated meaning uses *Ganma*, a metaphor commonly used in some Aboriginal coastal communities to describe the place where fresh water and salt water meet. This meeting of the two waters causes turbulence, representing the dissonances produced

when two cultures meet, but although the two never waters meet, they never merge, each retaining their own identity.

The *Ganma* metaphor also used in some Aboriginal cultures to describe and inform the negotiation of meaning between two different clans, or moieties; the conflicts between older and younger generations, and the border between life and death. The central idea is that opposing views create conflicts and dissonances, which lead to dialectic engagement and that this interaction produces new, higher order knowledge and understandings on both sides. Notions of equality, reciprocity and exchange are embedded in the metaphor. The attraction of this model is that it "conceptualises the interaction of the two cultures in terms of an Aboriginal theory, as a two-way flow, a highly conscious exchange with positive potential for both sides" (McConvell, 1991, p.21).

Negotiated meaning, or *Ganma*, has been viewed positively by Aboriginal communities with strong traditional links and where community members are willing and able to take the initiative with regard to preferred models of education for their young people (Daniels & Daniels, 1991; Wunungmurra, 1988; Yunupingu, 1991). The model also appears to have been successful at Bachelor College (Baumgart, Halse, Philip, McNamara, Aston & Power, 1995; Henry & McTaggart, 1991).

Although Ovington (1994) agrees in the potential power of dialectic exchange, he questions whether higher order thinking can always result from this interaction.   He suggests that this is often difficult for Europeans, even though it is thought to be part of the trappings of European culture, therefore it must necessarily be more difficult in the Aboriginal context:

> [T]here exists an immense difference between meaning negotiation for two moieties of the same cultural group and negotiation meanings for two distinct and often disparate cultural groups such as Aboriginals and Europeans. The concept of dialectic in itself is, or has not been, a trapping of the intellectual tradition of Aboriginal cultures. (Ovington, 1994, p.41).

The main theme to emerge from these differing views of Aboriginal culture is one of debate about change and exchange. Harris's (1991) notion of exchange is simply an exchange of ideas and does not involve change, growth or adaptation. Further, his use of binary oppositions to describe perceived differences between Aboriginal and Western culture (Harris, 1990) allows Westerners to construct Aboriginal people as "other" and sets up an "us and them" situation. The "us" will be the more powerful because the "us" is the

dominant culture. "Them" will be denied access to the culture of "us" simply because they are "them" and they are opposite to "us".

In reality, the lives and culture of many Aboriginal people have already changed and been shaped by their interactions with European cultures and before that with Asian cultures: "[T]he idea that the Aboriginal essence must be the opposite of the white European seems to take precedence over analysis of the reality of Aboriginal life and how it articulates wider society in which it is now embedded." (McConvell, 1991, p.14). It follows that as different groups of Aboriginal people have different interactions and exchanges with other different cultural groups, they will grow and change in different ways, even while maintaining a strong cultural identity across groups of Aboriginal people.

Whatever their orientation, it seems that all Aboriginal groups, both traditional and urban, recognise a need to succeed within the dominant, Western culture, without compromising their cultural identity:

> What is needed here is an education which will help Yolngu [Aboriginal] succeed in the Balanda [European] world without letting them forget their cultural identity. It must be an academic education so we can compete with students in any other school in Australia. (Wunungmurra, 1988, p.70.)

Both Ways and Two Ways educational models imply more than culturally responsive teaching; they embody a whole philosophy that underpins the system of schooling and its place in the community. Western bureaucracies and government systems such as state education departments do not fit well with these kinds of systems (McTaggart, 1991). The desire for more community involvement in Aboriginal education, together with a need for more Aboriginal teachers, is frequently expressed (Groome, 1994; Poulson, 1988; Western Australia, 1994; Wunungmurra, 1988).

It was hoped by the National Aboriginal Education Committee that by 1990 there would be 1000 Aboriginal teachers across Australia. (Groome, 1994; Western Australia, 1994). Although it is understood that over 1000 Aboriginal teachers have been trained, it seems that this number are not involved in teaching (Western Australia, 1994). The House of Representatives Report on Urban Aboriginal People "Mainly Urban" & the Royal Commission Regional Report (cited by Western Australia, 1994) suggest that "Aboriginal teachers are often hired away to more lucrative jobs due to the general scarcity of highly trained Aboriginal people" (p.378). The report further suggests that those Aboriginal

teachers who do remain in the teaching profession opt to teach in urban areas rather than rural or remote areas.

Even in remote communities, in Western Australia at least, Aboriginal children are almost invariably taught by white teachers in the mainstream system: "...teachers are almost solely members of the dominant culture, their resources are almost totally drawn from that culture, and they almost exclusively use [standard Australian] English as the language of instruction" (Partington, 1997, p. 15). In the absence of Aboriginal teachers and greater community involvement, Western teachers must develop a model of what can work in their particular context, that is, Western teachers teaching Aboriginal children to operate effectively in Western Society.

Aboriginal children in mainstream classrooms

It has been argued (Malin, 1989; 1990; West, 1994) that Aboriginal children, even in urban settings, are socialised differently from children with an Anglo or European background, because the child rearing and social practices of Aboriginal people differ from those of other cultures. Self-reliance is encouraged in Aboriginal children, they are given fewer reprimands and directions than white children, and as a consequence tend to be more autonomous and independent (Malin 1989; 1990; West, 1994). Compliance with requests from others, even adults, is optional and children are considered to have equal status with adults in terms of needs and wants, so they are not required to make deferential requests, for example, asking for food, asking to go to the toilet. Aboriginal children are also encouraged to a greater extent to help and nurture other, younger children (Malin, 1989; 1990).

When Aboriginal children come to a school where teachers have a different set of expectations in terms of socialisation, particularly in a context where they are the minority cultural group, they often find themselves in a situation where these behaviours are neither expected nor accepted, and the mismatch between two value systems becomes the source of potential conflict (Howard, 1994; Malin, 1989, 1990; West, 1994):

> Aboriginal students' independence and sense of equality with adults is likely to be viewed by teachers as purposeful misbehaviour. Conversely, teachers constantly giving and enforcing directions is liable to be seen by Aboriginal students as being 'too bossy' and may prompt angry outbursts or sullen resentment (Howard, 1994, p.37).

Also related to the culture and socialisation of Aboriginal students is a set of learning styles which are considered to be different to those of children socialised into an Anglo or European style culture. Harris (1982) suggests that whilst these "Aboriginal learning styles"

are not peculiar to Aboriginal people, rather they are features of informal learning more suited to Aboriginal people. Features of informal Aboriginal learning include observation and imitation, personal trial and error, real-life performance, successive approximation to the end product and persistence and repetition (Harris 1987). Harris further claims that teachers who understand Aboriginal learning styles will be able to make sure that learning experiences will be meaningful for Aboriginal students, that they will be able to build a rapport with their students and that they will be more able to assist the Aboriginal staff who may work alongside them.

More recently, it has been suggested that Aboriginal children are more likely to succeed at school situations which involve co-operative group work (Eibeck, 1995; West, 1994), shared experience (Trouw, 1994a; West, 1994), modelling (Eibeck, 1995; Trouw, 1994a), active participation in meaningful contexts and activities (Jarred, 1994; Trouw, 1994a), problem solving based on real-life situations (Eibeck, 1995; Jarred, 1994) using familiar materials and topics (Eibeck, 1995) and concrete materials (Jarred, 1994).

The issue of culturally appropriate teaching is not one that is peculiar to Australia. Ongoing research, discussion and argument continues amongst American educators regarding culturally appropriate teaching for the Indigenous peoples of America (Barnhardt & Harrison, 1993; Henze & Vanett, 1993; Osborne, 1996) and African Americans (Frisby, 1992; 1993a; 1993b; Hale, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; 1995b; Richardson, 1993). Ladson-Billings (1995a) examined the practices of eight teachers who had been identified by both principals and parents as highly successful teachers of African American students. Common features of the practice of these teachers were the consistently high expectations they had of their students, their use of the children's cultural knowledge as a bridge or scaffold for learning, that the primary and secondary discourses of the classroom were made explicit, and that the students were taught and encouraged to be conscious and critical of the social norms and practices that produce and maintain social inequities.

Ladson-Billings (1995a) suggests that these features are more than simply teaching strategies; that good practice goes deeper and stems from the teachers' beliefs and understandings; the "philosophical and ideological underpinnings of their practice" (p.162). These values were made evident in the teachers' beliefs that every child could succeed, the respectful relationships and equality that existed between students and teachers, the collaborative communities of learners that were created in their classrooms and the teachers' own critical thinking, learning and collaboration, which in turn provided models of teachers as learners and informed teachers' own philosophies about learning.

It could be argued that the ideology which underpins this kind of teaching would produce good teaching for any student, but particularly for those students from any marginalised groups. In Australia, Nicholls, Crowley and Watt (1996, p. 7) have argued that to locate Aboriginal students as "other" or somehow "separate" from the larger body of students has ignored Aboriginal education "in terms of its location within the broader field of economic, social and political power in this country". To unproblematically locate Aboriginal groups as "culturally different" not only ignores the diversity of expressions of Aboriginality, but it also ignores other, social and political conditions which continue to marginalise Aboriginal people: "[C]ultural explanations about Aborigines' academic failure will continue to prevail. And while 'cultural reasons' for academic failure continue to hold sway, more overtly political explanations will continue to be disregarded" (Nicholls, Crowley and Watt (1996, p. 7).

In reply, Partington (1997) points out that of all disadvantaged groups in Australia, Aboriginal students generally continue to have the least success at school. He suggests that neither a cultural or a critical explanation goes far enough, and suggests an alternative might be "found in the way in which the individual student is constructed by the circumstances, events and contexts which exist in his or her social setting" (p. 16). In order to provide effective and appropriate teaching, educators must look at all elements of each teaching and learning situation, including the students, the teacher, the social context and the curriculum (Partington, 1997). Rather than imposing categories on groups of students, educators must be flexible enough to identify and adapt to the requirements of their students in each teaching situation as the need arises.

More recently, Perso (2012) has argues that cultural responsiveness is the result of cultural competence. Cultural competence is different from cultural awareness, which is the recognition of cultural diversity; an understanding which includes recognising similarities across cultures as well as differences. Cultural competence goes a step further and recognises and identifies the strengths and accomplishments that individuals bring with them as a result of their cultural diversity, and this definition includes the professional's capacity to build on these strengths to facilitate new learning (Perso, 2012).

Aboriginal children learning English language.
Aboriginal children face particular problems learning literacy because the majority of them speak a variety of Aboriginal English as their first dialect (Eades, 1993). Aboriginal English differs from Standard Australian English at every linguistic level (Eades, 1993; Malcolm, 1995), including accent (phonology), grammar (syntax), vocabulary and pragmatic

use. Teachers who are unaware of the differences between Aboriginal English and Standard English may fail to see Aboriginal English as a legitimate dialect and simply dismiss it as "bad English", in need of correction (Eades, 1993).

The most important issue then, is to ensure that both the teacher and the students are aware that Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English are two legitimate, but different language systems. The FELIKS (Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools) approach (Berry & Hudson, 1997) aims to make these differences clear, to teach Standard English to Aboriginal children for use in appropriate contexts, and to explicitly teach them which dialect is appropriate for different contexts. By doing this, learning Standard English becomes a meaningful activity for Aboriginal children, and gives them a clear sense of achievement (Berry & Hudson, 1997).

At Traeger Park School in Alice Springs Brian Gray developed a model of "Concentrated Language Encounters" (Gray, 1985; 1987) which aimed to provide scaffolding and make explicit the features and registers of Standard Australian English for speakers of Aboriginal English. Concentrated language encounters use an experience which has been shared by all members of the class (an outing, a visitor, tending the garden, making toast for breakfast) to provide a context for scaffolded language experiences. These language experiences can take a variety of forms, but logically should begin with oral discussions, leading to activities such as building vocabulary, to more demanding activities such as shared writing:

> a concentrated language encounter is a role play, dialogue or discussion session for which perception of the relevant situational context (i.e. field, tenor, mode...) has been developed and is shared by both teachers and children....the concentrated language encounter sets a specific context for which the meaning requirements are known by all parties (Gray, 1985, p.94).

The concentrated language encounter provides a context for scaffolding children's language and literacy development through a process of "natural learning" (Gray, 1987; Trouw, 1994b) which involves shared experience, modelling, negotiation and collaboration to clarify meaning, and self-performance with increasing expertise. Although they were developed some years ago, these principles have continued to inform teachers' practice in more recent years (Clayfield, 1993; Trouw, 1994a; 1994b).

A further difficulty which affects Aboriginal children learning English language is that of otitis media, a chronic middle ear disease. Between 25-50per cent Aboriginal children are affected by mild to moderate hearing loss through otitis media (Quinn; Kelly & Weeks

cited by Howard, 1994). While this hearing loss can be spasmodic, especially in younger children, continued recurrences can result in permanent damage to the ear drum or auditory canal, with the result of permanent hearing loss (Howard, 1994).

Hearing loss, both permanent and temporary, presents difficulties for Aboriginal students in situations where teacher centred talk is part of the pedagogical practice. Loss of hearing also makes it even more difficult for Aboriginal children to reproduce the already unfamiliar phonology which they encounter in Standard Australian English.

Teachers in rural schools

Typically, the majority of teachers who teach in remote and difficult-to-staff country schools throughout Australia are young, newly qualified (Auditor General, Western Australia, 2000; Crowther, Cronk, King and Gibson, 1991; Gibson, 1994; Preston, 2000; Sharplin, 2002; Williams, 2002; Yarrow, Ballantine, Hansford, Herschell and Millwater, 1999) and, in Western Australia, employed on fixed-term contracts (Auditor General, Western Australia, 2000). They tend to stay in these locations for a short time only before moving on to other, more desirable positions (Sidoti, 2000; White, Lock, Hastings, Reid, Green & Cooper, 2009; Yarrow et al, 1999) or even to more desirable occupations (Lang, 1999; Williams, 2002). Further, it is claimed (Collins, 1999; Gibson, 1994; White et al, 2009; Yarrow, Ballantine, Hansford, Herschell and Millwater, 1997) that they are often inadequately prepared for their situation and that the expectations placed on new teachers in these contexts may be inappropriately high (Ramsey, 2000; Williams, 2002). For many teachers in such contexts, this may be their first teaching position and their first experience of living in a rural community.

The first year of teaching has been described as one of "survival" (Huberman, 1988; Lang, 1999) with teachers experiencing varying degrees of "reality shock" (DEST 2002; Lang, 1999), or "culture shock" (Cameron, 1994; Crowther et al, 1991; Down & Wooltorton, 2004). Perceived administrative incompetence, anxiety, an overwhelming workload leading to mental and physical exhaustion, and difficulties in managing challenging behaviours, or dealing with a wide range of academic abilities appear to contribute to these feelings of disorientation (Cameron, 1994; DEST, 2002; Down and Wooltorton, 2004; Lang, 1999.) Additionally, it is reported that beginning teachers in relatively isolated locations sometimes have to make do with inadequate resources and unsuitable accommodation (Cameron, 1994; Down and Wooltorton, 2004; Sidoti, 2000), and feel the effects of social and professional isolation (Cameron, 1994; Crowther et al 1991; Lang, 1999). In situations

where more experienced colleagues are available and willing to give advice to beginning teachers, their advice, although well-intentioned, may not always be helpful or appropriate (Down & Wooltorton, 2004).

Crowther et al (1991) point out, however, that some beginning teachers who had a more positive orientation to their location still viewed these factors as important, but were able to put a positive spin on the various aspects of their isolation. For instance, they enjoyed the professional autonomy afforded to them by their geographical isolation, or they learned to use their limited resources in more creative ways. Whilst they acknowledged the difficulties associated with their position, they also celebrated their successes, and saw their challenges as opportunities for professional growth.

What Do We Know About How Schools Can Support Teachers to Teach Literacy Effectively?

Induction and support

The issue of new teacher induction is one that has attracted significant scrutiny for more than twenty years. There can be no doubt that induction and support are seen as vital for beginning teachers, particularly those who are posted to difficult to staff schools (Britton, Raizen, Paine & Huntley, 2000; DEST, 2002; Gibson, 1993; Lang, 1999; Ramsey, 2002; Schuck, 2003). Ramsey (2002, p. 207) suggests that induction of teachers "is in many ways the critical link between preparation and practice as a professional." Along with employing bodies in other Australian states and systems, the Department of Education and Training in Western Australia has made considerable effort in recent years to improve the induction processes on offer for beginning teachers. However, there is "significant variation between state and territory systems" (DEST, 2002, p. 12) in relation to the type of induction and the levels of support that are provided, how these are provided, and by whom. Currently, new teachers taking up employment with the Department of Education and Training in Western Australia are supported with professional learning through the graduate modules (three modules over two years) offered by the Institute for Professional Learning, have access to coaching from a Teacher Advocate, are entitled to a reduced teaching load in their first year, and on appointment, are offered a one-off payment to help with expenses.

While the current provisions for beginning teachers in Western Australia appear to be generous, there appears to be considerable variation in the degree to which these entitlements are actually accessed and taken up (Johnson, Down, Le Cornu, Peters, Sullivan,

Pearce and Hunter, forthcoming). Some teachers in their study did not access the modules because they did not think they needed them; others did not know about them; still other beginning teachers, who had been employed on temporary contracts, did not qualify. Some teachers in their study found the Teacher Advocates (coaches) to be very helpful, while others did not. Some teachers, because they were employed in remote or rural locations, had only the option of another staff member as their mentor; others attempted to set up meetings with their Advocate, but these did not eventuate because of illness or other commitments on the part of either party. Johnson et al. (forthcoming) also found that there was considerable variation in the ways in which new teachers were provided with their non-contact time, and this was largely dependent on the way that the Principal set this up. Some Principals organised the time into a structured learning program for the beginning teacher; others suggested the teachers accessed their time in the form of "mental health" days. The Hay Group (2014), in their report commissioned by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), state (p. 5) that "…the evidence base for determining best practice in teacher induction is far superior to that of other professions or the corporate sector." Despite this, there remain concerns about the induction processes for new teachers. The Hay Group suggest that "the issue is not one of design, it is an issue of implementation" (p.5).

CHAPTER 4:
Methodology

The Impact of the Context on the Design of the Study

The contexts in which this study took place, and the fact that it was a longitudinal study, carried out over the course of three years, imposed some constraints on the methodology of this study. I believe it is important to foreground this because it forms part of the data and draws attention to the difficulty of imposing even a well-thought-out plan in such contexts, because of the ever-changing nature of the school communities. To some extent, the design of the study emerged in response to the continually changing landscape that formed the backdrop to this study. It was important to respond in this way in order to capture the "lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990) of the children, teachers and school leaders who were the focus of observation and inquiry. It is my argument that capturing this landscape of continual change has added to the richness of the data, even though it was complex and often frustrating to manage. It was therefore necessary to have some degree of flexibility around the design of the study in order to manage the changes.

In most schools that were the focus of the study, there was an almost complete turnover of staff and school leaders during the three years of data collection. In at least one school, this major staff renewal occurred at the end of every school year. This meant that in all cases towards the end of the three-year period of data collection, schools, school leaders and teachers "inherited" the study as a result of a commitment made not by them, but by their predecessors. Although all school leaders and most teachers cooperated, the degree to which they actively engaged with the study varied, from passive interest at one end of the scale to outright enthusiasm at the other.

Educational connoisseurship and criticism

The notion of educational criticism and connoisseurship (Eisner, 1985) presents an effective way of describing, interpreting and evaluating the literacy teaching practices which occur in schools and classrooms. Eisner believes "that the creation of educational criticism, a form of criticism not unlike that found in the arts but directed to educational matters, could provide a kind of utility that scientific studies and quantitatively treated phenomena neglect." (p. 219).

The educational connoisseur, like the connoisseur of art, music, film, or any other artistic endeavour, not only examines the quality of the work as a whole entity, but

perceives and appreciates the various different qualities which exist within the work and contribute to the work as a whole. The work of the connoisseur is appreciation; "to perceive what is subtle and important" (Eisner, p. 219). The work of the critic is disclosure; to "...create a rendering of a situation, event or object that will provide pointers to those aspects of the situation, event or object that are in some way significant." (Eisner, p.224). Thus it follows that connoisseurship precedes criticism.

Eisner and Flinders (1994) claim that educational criticism goes further than ethnography as a means of interpretive inquiry. Firstly, "[E]ducational criticism requires educational expertise, not simply ethnographic expertise" (Eisner and Flinders, 1994, p.385). The researcher as connoisseur has a degree of knowledge and expertise which allows him/her to recognise those events which define the quality of teaching. Secondly, "Educational criticism is designed to enlighten in order to *improve* the quality of schools, classrooms, teaching, and textbooks" (Eisner and Flinders, 1994, p.385, their emphasis). The researcher as critic sets out to share what (s)he sees with the intention of influencing current practice.

Eisner (1985) identifies three elements of educational criticism; descriptive, interpretative and evaluative. The role of description is to adequately portray and characterise the situation under examination. The interpretative aspect asks questions about what the situation means to the participants: What understandings are influencing the action, and what understandings are being constructed by the action?   Finally, in the portrayal and interpretation of events, judgements are an inevitable part of the process. As Eisner (1985, p. 235) says, "One must inevitably appraise the value of a set of circumstances if only because, in the process of description, selective perception has already been at work."

Theoretical Framework

Habermas (1971) has identified three "knowledge constitutive interests", or categories of possible knowledge, according to which knowledge is generated and organised through different epistemological orientations:

> The approach of the empirical-analytic sciences incorporates a *technical* cognitive interest; that of the historical-hermeneutic sciences incorporates a *practical* one; and the approach of critically oriented sciences incorporates the *emancipatory* cognitive interest...(p.308).

A review of literature relating to current perspectives of early literacy learning demonstrates that these can be broadly classified into three orientations. The first of these is the notion of emergent literacy, which is informed by cognitive and developmental psychology. The second view is the socio-cultural perspective which is informed by anthropology and socio-linguistics, and thirdly, the socio-political perspective is informed by critical and feminist theory.

What is known about children's early literacy learning cannot adequately be explained from any one perspective. Cognitive skills and understandings do not develop in isolation, but are influenced by the social context and processes in which development takes place. Further, the context and processes are influenced by social, cultural and institutional practices which surround literacy learning and form part of the context.

Similarly, teacher knowledge cannot be viewed from any single perspective. While teachers clearly need the technical knowledge of their discipline that is reflected in procedural and content knowledge, they also need to ground this in the context in which they are working, which requires them to draw on cultural and pedagogical knowledge, and to be able to use this knowledge in socially political and emancipatory ways to empower their students to "read the world as well as the word" (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

The three perspectives of early literacy development and teacher knowledge outlined above appear to fit somewhat neatly against the backdrop of Habermas's (1971) knowledge constitutive interests, to provide three different "lenses" through which early literacy learning and teaching may be viewed. Figure 4.1 presents a graphic representation of these ideas.

The technological lens relates to ways of thinking about literacy which are informed by cognitive and developmental psychology. The focus is on controlling and managing parts of the language system. This knowledge constituent interest is traditionally generated through empirical and analytical science (Habermas, 1971). In the current study, this lens has been informed by the assessment tasks carried out by the students, the student profiles which were subsequently constructed using this information, the ways in which teachers chose to use or disregard this information to inform their teaching.

The practical lens reflects ways of thinking about literacy which are grounded in cultural anthropology. This way of thinking about literacy focuses on understanding literacy as a social, interactive, meaning-making process. Habermas's (1971) practical knowledge constituent interest is generated through the historical and hermeneutic

sciences. This lens has been informed by ethnographic data which was used to construct case studies of teachers and children.

The critical lens relates to ways of thinking about literacy which are drawn from feminist and critical theory. Critical theorists focus on making visible those structures and practices which reproduce inequality and injustice. The emancipatory constituent knowledge interest which relates to this view is generated by the critical sciences (Habermas, 1971), and in this study, the lens has been informed by a critical analysis of classroom and institutional practices.

Technical

Informed by cognitive and developmental psychology

Controlling & managing parts

Empirical/analytical sciences

Assessment tasks
Student/class profiles

Practical

Informed by cultural anthropology

Social interaction; understanding; meaning-making

Historical/ hermeneutic sciences

Case studies
Vignettes

Critical

Informed by cognitive and developmental psychology

Emancipatory justice & equality

Empirical/analytical sciences

Critical analysis of classroom & institutional practices

Figure 4.1: Three lenses through which literacy can be viewed

The technological lens

Grundy (1987, p.12) defines the technical interest as "a fundamental interest in controlling the environment through rule-following action based upon empirically grounded laws". Traditionally informed by empirical and analytical research, researchers working with this knowledge constituent interest frequently break literacy into parts and observe the relationships that exist between the various parts, developing rules and laws about those relationships.

The cognitive view of children's early literacy development focusses on young children's growing understanding of the technological parts that make up the language system, and how these various parts need to work together in process to bring about fluent and effective reading and/or writing. As young children's understandings about literacy emerge, they consistently refine and add to their knowledge of the implicit rules which govern language, developing their skills with language and literacy in its various forms, and

moving along a developmental continuum until they eventually become competent users of literacy. The technological lens has been informed by a range of assessment tasks which were carried out each year to assess each child's progress along this continuum. The assessment tasks were selected to show what children knew and could do with literacy at various points in the study.

Each of the children in the study worked one-to-one with the researcher to complete the bank of assessment tasks during one or two sessions of twenty to thirty minutes, depending on the individual child. The assessment tasks provided measurable outcomes which were used to develop class and school profiles; these measures have been consistently recognised for more than 60 years as indicators of skills and processes that are integral to learning to read and write (Adams, 1990; Clay, 1991; McKenna & Stahl, 2009; Morrow, 2009; 2011; Pressley, 2006; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). All the tasks were diagnostic in nature and this diagnostic information was therefore returned to the children's teachers with the intention that it would be used to inform their teaching practice as well as adding fine grained detail to case study data.

The practical lens

Researchers working with Habermas's (1971) practical interest examine knowledge in a holistic way, informed by a heuristic or historical view. The orientation of this interest is towards making meaning through interaction with the environment. Grundy (1987, p.14) defines the practical interest as "a fundamental interest in understanding the environment through interaction based upon a consensual interpretation of meaning".

The socio-cultural view of children learning literacy recognises that young children learn about print as they see it being used in purposeful and meaningful ways. They also learn about print as they use it themselves to achieve social purposes. Understandings about print and its functions are constructed through the scaffolding of more proficient others. This study is also concerned with examining and understanding the social environment in which young children's literacy learning develops and how this environment is fostered by the relationships, practices and classroom setting. What were the cultural practices of each particular classroom? What did teachers do to provide purposeful activities and scaffold children's understandings? What other classroom events assisted this development?

An ethnographic approach, using interviews and participant observation, was employed to record and interpret the events of the classrooms and produce renditions of

life in classrooms and schools. Wolcott (1985, p. 190) claims that the "essence of ethnographic endeavour" is to "describe and interpret cultural behaviour". Classrooms can be viewed as individual communities, made up from a group of people who come together and interact together as social beings, each bringing something of themselves to the group: "...cultural elements not originating in schools are brought into those settings in the practices and minds of students, teachers and administrators, blurring the boundaries of school and society" (Preissle & Grant, 1998, p.5).

Because classrooms are groups of different people, the cultures of classrooms differ, from one to the other. The members of each classroom community will develop and shape their thoughts and understandings differently as a result of their interactions with the other members of that community. Ethnographic accounts "help us understand how particular social systems work by providing detailed descriptive information, coupled with interpretation" (Wolcott, 1984, p.199).

In the first, broad phase of the study, general data were collected to describe the context and culture of each school and the range of classroom practices surrounding literacy and literacy events. In the second, more focussed phase of the study, case studies were constructed around individual teachers and children with the intention of describing the social contexts and events surrounding literacy learning. Case studies have been created around a selection of teachers and children to provide insights into school and classroom events from the perspective of both teacher and child. Case study teachers were selected to represent a variety of life-histories, pre-service experiences, qualifications and teaching experience. Similarly, case study children were selected to represent a variety of life and classroom experiences and the different ways in which they responded to what was offered in school and in their classrooms.   "Detailed portraits of children...highlight the diversity among seemingly similar families and the individuality of children's experience and action." (Solsken, 1993, p.10) The vignettes which further support the discussion around the case studies were also drawn from the ethnographic data.

During this period of data collection, assistance was offered to teachers to put together professional portfolios around their teaching of literacy. The professional portfolio is both a product and a process (Loughran & Corrigan, 1995). It was envisaged that these products would enable teachers to share with others the practices and ideas which had been successful for them in their particular context. The process would require teachers to reflect on their practice as they selected the artefacts which best described and

illustrated their growth and development as a teacher. It was intended that the process of building professional portfolios would add to the data which would be used to construct the case studies of the focus teachers. This process of self-reflection may seem more suited to informing the critical lens, but in order for this to be the case, teachers would need to be reflecting on their practice at a critical level. As it turned out, few teachers were able to do this.

Although a number of teachers initially expressed their interest in going through this process, in the end, only two teachers actually achieved any kind of product. For most of the teachers, the demands of the classroom were overwhelming to the extent that developing portfolios was very low on their list of priorities, however well-intentioned they might have been at the beginning of the study.

The critical lens

The emancipatory interest identified by Habermas (1971) refers to knowledge which is subjected to question and analysis in order to make visible the influences of social structures. Notions of autonomy and responsibility are connected with self-reflection which seeks to identify one's own orientation to knowledge. Grundy (1987, p.19) defines the emancipatory interest as "a fundamental interest in emancipation and empowerment to engage in autonomous action arising out of authentic, critical insights into the social construction of human society".

Classroom and institutional practices operate to group students into various categories, according to criteria such as gender, ethnicity, and social class, which in turn make up the social structures which exist within those institutions. Solsken, (1993, p.7) suggests that "[b]arriers to achievement are seen as built into social structures and everyday social practices, especially for those groups which are not in positions of power".

The work of Michel Foucault has been useful in informing and helping to identify and make visible the practices and discourses which may have been at work at various organisational levels of schools and the school societies to construct and position community members, teachers and students. Foucault's notions of 'power/knowledge', 'discourse' and 'governmentality' (Cutting, 1994) provide a "toolbox of concepts" (Rajchman, cited by Comber, 1996) with which to begin to critically analyse and explore the classroom and institutional practices that surround young children learning literacy.

Bourdieu's (1979) notion of 'habitus' also provides a useful means of looking at the ways in which young children are constructed and construct themselves as literacy

learners. The 'habitus' is the set of beliefs and practices associated with groups of people and how they view and construct themselves. It is defined as much by what it is not as by what it is. Olson (1995, p. 35) describes habitus as "a way of being or an habitual state which describes an individual's way of predisposition to act in certain ways and to have certain tendencies of behaviour, outlook and taste." This can relate to a person's choice of books, clothes, art, music and personal style, but also relates to such things as ways of speaking, mannerisms and body language. The habitus can relate to both the individual and the group. An individual's orientation to society is conditioned by the orientations of others. "[H]abitus interprets individual situations and actions in relation to the predispositions and traditions of the group" (Olson, 1995, p.35).

Reay (1995) suggests that habitus is a useful way of looking at social inequalities because it acknowledges diversity within social groupings and takes into account the context in which events occur. While Bourdieu has used habitus as a way of examining the inequities that are played out and reproduced in relation to gender and social class, Reay suggests that it could equally well be applied to issues of ethnicity.

The first, broad phase of data collection sought to document the general practices of schools and the relationships which appeared to be set up between the schools and their clientele. In the second phase, the case studies were constructed to attempt to describe in depth the classroom practices and interactions between various groups and individuals in the classrooms. In the discussion and analysis of the case studies, the work of Foucault and Bourdieu as discussed above has been drawn on to critique and comment on school and classroom practices and interactions between groups of people which may have (unintentionally) obstructed the advancement of some groups while fostering the progress of others. This lens has also been informed by the insights of some teachers who had developed a degree of critical self-reflection as they discussed their professional practice.

Design of the Study

The study has been informed by two kinds of data. First, the construction of case studies has attempted to produce renditions of life in the classrooms which became the focus of this study. The case studies, and the vignettes which support them, have been constructed to give the reader a sense of events from the perspective of both the teachers and the children. A second source of information has emerged from an analytical interpretation of data collected through children's performance on a series of assessment tasks (Hill et al, 1998b) which were selected to show what the young children who

participated in the study knew and were able to do with literacy in the early years of their education. Analysis of these assessment data helped construct the case studies by providing profiles of individual students and class groups of students. Additionally, these data helped track the literacy development of individual children and groups of children over time.

Participants

The schools

Because of the long distances and costs involved in travelling to rural, regional and remote locations to collect data over three years, it was important to involve schools that were relatively close to each other geographically, so that travelling time could be minimised.

The participating schools were initially approached via the District Directors of two Western Australian Education Department school districts. Having explained the purpose of the study and secured their agreement to work with the schools, individual schools in each district were approached. Within the districts, schools were arranged in "clusters"; groups of schools that were relatively closely located geographically, so that they could work collaboratively and provide a professional network for staff. Principals from one of the districts invited me to attend a "cluster" meeting, where I was able to outline the study in some detail. Following this, principals from four schools in this cluster expressed their interest and volunteered their schools to participate. In the second district, the schools were more spread out geographically, but there was a large regional centre in the district, so schools in the regional centre were approached, and the principals at two of these schools elected their school to participate in the study.

To include a remote school perspective, a remote community school that was located on the border of these two school districts was approached, and also agreed to participate. During the three years of data collection, the district borders were re-aligned, and this school moved from the original school district into the other.

The teachers

In each of the schools, teachers who taught the pre-primary, year one and year two classes were invited to participate in the study. Teacher Assistants and Indigenous Education Officers who were working with these classes were also invited to participate, to provide further insights. In the first year of the study, a total of 19 teachers participated in the study. This number reduced in subsequent years as some of these teachers moved on to other schools.

In the first year of the study, children from the year one and pre-primary classes were invited to participate. In the second year, children from the same cohorts (now years one and two) were invited to participate once again, and a new group of children now in the pre-primary year were invited to join the study. In the final year, children in years one and two were invited to participate. In this way, data were collected from one cohort of children over three consecutive years, and two further cohorts over two years. Student cohorts in Table 4.1 have been colour-coded to demonstrate this process.

Data collection

Progressive focussing

During the initial visits to each of the schools, a range of general and demographic data were collected from the schools, observations took place in each participating classroom and teachers were informally interviewed so that a broad general picture could be constructed relating to the variety and range of teachers' practices and the social and cultural contexts in which those practices took place. Data collected from carrying out the assessment tasks with children in pre-primary and year one added to the construction of this overall picture. The data from these assessment tasks were also returned to the class teachers and school leaders with the intention that they should be used to inform future classroom instruction.

Case studies of both teachers and children were developed by using a technique of progressive focussing. The teachers who are the focus of the case studies were selected to represent a range of pre-service and in-service experiences. To further add to the richness of the reported data, the discussions that follow the presentations of the case studies are supported by vignettes which add to the picture of teachers' experiences.

Case studies of children were similarly constructed. The focus children were selected not only to represent a range of circumstances and ages but also to represent children's common experiences. In addition, the children for the case studies were selected because they were at school at the time of data collection on at least two of the three occasions. Again, the discussion that follows the case studies is supported by vignettes that add to the richness of the data.

The case studies for both teachers and children were constructed from transcripts and observations of lessons, informal interviews, and artefacts such as children's work samples, classroom displays, attendance records, student records, teaching programs and so on.

Over the course of the study, semi-structured interviews were also carried out with school leaders at each of the participating schools. As well as discussing the challenges and rewards of school leadership in their context, they were also asked to comment on issues such as appointing and retaining staff, supports for staff and students, community liaison and the development of school policies.

Each school was visited for a period of around a week, at least twice a year, usually in terms two and three. Terms two and three were chosen as being the time when the most children were at the school. In the second year of the study, some schools were also visited in term one, at the invitation of the school leaders. The purpose of these term one visits was to workshop the previous year's assessment data with newly appointed staff, with the aim of supporting their planning. Table 4.1 summarises the data collection over a period of three years.

Table 4.1: Summary of data and timeframe

Year	Interpretive Data	Student Assessment Data		
1998 (initial visits)	**Phase 1 Broad data collection** School Information Policy Information Teacher Information Classroom Information Home Information	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	
1988, 1999	**Phase 2 In-depth data collection** Case studies: - 4 focus teachers - 4 focus children Vignettes School leader interviews	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
2000	Case studies Vignettes School leader interviews		6-year-olds	7-year-olds

Phase 1: Baseline data and selection of case study participants

The first phase of the data collection was broad-based. Data were collected from participating schools in each of the two school districts to describe the context of each participating school; enrolments, number, qualifications and experience of teachers, numbers of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, school policies and plans relating to literacy and culturally responsive education, and data relating to attendance and behaviour management. School leaders were briefly and informally interviewed to provide further background information about each school.

In most cases, Indigenous Education Officers provided invaluable assistance by liaising with the parents and caregivers of Aboriginal children. Prior to the commencement of the study, the assessment tasks were demonstrated to them, and their advice was sought about the appropriateness of the tasks. They were able to explain the study to parents, answer their questions and, where desirable, introduce me to the children's parents or family members.

Indigenous Education Officers were also able to provide important background information relating to the history of the schools and communities, the welfare of the Indigenous children and their relationships to other children and families. The only school where this did not happen was at Mulga Springs, where the Indigenous staff had their own staff room and rarely came into the teachers' staff room. Similarly, non-Indigenous staff did not go into the Indigenous staff room. More discussion of this issue will occur in the data chapters.

Initial classroom observations were carried out (a total of approximately one half-day) in each classroom, and each teacher was informally interviewed so that the range of literacy practices could be identified and documented.

To provide a baseline of student literacy knowledge, children in pre-primary and year one were assessed, using the range of assessment tasks described in table 4.2 below, and from these data, profiles of student performance were developed for each year level, by school and classroom. These profiles were returned to the schools and to individual teachers, so that they could be used to inform their teaching.

This phase of data collection was mostly completed by the end of 1998. Some collection of this information was ongoing. Table 4.2 below represents a summary of the data collected in Phase 1:

Table 4.2: Summary of phase 1 data.

Type of Information	Data	Source of data
School Information	• No of enrolments K-2	• School enrolment information
	• No of Aboriginal children K-2	• School enrolment information
	• School ethos & objectives	• Interview with Principal

Policy Information	• School policies relating to:
	   - Literacy
	   - Culturally responsive education
		• Policy documents

Teacher Information	• No of teachers & support staff	• School information systems
	• No of years & type of teaching experience	• Informal interviews
	• PD relating to literacy and/or Aboriginal Education	• Informal interviews
Classroom Information	• % Attendance per student, 1998	• Class rolls
	• % Serious misdemeanours, 1998[2]	• Behaviour management records • Teachers' records
	• Range of teachers' literacy practices	• Observations • Informal interviews
	• Student literacy profiles	• Assessment tasks
Home Information	• Community perceptions	• Informal Interview with IEO
	• Parents' expectations of school	• Informal interviews with IEOs and parents
	• Home literacy practices	• Informal interviews: children, IEOs & parents
Baseline Literacy Assessment	• Children's school literacy knowledge	• Assessment tasks

Phase 2: In-depth data collection

Classroom observations and teacher interviews

During each school visit (around 1 week, at least twice each year), observations of literacy instruction were carried out in each of the participating classrooms. Observations were recorded as field notes, and classroom interactions were audio-recorded and later transcribed. These observations were further supported by the collection of artefacts such as worksheets used in the lessons that were observed, children's work samples, photographs of classroom configurations and wall displays, and teachers' record-keeping formats.

Semi-structured interviews and informal conversations took place with teachers, school leaders, Indigenous Education Officers, Literacy Support Teachers and some parents.

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[2] Serious misdemeanours as determined by the school's behaviour management policy.

The semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, and field notes were made following informal conversations. A number of the teachers and some school leaders corresponded with me between visits by email and these emails supplemented the field notes. During the course of the study, two teachers who participated in the study were putting together teaching portfolios for their Level 3 teacher applications. Their reflections and some of the artefacts they included in their portfolios also contributed to the qualitative data. School leaders at all schools participated in a more structured interview during the final year of the study and these interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

In addition, I kept a personal diary during the three years of data collection. This diary has served as a useful reference and timeline for events, as well as a detailed record of my own thoughts and impressions, celebrations and frustrations. Blaxter, Hughes & Tight (2001,) suggest that it is a good idea to keep a research diary in which to record "progress, feelings, thoughts, insecurities and insights" (p.49) and that these interpretations contribute to the analysis of events.

Assessment tasks

At the suggestion of the Aboriginal school staff, wherever possible, the assessment tasks were carried out with the children in a quiet corner of the classroom, where we could be in full view of the rest of the class. This way, the children who were not participating in the tasks at the time could see what was going on and felt they had some idea of what was involved. Where it was not feasible to conduct the assessment tasks in the classroom, I spent time beforehand showing the whole class the materials for the tasks and providing a brief explanation of "the games" I would be asking children to "play with me". The employment of these techniques meant that the children did not see the activities as "testing" but approached the assessment tasks with some degree of confidence and were keen to participate in the activities.

The degree of mobility of the children meant that each year, some children who had originally undertaken the assessment tasks withdrew from the study, because they were either not at school at the time that the assessment tasks were carried out in future years, or because they had by then permanently left the school. In addition, other children, who for similar reasons had not participated in the study in the first year, joined the study in subsequent years. The consequence of this is that although there are a core of students (approximately 50per cent) who remained in each cohort, the rest of the cohort may not have been made up of the same students each year.

The assessment tasks which were conducted with children in pre-primary, year one and year two were selected to provide a broad range of information about children's skills and understandings in early literacy. The selection of the specific diagnostic tasks draws from and builds on the range of assessment tasks which were selected and developed to inform a comprehensive study of 100 children in three states of Australia during their first year of school (Hill et al, 1998b). Some of these assessment tasks are based on previously published materials, most notably Clay's (1993a) *Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement*, which includes the Concepts about Print test, Letter Identification, Writing Observation and Ready to Read Word test. Other items (Hill et al, 1998a), which were especially developed for the study of 100 children (Hill et al, 1998b), include tasks connected with everyday literacy (a junk mail toy catalogue) and environmental print (photographs of familiar food, toys and retail signs). Other tasks are a phonological awareness task adapted specifically for this study from another, published study (Bowey, 1995), and the Yopp-Singer test of phoneme segmentation (Yopp, 1995).

The high-frequency word list from the UK National Literacy Strategy (Department for Education and Employment, 1998) materials was used to select lists of high frequency words to test students' sight word knowledge at each year level. The first 10 words were selected for pre-primary children, the first 45 words for year one students and the first 100 words were used to test year two students' automatic recognition of high frequency words. This list was selected because of its similarity to a number of high frequency word lists in common use in Western Australian classrooms, but also because the teacher resource materials provided some indications of what words children might be expected to know in the reception year, year one and year two.

Table 4.3 below summarises the range of assessment tasks which children were asked to complete in pre-primary, year one and year two. As well as providing some measure of young children's early literacy development, these tasks are all diagnostic in nature and their use was designed to provide teachers with detailed information about their students which would then inform their teaching.

Table 4.3: Summary of assessment tasks

Pre-Primary	Year One	Year Two
Environmental Print (Hill et al, 1998a)	Environmental Print (Hill et al, 1998a)	
Everyday Literacy (Hill et al, 1998a)	Everyday Literacy (Hill et al, 1998a)	
Concepts about Print (Clay, 1993a)	Concepts about Print (Clay, 1993a)	Concepts about Print (Clay, 1993a)
Letter Identification (Clay, 1993a)	Letter Identification (Clay, 1993a)	Letter Identification (Clay, 1993a)
phonological awareness production and oddity task adapted from Bowey (1995)	phonological awareness production and oddity task adapted from Bowey (1995)	phonological awareness production and oddity task adapted from Bowey (1995)
	Yopp-Singer Test of phoneme segmentation (Yopp, 1995)	Yopp-Singer Test of phoneme segmentation (Yopp, 1995)
		Hearing & Recording sounds in words (Clay, 1993a)
Writing samples (Clay, 1993a)	Writing samples (Clay, 1993a)	Writing samples (Clay, 1993a)
	Writing Vocabulary (Clay, 1993)	Writing Vocabulary (Clay, 1993)
Book Reading Behaviours on Text Gradients (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996)	Book Reading Behaviours on Text Gradients (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996)	Book Reading Behaviours on Text Gradients (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996)
	Running Record (Instructional level text) (Clay, 1993a)	Running Record (instructional level text) (Clay, 1993a)
High Frequency Word List (UK National Literacy Strategy, 1998): first 10 words	High Frequency Word List (UK National Literacy Strategy, 1998): first 45 words	High Frequency Word List (UK National Literacy Strategy, 1998): first 100 words

Analysis of Data

Case studies

An ethnographic approach, using participant observation, interviews and the collection of artefacts was employed to record and interpret the events of the classroom and case studies have been constructed to produce renditions of life in the classrooms and schools. The practical lens identified in the theoretical framework has been employed through which to view, interpret and comment upon the social and cultural practices of the classrooms as communities and the ways in which these practices might have impacted on the children's literacy development.

The critical lens identified in the theoretical framework has been used to attempt to identify and make visible those school and classroom practices which may have been at work at various organisational levels within the schools and classrooms to construct and

position community members, teachers and students, and the ways in which these practices may have directly or indirectly impacted on the early literacy development of the children in the study. Four teachers and four children were selected to become the focus of the case studies, to represent the broad range of experiences observed through the study. These case studies and the discussions that follow them provide a means for interpretation and critique of classroom events. This discussion and critique is further supported by vignettes which have been drawn from the qualitative data and add richness and further insight to the discussion.

Student profiles – assessment tasks

The profiles of student achievement and development have clearly been informed by the technological lens identified in the theoretical framework. Children's performance on each of the assessment tasks was given a score that reflected the number of correct items on the task. Assessments such as writing samples and book reading behaviours which relied upon a more qualitative judgement were more difficult to report an quantitative terms, but were assigned a score according to Clay's (1993a) criteria for writing and Sulzby's (1985) hierarchy of behaviours for reading. The scores were entered into a spreadsheet and the statistical package SPSS (Statistics Package for the Social Sciences; IBM Software) was used to create profiles for each class and school, year by year. Microsoft Office Excel was used to render graphical representations of these profiles.

Issues of Reliability & Validity

Eisner (1985) states that a frequently raised question concerning the use of educational criticism is that of objectivity. His response is to comment that "All of us construct our conception of reality by interacting with the environment....And that construction is influenced by our previous experience, including our expectations, our existing beliefs, and the conceptual tools through which the objective conditions are defined." (p. 240). He asserts that what is important is to demonstrate verisimilitude within a community of believers; that is those who have shared understandings and a shared construction of what is real. Further, he suggests two ways of doing this; through the use of structural corroboration, and referential adequacy.

Structural corroboration

Structural corroboration is the process of gathering data from a variety of sources and establishing links that build a whole picture, with each piece of information supporting the other and creating a structure which holds together as a true rendition, rather like

fitting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle to create a picture that makes sense. In other words, the events observed in the classroom should support the information given by the teachers during their interviews, and this picture should further be supported by the observations of children as they completed the assessment tasks.

Referential adequacy

The term referential adequacy deals with the relationship between the phenomena under investigation and the way in which it is presented by the critic. If the description of the event is referentially adequate, the portrayal presented will "ring true" and fit with the experiences of others who are familiar with the phenomena.

Member checking

Besides using structural corroboration and referential adequacy, credibility has, wherever possible, been further tested using the process of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is the process of returning to the participants the events observed to check that the reconstructions are recognisable. In cases where contact with the case study teachers was maintained, the teacher involved was provided with a copy of the case study once it had been constructed, and they were given the opportunity to comment on the events described and correct any representations which they felt to be inaccurate. Because of the difficulties of later tracking down some of the teachers once they had left the schools, it was necessary in these cases to rely solely on structural corroboration and member checking. All of the case studies have been read by teachers or school leaders who had worked or who were currently working in similar settings and they were asked to comment on the verisimilitude of the picture that was presented through each of the case studies.

Before the assessment tasks were carried out with Aboriginal children, consultation occurred with the ASSPA (Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness) committees, or their nominee, in various sites to ensure that the tasks were considered to be appropriate for Aboriginal children. In all cases, the assessment tasks were considered by the nominees to be suitable. The results of the student data from the assessment tasks, in the form of school and student profiles, were also returned to ASSPA committees, or their nominee, for member checking after each round of data collection.

Ethical Issues

Informed consent

A letter was sent to parents or caregivers of all the children involved in the study, explaining the nature and purpose of the study and the nature of the assessment tasks. Parents and caregivers were asked to give written consent for their child to be involved in the study and were informed that they were able to withdraw their child from the study at any time. The letter provided contact details, both on site and via the university, so that they could seek further information regarding the study at any time. The assistance of the Indigenous Education Officers proved to be invaluable in introducing me to the children's parents or caregivers; they also assisted by explaining clearly to parents what was involved for their children.

Teachers, school leaders and other staff or parents who contributed to the study were also asked to give written consent to their involvement, and they also had the option to withdraw at any time.

Protection of identity

Pseudonyms have been used for all schools, school leaders, teachers, students and other participants mentioned in the study. Although it has been important and relevant to provide relatively detailed descriptions of the school communities, considerable care has been taken to ensure that this has been done in such a way that the location of schools in the study cannot be identified.

Consultation with Aboriginal community

Although this study aims to inform practice for all young children learning literacy, many of the children involved in the study were Aboriginal. It was therefore imperative that consultation took place with the Aboriginal community at every level and during every phase of the research to ensure that the interests of the Aboriginal community and the children involved in the study should not be compromised.

The literature review has identified that because of differences in Western and Aboriginal language use and styles of communication, there are many opportunities for misunderstandings to occur during interactions between the two cultures. Member checking is the process of returning the documented data to informants to ensure that what is reported is correct. It was therefore crucial that member checking took place during all phases of the study.

Although the assessment tasks which will be used in this study have been used with children from a variety of cultural backgrounds (Hill et al, 1998b), none have specifically been developed for use by Aboriginal children, and therefore it was necessary to consult with members of the Aboriginal community to ensure that they were considered appropriate for use with Aboriginal children.

With these issues in mind, consultation with the Aboriginal community occurred at all system levels during all phases of the study. The various committees from which advice was sought are documented below in table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Consultation with Aboriginal community

1. Steering Committee	(Proposal stage) Representatives from: • Aboriginal Affairs Department • Education Department of Western Australia • Aboriginal Education and Training Council • Edith Cowan University
2. School Reference Group	(ongoing, during study) • Principal • Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker • Parent / Community member
3. Member Checking of Assessment Tasks - ASSPA Committees or other nominee from Aboriginal community	(ongoing, during study) • Assessment task materials • School/class profiles 1998 • School/class profiles 1999 • School/class profiles 2000

CHAPTER 5:
SETTING THE CONTEXT – THE COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS

This chapter presents an overview of the schools that were involved in the study, together with a description of the communities in which they were located. The chapter begins with an explanation of how schools were approached and recruited, which is followed with a description of each community and the participating school or schools from that community. We begin with the schools in the regional centre, followed by rural schools in three mining and one farming community, and conclude the chapter with a description of the one remote community school.

Recruiting Participants

The schools were initially recruited via their District Directors. Two District Directors expressed interest in the study, and facilitated contact with principals from schools in their districts. After meeting with the principals and explaining the proposed procedures and outcomes for the study, the principals then consulted their school staff and secured their agreement to participate before volunteering their schools. Teachers of all pre-primary, year one and year two classes at each school were asked to participate and informed consent was sought from each teacher.

In some instances, interviews of an informal nature were conducted with participants other than teachers or school leaders, for example, parents or Indigenous Education Officers. In cases such as these, informed consent was sought from these participants to include these conversations in the data. All children enrolled in pre-primary and year one classes in 1998 were invited to participate in the study. Prior to the commencement of the study, a letter was sent home with all children, explaining the nature of the study and how it would proceed, together with a summary of the intended outcomes and benefits for both schools and children. Parents and caregivers were supplied with a telephone number so that they could contact me in the event that they wished to discuss any aspect of the study, or they were given a date when I would be available at the school if they wished to speak to me in person. In the case of Aboriginal children, Indigenous Education Officers were recruited to act as intermediary if this was desirable. Informed consent was received from the parents or caregivers of approximately 60 per cent of children.

The schools were asked to sign on to the study for the full three years of data collection, although any participant in the study had the option of withdrawing at any time. An unforseen difficulty arose due to the very high turnover of school leaders and teachers in some schools. As the study progressed and different school leaders and teachers came and went, they "inherited" participation in the study, and, although they were given the option of withdrawing, few of them took this option. The outcome of this was that some teachers and school leaders found themselves as participants in a study that they were not necessarily interested in, therefore it was not a matter of high priority for them to carry out any tasks that were related to the study.

Six schools, from two education districts, participated in the study. Four of these were in rural communities with some degree of isolation, and two schools were drawn from a regional centre. Further data have been drawn from a seventh, remote community school, "Gibbs Crossing", where data were being collected at the same time for a different study. One of the teachers from Gibbs Crossing relocated to Mineside the following year, and observations of her work in the classroom at Gibbs Crossing have been included in Chapter 6. Table 5.1 below summarises the demographic data for each of the schools. Pseudonyms have been used for all schools and communities. Following this is a general description of each of the communities and schools to provide a context for the data that is presented in the following chapters.

Table 5.1: Schools involved in the study

School	Location (Population)	School type	Student Enrolments	No of teaching staff	No of non-teaching staff
Emu Plains	Mining town (2098)	DHS	337	20	15
Beacon Hill	Mining town (731)	PS	69	4	5
Stockman's Ridge	Mining town (833)	DHS	150	15	9
Mulga Springs	Wheat belt town (1,192)	DHS	140	14	11
Mineside	Regional Centre (29,683)	PS	112	6	6
Bridgewater	Regional Centre (29,683)	PS	462	25	10
Gibbs Crossing	Remote Community	RCS	70	5	9

Regional Centre

The regional centre is located approximately 600 kilometres inland from Perth and services the mining industry. Census data for 1996 and 2001 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007) records the population for the Local Government Area as 29,683 and 29,651 respectively. Seven per cent of the population is Indigenous and twenty five per cent of the population is aged 14 years or under. At the time of this study, unemployment in the area was recorded between four and seven per cent (Department of Local Government and Regional Development, 2003). In the financial year 1999/2000, the average taxable income for individuals was recorded as $41,218, and the regional prices index indicated that in 2000, prices were on average 6.8per cent higher than in the Perth metropolitan area (Department of Local Government and Regional Development, 2003).

A range of services and amenities are available in the town. In the Central Business District, most of the major chain stores are represented, including the major supermarket chains and a variety discount store. Several suburbs have supermarkets or convenience stores in neighbourhood shopping centres and one of these operates 24 hours, to cater for shift workers employed in the mining industry. There is a multi-screen cinema in the town, and a range of restaurants, cafes and hotels. A variety of sporting and recreational facilities

are available for both children and adults. At the time of the study, a new swimming pool and sports centre had just been constructed.

There are three high schools and nine primary schools in the town. The state Education system operates one of the high schools and six primary schools. A regional hospital offers a full range of services, including operating theatres and a 24 hour emergency department. A range of health support services is also available, including a specialised health service for the Indigenous population. A range of housing is represented in the town, from fibro and weatherboard cottages to palatial residences with swimming pools.

Bridgewater Primary School

Bridgewater Primary School was a new, relatively large primary school located in one of the town's newest suburbs. Many new houses were being built in the area, mostly brick built with neatly tended gardens. Apart from the bright red colour of the soil, a drive through this neighbourhood was no different from a drive through any new subdivision in Perth. The school, too, could be mistaken for a school in one of Perth's newer suburbs. The appearance and layout of the school was similar to that of any of the more recently built schools in the metropolitan area, with the same standard of facilities, which included a library, specialist teaching areas for music and science, a well-appointed staff room, canteen and undercover assembly area. Classrooms were arranged in clusters, each having a central "wet area", with sinks and cooking facilities to one side, and a bank of computers to another. The year one and year two classrooms shared one of these clusters of classrooms. There were two year one classrooms on one side of the cluster, separated by a partitioned wall, and two year two classrooms on the other side, similarly arranged. The partition between the two year one classrooms was drawn back, and the two teachers worked together, teaching the class together as one large group.

The pre-primary and kindergarten classrooms were located to one side of the school site, and could be accessed from the main school quadrangle, or by a separate entry to one side of the main school grounds. The three pre-primary classrooms had their own play area, fenced off from the main school. This area was equipped with a range of climbing equipment, a sand pit covered with shade cloth, and a bike track meandered around the edge of this outdoor area. In one corner, a shed provided storage for outside play equipment. The three separate classrooms opened on one side to this outside play area,

and from the other side they accessed kitchen and preparation areas, which then led into a larger utility area with access to the main school.

The three pre-primary teachers worked together. They shared the programming for all three classes, and each took responsibility for a different aspect of the program. One afternoon a week, the teachers rotated round the classes and taught in their own area of interest; Italian, Technology and Enterprise and Art Appreciation.

At the commencement of the study, the school had an enrolment of 462 students; this number has steadily increased each year. Approximately 10per cent of the students at the school were Aboriginal. The school leadership team consisted of a Principal and two Deputies. Other teachers held the responsibilities of First Steps Focus Teacher, responsible for supporting teachers with the use of First Steps materials (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997) in the school and ELAN (Early Literacy and Numeracy) Teacher, who took a leadership role in supporting the teaching of literacy in the junior primary classrooms. There was one Indigenous Education Officer employed at the school, reflecting the comparatively low enrolment of Aboriginal students. The school was running a number of special programs, including PEAC (Primary Extension and Challenge), Aboriginal Studies, Behaviour Management, Music and Swimming. Priorities identified for 1998 and 1999 included supporting students at educational risk in literacy, and technology and enterprise. The school was also in the early stages of implementing the then newly released Curriculum Framework for Western Australian Schools (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1998). This school did not receive funding from the Federal Government's Priority Country Areas Program.

Bridgewater Primary School was the largest school involved in the study. This school was classified as a class 5 primary school, and the school leadership team consisted of a non-teaching Principal and two deputies, both of whom had some teaching duties. One of the deputies had a teaching allocation as the ELAN (English Literacy and Numeracy) teacher, and she was delegated to liaise with me in all aspects related to the study. Consequently, I had little contact with the principal or the other deputy.

In this school, there was a mix of newly graduated and more experienced teachers. The current leadership team had been in place since the school opened, some three years before the beginning of the study, and remained the same during the three years of the study. Although there were changes in staff from year to year, and a high proportion of the staff were graduate teachers, Bridgewater did not seem to experience the effects of

teacher transience to the extent of other schools in the study. The school was in a newly developed area, the school was clean, modern and well equipped, with a relatively low proportion of Indigenous students. It was reported by members of staff that transience in the regional centre was manifested by both students and staff moving from school to school within the town. It seemed that of the government schools in the regional centre, Bridgewater was one of the schools of choice for both teachers and students.

The school employed a teacher to co-ordinate their students at educational risk program. During the first two years of the study, this program was run by a teacher who had a background in speech pathology and special education. She organised a program of testing for children who were referred by their classroom teachers. This did not include children in the pre-primary year. Children were mostly supported through withdrawal programs, organised by the support teacher and implemented in the main by Teacher Assistants. For the children in years one and two who had been referred because of difficulties with literacy, there was a strong emphasis on developing phonological awareness and automaticity with letter recognition.

In the third year of the study, the co-ordinating teacher requested a change and took on the duties of a classroom teacher. A new teacher was employed in her place, and, co-incidentally, that teacher was Jenna, who had been the pre-primary teacher at Stockman's Ridge for the two previous years, and who we will meet later on as one of the case study teachers.

Mineside Primary School

Mineside Primary School The school catered for an almost hundred per cent Aboriginal population, and many children crossed the school boundaries in order to attend the school.

Mineside Primary School is also located in the regional centre, in a much older part of the town; next to the school is a huge conveyor belt which is a part of the infrastructure of the local mine. The school was originally established in 1906, and at the time of the study, the original schoolhouse provided accommodation for all the early childhood programs and classes. The middle and upper primary classrooms, a classroom which was used as a library/resource room, and the administration buildings were located in a group of fibro-type buildings to the rear, arranged around a central courtyard. In front of the original building was a large asphalt area with basketball hoops at each end. To one side of the grounds, there was an area with children's play equipment, with a lockable shed which

provided storage for sports and other outdoor play equipment. Nearby, a new outside learning area was under construction. The design was a pattern of circles, with a bike track around the outside. The main circle was intended to be an amphitheatre-like meeting area. The school had received support from one of the local mines to build this area.

At the time of the study, the school employed seven teaching staff and 13 support staff. There was one non-teaching principal. Of the seven teachers employed at the school, only one had permanent status with the Education Department, the rest being employed on fixed-term teaching contracts. Three of the teachers were in the first five years of their teaching careers, and another had recently migrated from South Africa.

Around 100 children were enrolled at the school. At that time, only one non-Aboriginal child was enrolled. Many of the children who attended the school came from outside the school boundaries, and each day a dilapidated school bus made several trips to various parts of the town to pick up children from their homes and return them at the end of the school day. A number of children came from an Indigenous community approximately five kilometres outside the town. Many Aboriginal parents and caregivers chose to send their children to Mineside, because they wanted them to be with other Aboriginal children and because the school had a reputation for being sympathetic to, and catering to the cultural and educational needs of Aboriginal children.

There was a very strong focus on early childhood education at Mineside, because the philosophy of the school was that if children could be helped to succeed at school early on, this would help children avoid any later issues with behaviour and participation in school. A 4-year-old kindergarten operated for two hours each morning, and one day a week, they were joined by a community playgroup. A mother and baby clinic/program also operated from the school on two mornings each week.

The pre-primary class was housed in a spacious room that was part of the original building, and was run by two highly experienced teachers who worked in tandem, one teacher taking the class Monday to Wednesday, and the other teaching Thursday and Friday. Between them, these two teachers had eighteen years' teaching experience, and had spent much of this time teaching Aboriginal children in both remote and urban contexts. One of these teachers was also studying to gain a Masters qualification. In an adjoining classroom, a young teacher, in her second year of teaching and her first year at the school, took the year one and year two class.

This young teacher worked very closely with the two more experienced teachers and the three teachers did most of their planning together. Further, much of the teaching for all of the junior primary children was based around Language Experience activities and, depending on numbers, these were conducted with both groups together. This collaborative approach allowed the younger children to work in family groups with their older siblings in year one or year two. One of the teachers explained the rationale behind this approach:

> …the younger children are able to work alongside their older siblings whilst they are becoming familiar with the school environment. It also satisfies the wishes of the Aboriginal parents and care-givers, who view the family structure as being very significant in their children's education…many of the children who come to our [pre-primary] class have never been away from their mother before and by them being able to be with a sibling, the settling process becomes easier and the mother, too, is less stressed.

When enrolments were low, or when there were only a few children at school for the day, one teacher would run the regular program with all the children, while the other would take the opportunity to conduct some focussed assessment or instruction with individual children.

In this way, the two more experienced teachers provided models and support for Jess, the younger, less experienced teacher. Both of the experienced teachers talked about how they had been mentored as young teachers, and how this mentorship had supported them in their early years of teaching. Jess had valued their support enormously, and by the third year of the study, when the two more experienced teachers had moved on to take up other positions, Jess moved into the role of mentor for other new teachers.

> It was really easy for me when I first came here because I had other teachers that were really helpful and guided me a lot. And now it's reversed and I'm the person guiding new teachers. So I've taken on more of – a bigger role, sort of thing. And, I feel that I also know how the Aboriginal kids are coming in, I think some people never feel comfortable. We've had teachers here that haven't liked it – that have sort of left straight away because they can't handle it. I was lucky because I did have such good role models; other teachers to help, so I think that was a big thing. It'd be horrible coming to an Aboriginal school and just getting chucked in and not given any help.

Many of the young children who attended the school had little knowledge and understanding about school literacy, and almost without exception, Aboriginal English was their first dialect. Throughout the school, teachers collected baseline assessment data

using Managing Student Information (MSI) data, the Waddington Reading and Spelling diagnostic assessment (Waddington, 1998), the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn & Dunn, 1981) and using the First Steps Continua (Ministry of Education, Western Australia, 1992). Students who were identified as being at educational risk were supported within the mainstream classroom literacy program.

All of these data, together with health and demographic data collected by The Centre whenever any students accessed their services were entered into a database that was being developed and maintained by the Centre Manager. Using a computerised system meant that the size of the database was not an issue, and therefore records could be kept for children who appeared briefly at the school and then disappeared again, so that the information would be available if they ever returned. There were plans to try to extend the database across all schools in the district, particularly a number of schools in the district that were very remote.

Oral language provided the main focus for the pre-primary program, to facilitate immersion and modelling of Standard Australian English. Modelled reading and writing events occurred to demonstrate the use of written language.

> Aboriginal English; the child's home language is valued and respected in our classroom while it is stressed to the children that Standard Australian English is the way we need to learn and speak at school, at University and when you get a job. We don't want to take away the child's identity, just provide them with skills to become successful and accepted members of society. (Interview with Pre-primary teacher).

The teachers had discussed with some of the parents whether they wanted to include Aboriginal language(s) and culture in the curriculum, but the response to this idea had been emphatically negative: "It is the wishes of the parents we talk with that their children learn to read and write in Standard Australian English. That seems to be the single educational outcome they expect from the education system".

The two pre-primary teachers had participated in a summer school course which introduced them to the use of Clay's (1993) Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement and some of the strategies that are used by Reading Recovery teachers (Clay, 1993b). The teachers had used the Observation Survey (Clay, 1993a) to screen all of the children in years one and two, and had selected some children for whom they had developed an intervention program, drawing on what they had learned about Reading Recovery. It was intended that this would be a relatively short-term intensive, high impact one-on-one program aimed at bringing some of the year two children up to the expected

level for their age, so that they would be able to participate fully in any year three program. Using some extra funding, one of the pre-primary teachers was engaged to run this program on the days when she was not teaching her class. Because of the high cost of this initiative, it was decided that the intensive tutoring would only be offered to children who had regular, consistent attendance at school.

Led by Linda, their principal, there was a strong commitment amongst the staff to improve educational outcomes for their students. The staff were encouraged to think more broadly about children's needs and what would support their learning. The over-riding philosophy of the school was to identify what it was that was interfering with children's learning, to consider if it was something anyone at the school had the power to do anything about, and if they could, to put measures in place to rectify it, so that learning could occur.

> …it is about giving those kids a sense of security, and then you're able to challenge it; you're able to say, well, now that you're happy, you know, this is what learning's all about… If Mum or Dad are in jail, there's nothing we can do about that. We can go and see them in jail, but we can't get them out of jail. If you're hungry, we can do something about that. If your ears are blocked, or got holes in them, we can do something about that. What we will do the most is we will empower you to make decisions about your own life. And they're all things that generally don't cost much money. (Interview with Centre Manager).

Mineside ran a variety of programs to support their students. One of the first issues that had been considered was the need to get the children attending school regularly in the first place. Prior to the school providing transport, some of the children from the local Aboriginal Community would be dropped off at the school on an irregular basis by a member of the Community, provided that the driver of the car was going past the school, or providing that the car used to drop the children off was in working order. When children were dropped off at school, this did not necessarily mean that they would also be picked up again at the end of the day. Sometimes, children did not attend school because they did not have a guaranteed way of getting home.

A grant from the Lotteries Commission of Western Australia had allowed the purchase of the school bus. Children would be collected from their homes and returned again at the end of the day. The long-term teaching staff claimed that due to this initiative, the levels of absenteeism and truancy decreased significantly for a number of children, and this allowed for more efficient follow-up of those children who still were not attending: "Once the children had an established attendance record, it became easier to keep track of

which kids were staying away and it meant that they could be targeted through home visits".

The other major initiative that was put into place at Mineside was the health and nutrition program. It became apparent that many children were not eating before they came to school, nor did they come to school with any lunch. Cereal was made available for the students for breakfast, and a sandwich was provided for lunch.

The "Centre"

The support services at Mineside were coordinated and managed by staff at the "Centre", a District office managed initiative that was located at Mineside and was largely the result of a vision of the community that Mineside served. The Centre was housed in a new, demountable building located to one side of the school site. Inside the building, there was a kitchen and two rooms fitted out with sofas, a table and chairs, and in one of the rooms, a computer. Another part of the building housed a nurse's room, a bathroom and laundry, and office space. A storeroom was stocked with towels and spare school clothes.

The operation of the Centre was in its infancy in the year this study started. Locating The Centre on the school site provided opportunities to extend the health and nutrition program. Because the building provided kitchen facilities, children could come into the Centre and get breakfast for themselves and their younger siblings. Cereal, milk, crockery and utensils were provided, but children were expected to get breakfast for themselves and clean up afterwards. This meant that they were learning necessary skills as well as eating a healthy breakfast. The teachers reported that this approach had a more transferable effect and that some children who had once taken advantage of the breakfast program withdrew as once they knew what to get, they were able to get breakfast cereal for themselves at home and prepare breakfast there.

The Centre also provided appropriate space for health professionals to monitor and attend to children's health. A Community Health Worker attended every day to attend to the more minor issues, such as ear washes and skin sores. A nurse from the local Aboriginal Health Service came twice a week to attend to anything more serious. An Audiologist also attended regularly to screen children for hearing problems, and the Centre Manager was also able to co-ordinate other inter-agency interventions, such as speech pathology and occupational therapy. Medical staff who attended The Centre were also able to oversee the administration of medications, such as antibiotics, when necessary. The Centre Manager explained that this was a more efficient way of making sure that

children received the correct ongoing dosage, although this could be complicated if children stayed away from school.

The programs that were run from the Centre were funded from a variety of sources. For instance, at the start of the study, the school bus was mostly funded by a grant from the Western Australian Lotteries Commission. Although the Education Department paid for the running costs of the bus (ie, petrol), they did not fund the maintenance of the vehicle (which was considerable, as the bus was subject to frequent breakdowns), nor did they provide the means to employ a driver. The staff at the Centre, and the Principal from the school put considerable time and effort into applying for various grants and funding to support these services.

Although in the first year of the study the Centre was relatively new, the idea of having a purpose-built building was one that a number of people connected with the school had been working towards for some time. It was not clear, and it was difficult to find out how much support and funding had been provided by the local District Office. It seemed that the Centre Manager had been employed through some of the funding raised externally by these interested parties. However, this also led to some political issues in the district. The Centre was part of a vision shared by several of the staff connected with Mineside Primary School, and certainly the children who attended Mineside demonstrated the most need for the services it provided. However, the Centre was there to provide a service for all children in the district who had been identified as being at educational risk. Staff at the Centre claimed that other schools in the area expected that children who were identified as being at risk would attend the Centre instead of their usual school. There was a perception amongst the staff at the Centre that other schools were attempting to offload their difficult children. However, there was also a perception amongst some other schools in the town that Mineside saw themselves as exclusive users of the Centre.

> …some schools say that we are quite secretive; we're not so much secretive as not all that welcoming in terms of them trying to offload all their problems. We're very mindful of the fact that if we started taking kids physically in here in the classroom environment, every school in the town would offload and they wouldn't be accepting the responsibility. So if a school rings up and says you don't take kids, we say, that's right, we don't take kids. If you've got a kid that's a problem, we'll work with that kid in your school, and even if we do actually move a kid for a couple of hours a week to come up here, we always make sure the school retains ownership of that kid… (Centre Manager).

In the second year of the study, the position of Centre Manager was advertised and appointed through the local District Office. Catherine, the young teacher from Gibbs Crossing, successfully applied for the position. It would be difficult to say whether it was due to a change in management, or more control from District Office, but it seemed that after this change, the Centre was more visibly supporting other schools in the area, whilst still maintaining the level of support that had previously established at Mineside.

Rural Communities

Mulga Springs

Mulga Springs is located in the wheat belt of Western Australia, approximately 500 kilometres from Perth, and around 100 kilometres from a regional port city. Census data (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996; 2001) records the population as 1,192 in 1996 and 1,118 in 2001. Thirty five per cent of the population is Indigenous (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). The average taxable income for individuals in this community for the year 1999/2000 is recorded as $14, 443 (Department of Local and Regional Government, 2003). This is compared with a figure of $30, 374 the previous year (Department of Local and Regional Government, 2003) and reflects the year-to-year fluctuations in income being experienced by many farming communities as a result of climate issues. Unemployment in the area for the period June 1998 to June 2000 ranged from 11per cent June 1998 to just 3.5per cent in December 1999 (Department of Local and Regional Government, 2003), again reflecting the seasonal nature of employment in the area.

The majority of services in Mulga Springs revolve around grain production. The town is dominated by a huge grain bin, which stands next to the railway line. There are a few shops in the town; a small supermarket, a video store, pizza shop and a fish and chip shop. A convenience store sells a range of groceries and fresh produce, confectionary, take-away food such as sandwiches, burgers and hot chips, and a range of newspapers and magazines. The small post office/newsagency also offers banking facilities, and a number of community programs such as Home Help and Meals on Wheels are coordinated through the local library. A recreation centre offers a range of youth programs and there is a town swimming pool which is open in the summer months. There are two hotels in the town, one of which also offers hotel and motel accommodation.

There are two schools in Mulga Springs; a private Catholic primary school, and the District High School, which provides education for children from Kindergarten to year ten. Most of the non-Indigenous children at the school came from families who were local

farmers and had been on their land for more than one generation. In 1998, there were 140 children enrolled at the school, 85 of these children were enrolled in the primary or pre-primary years. Approximately 80per cent of the students at the school were Aboriginal. In 1998, there were 14 teaching staff and 11 non-teaching staff. During the course of the study, student numbers at the school were declining, and by 2001, the total enrolment at the school was down to 112 students, with the result that the number of teaching staff had dropped to 12.

The school was first established in 1896. The current building looks as though it was built in the 1930s. An administration building at the front of the school houses offices for the Principal and Deputy, a medical room, a storeroom and a staff room. An adjoining building accommodates the primary classrooms. The classrooms and specialist teaching areas for the high school are located on the opposite side of the school campus. The library is also accommodated in a separate building. One of the rooms on the high school side of the building was set aside for the use of the Aboriginal support staff, who seemed to use this room instead of the staff room.

The Pre-primary centre was located in a demountable building to one side of the school site, near to the high school. A spacious lawn area was fenced off from the rest of the school, with a large, shade cloth-covered sandpit and a climbing frame. Immediately outside the entrance to the pre-primary classroom was a wooden workbench, with a variety of full-sized hammers, a box of nails and an array of wooden off-cuts.
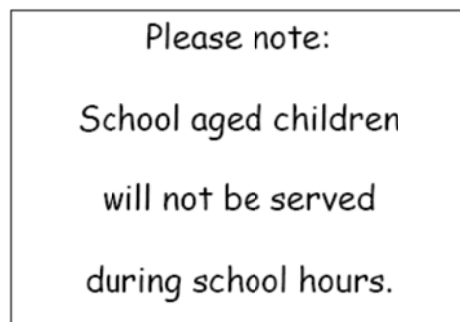
The kindergarten program also operated from the pre-primary centre, joining the pre-primary children in the mornings. No children attended on Fridays, and this day was used for preparation. The pre-primary teacher was a young woman with approximately five years' teaching experience, much of this at a remote community school. The Pre-primary Teacher Assistant had lived in the town for over forty years, and had worked at the school for around twenty six of them. When she talked about the Aboriginal children, she sometimes referred to them as the "Native" children.

In the primary school, the year one and two class was taken by Vanessa, a young teacher who was in her second year of teaching, and who was new to the school that year. Next door, another teacher took a class that was mainly year three, but also included a group of seven, more advanced year two children. She had been at the school for four years. As well as the implementation of the Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1998), the teachers in the lower school were receiving professional

development in and trialling the use of the Literacy Net (Department of Education & Training, 2005). School priorities for 1998 were listed as Curriculum Innovations, Student Management, Staff Induction and Literacy (School Profile, 1998). The school also received funding through the Priority Country Areas Program.

Mulga Springs District High School taught children from K- year 10 and had a non-teaching Principal and one Deputy with some teaching duties. When this study commenced, the Principal was newly appointed, having come from a remote community school in a different district. Most of the teachers at the school were either new graduates or early career teachers. However, a very small minority, which included the Deputy Principal, had been there for a number of years. In most cases, these teachers had come to Mulga Springs as a new graduate, married a local farmer and had remained at the school or returned after having children. Only a few of the teachers were employed on permanent contracts.

Ken, the Principal at Mulga Springs, had developed some views about the way that Aboriginal people learn. He believed that mostly they learned through rote learning and memorisation, and he did not ascribe to the idea of visual learning. He commented that "Aboriginal children are hopeless at maths". He also commented that Aboriginal people were "so tuned in to junk food". Ken had made an arrangement with the convenience store down the road from the school. Among the many notices in the window was the following:

> Please note:
>
> School aged children
>
> will not be served
>
> during school hours.

Barbara, the pre-primary teacher, was new to the school that year. This teacher had been teaching for some three or four years and was married to the Principal. She had previously taught at the same remote community school. Because her qualification was in primary education, she was externally completing a graduate certificate in early childhood education. The Principal's parents were also both teachers, and Barbara explained that her mother-in-law had been able to provide her with a lot of support in terms of teaching ideas and resources.

Vanessa, the year one teacher, was also new to the school that year. In her second year of teaching, she had spent the previous year in a school close to her parents' home in the south west of the state, where she had taken a temporary contract to fill in for a teacher who was on maternity leave. When that teacher returned to the school, Vanessa's contract had ended and she had been transferred to Mulga Springs. Judy, the teacher of the year two/three class, had been teaching for four years, all of them at Mulga Springs. She had trained as a mature-aged student, and after graduating, had made herself available to take up a position anywhere in the state. She had been posted to Mulga Springs, and because it was classed as a difficult-to-staff school, there were always positions available, so she had been able to stay there. She was working towards gaining a permanent contract, seemed to be quite settled there and had not asked to be transferred.

The school's students at risk policy had three main indicators of risk; work participation, behaviour and attendance. Students who were identified through these indicators were referred to the Deputy Principal, who would follow up the referral, after consulting with the appropriate support agency, if this was seen as necessary. Support agencies included the school psychologist, a speech therapist and an occupational therapist, community health, family and children's services, and the youth development officer for the local shire. An Aboriginal Liaison Officer followed up with issues of non-attendance.

The Deputy Principal explained the difficulties they experienced in accessing support services. Like country schools, the regional support agencies tended to be staffed by new graduates who were sometimes unprepared for the contexts in which they were required to work, and this resulted in a high staff turnover. This, coupled with student mobility, led to a sometimes impossible situation:

> …they usually tend to be in the same situation as us, they're probably getting young graduates, who take on the job, which is great, and then they find they've got [to cover] the whole of the [District], so they spend three days in a car, going round to all these [schools] and staying overnight in hotels, and for a young person it's probably not [enjoyable], so I think a lot of problems have been staff issues….We put a referral through, and then there's no-one there. So it's another month before they advertise and a month before they get someone, and in our situation too, you can have waited three months and then they turn up one day to find that that student isn't at school. Or they've gone [somewhere else] or something.

The two junior primary teachers and the year four teacher were given some release time (approximately one hour each fortnight) to do collaborative work in their planning and

support for students at risk in literacy. The local district office was providing them with professional development in using the Literacy Net, and this was used to identify students who needed extra literacy support. An audiologist who came two or three times a year to screen children's hearing. When children were identified as needing extra support in literacy, this support usually happened in the classroom, with children following Individual Education Programs (IEPs).

Most support in the early years classrooms came from the speech therapy program. This program had been put in place two years previously, when teachers had noticed there was no follow up on some children who had been referred for speech therapy. The speech therapist at the time had explained that for the therapy to be effective, it had to be carried out every day, and this involved parents participating in the program, to learn how to do the therapy at home. When parents did not attend, there was little point in preparing the program for the child. In response to this, the school had found some extra funds to employ an Indigenous Education Officer to do the therapy with children who were not doing it at home. So far, this initiative had worked well, because the Indigenous Education Officer had been employed at the school longer than many of the teachers, and was unlikely to move away.

The Deputy Principal reported that the speech therapist had also showed the teachers how to do the Breathe, Blow Cough exercises with the children to keep their ears clear. I had not seen this being implemented while I was at the school, and commented on this. The Deputy Principal responded by explaining that programs of this kind tended to drop off after a while as teachers left the school: "I don't think we had huge problems over the last little while; it's not the first time we've implemented the program. We have had it before, but of course with the teachers going, we lose all the programs again."

The high turnover of staff and the consequences of being a difficult to staff school impacted heavily on the implementation of any procedures and programs that were put in place to support the students. The Deputy Principal acknowledged that new teachers had a lot to deal with in terms of just getting used to their new position and settling in to the community. She felt that to ask them to take on "extra" programs and procedures would be to overload them:

> …it's very hard to get any routines, any processes going because you can't get it off the ground…the new teachers, they're possibly always new graduates, or experienced teachers who maybe have come from places other than Australia, so it takes a while to get into what the expectations are for them as teachers and what they'll be doing just in the classroom, before worrying about other programs. It's a huge thing.

A further issue raised by the Deputy Principal was the difficulty of providing teachers with professional development. Although they were only an hour's travel away from the local District Office, it was still difficult to access any professional development they provided, because there was no-one available to take their classes if they were away from the school. There were almost no relief teachers living in the town, and it was difficult to find someone who was willing to come out from the Regional Centre, because there were plenty of schools there who had work for relief teachers: "if you could get five days' relief work in [Regional Centre], why would you go to [Mulga Springs] for the day?"

While some professional development opportunities were offered by the District Office out of school hours, they were necessarily of short duration, and the effort of getting there and back outweighed the advantages of attending: "sometimes they have a bit of a network meeting for an hour, you've got an hour to get there, an hour for the meeting, and an hour to get home; it's not worth it. And if it starts at three thirty, or even four o'clock, it's so chaotic…"

In the second year of the study, the Principal re-configured the school timetable so that the primary school had their lunch break and morning recess at different times from the high school. He had done this in an attempt to reduce some of the bullying behaviour that had become a problem in the playground. An unforseen consequence of this initiative, however, was that it reduced the critical mass that was available in the staff room during non-teaching time, and therefore reduced the potential opportunities for professional conversation. In the first year of the study, a number of people used the staff room during breaks. In subsequent years, the staff room seemed to be frequented much less. People came in to get a hot drink, to get something out of the fridge or to use the photocopier, but they came and went without lingering. The Indigenous staff were rarely seen in the staff room, preferring instead to use their own room elsewhere in the school.

Emu Plains

Emu Plains, Stockman's Ridge and Beacon Hill are all in station country. The towns themselves, however, grew around the mining industry and all are considered mining towns, although they also provide services for local pastoralists. Emu Plains is around 750

kilometres from Perth. The largest of the three mining towns, it acts as a kind of regional centre for the other two towns and others in what is a relatively remote area. Emu Plains has an ARIA (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia) rating of 10.79, which is in the Very Remote category (Department of Local and Regional Government, 2003).

The census data for 1996 and 2001 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, (1996; 2006) reports the population of Emu Plains to be 2,098 and 1,453 respectively, showing a decrease in population over five years. In 2001, the Aboriginal population represented 40per cent of the total population for the area (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). The average taxable income for individuals in the financial year 1999/2000 is reported as $39, 383.00, and unemployment in the area during the course of the study ranged between 3.3per cent in December 1998 to 6per cent in June 2000 (Department of Local Government and Regional Development, 2003). The Regional Prices Index indicates that in the year 2000, prices in Emu Plains were on average 5.2per cent dearer than in the Perth metropolitan area (Department of Local Government and Regional Development, 2003).

Emu Plains has a small District Hospital, located to one side of the town, alongside the Police Station, the District High School and a School of the Air base. The hospital sees patients by appointment on three days a week, and provides a dispensing service that enables prescriptions to be filled and collected from the local post office the following day. There is a large General Trading Store in the town, which supplies everything from groceries and fresh produce to mining equipment and farm machinery. There is also a small but well-stocked supermarket, which sells groceries, fresh produce, newspapers and magazines, and has a bottle shop attached. When the study commenced, there was a bank in the town, but this closed in 1999. People in the town now do their banking by telephone or Internet, and access cash either by performing an EFTPOS transaction at the supermarket, or by cashing a cheque at the General Trading Store.

There is a campsite in the town, and a number of hotels and motels. An outdoor cinema and a swimming pool are open during the summer months. More recently, a new gymnasium and a half-size basketball court have been built in the town.

Apart from the School of the Air base, there is only one school in the town. In 1998, the District High School provided education for children from kindergarten to year ten. At that time, there were 337 children enrolled at the school, with 20 teaching staff and 15 support staff. This compared with an enrolment of 225 children in 2001, when there was a

teaching staff of 18 and 13 support staff. At the time of the study, approximately 65per cent of students at the school were Aboriginal.

Like the other District High Schools, the primary classrooms were on opposite sides of the campus to those set aside for the high school. A library and resource centre was housed in a separate building, close to the primary classrooms. The infrastructure of the primary school building provided a shaded assembly area. There was a small canteen building, which looked as though it had been built at a later date than the main school building. At the front of the school, there was a newly constructed administration building, with a reception area, offices for the Principal and two Deputies, storerooms, and a large room set aside for teacher preparation. The staff room was in the old administration area.

The pre-primary centre was listed as an off-site centre, but was easily accessed from the main school. This centre was a purpose-built prefabricated building, with a small fenced-off, grassed area immediately outside. Another fenced-off area nearby provided space for children's playground equipment; a climbing frame, flying fox, swings and a slide.

The year one and year two classrooms were located next to each other in the primary section of the school. The teachers in these rooms worked together to do their programming, but did not teach together. There was a particularly high turnover of both teachers and school leaders at Emu Plains, and this impacted significantly on teachers' capacity to work together. This issue will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Emu Plains was the only school in the study to have any fully qualified Aboriginal teaching staff. During the first year of the study, an Aboriginal teacher taught one of the upper primary classes. However, later that year, after a re-shuffle of staff, she had taken over a support position so that she could assist the non-Aboriginal staff with children who were more difficult to handle. The following year, this teacher moved back to the town where her family lived and took up a position in the District Office, which was based there. Another Aboriginal teacher, who had originally been employed as an Aboriginal Education Officer but who had recently completed a Bachelor of Arts in Primary Education, was employed to take the year three and four class. This teacher had lived in Emu Plains when she was young, and her family still lived there. She was still employed at the school when the study concluded, but by this time, she too had been moved into a support position, rather than having a class of her own.

The school had a bus, which could go and collect children who lived outside the town and bring them into town for school. However, it seemed that this service was only

available intermittently, because it depended on the state of repair of the bus at any given time. A nutrition program of sorts was available at the school. Children who arrived at school without breakfast or lunch could go to the canteen and ask for fruit, toast or a sandwich. This was funded by the ASSPA committee. Medical staff from the local hospital came to the school weekly to attend to children's medical problems, mainly ear infections. School priorities in 1998 were listed as maths, language, attendance and managing student behaviour. The school received funding from the Priority Country Areas Program.

Emu Plains District High School had a full time principal, and two deputies with some teaching duties. One of the deputies took responsibility for supporting the primary school while the other supported the high school. When the study began, in term 2, 1998, the Principal who had signed on to the study had just announced that he had accepted a transfer back to the city. One of the Deputies moved into his position, as Acting Principal. In the junior primary school, the Year One teacher had also left to take up another position, and she had just been replaced by an early career teacher who had one year's experience teaching in Britain. This teacher left after six months, to take up a position in the District Office, and was temporarily replaced with a teacher who had trained in Poland as a secondary teacher of English as a foreign language, and who had been employed in the primary school as a support teacher. A graduate teacher, in her first year of teaching, was in charge of the pre-primary class.

Instead of having one year two class and one year three class, the school had two composite year two/three classes, based on ability. Melissa, who took one of these classes, had been teaching for five years, and this was her second year at the school. The previous year, she had not been assigned to a particular class, but had provided support around the school as and where it was needed, first in the high school, then later in the Kindergarten and pre-primary programs, finally finishing the year with the year five class. Melissa had started off working part-time because she had a young child, but she had quickly been approached to increase this to full-time. Like a number of other teachers in the study, she had come to live in the town because her husband worked in the mining industry. Her previous teaching experience had been in a private school in Perth.

Melissa described her experience at the school as "a bit of a culture shock". Amongst the many differences she had encountered, the most notable was the difference in the children's achievement: "I was absolutely horrified when I took the [year] fives over, as to how far behind the kids were. That's both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. You can tell the kids that have come from Perth. Because they're so much better and

further ahead." She said she thought her biggest challenge was catering for the wide range of abilities that were evident in her class: "I've got one girl who's nearly three years ahead. She's in year two, so she's at year five level, and I've got a couple of kids who aren't even at pre-primary [level] yet."

Melissa had taken a Special Education specialisation when she completed her degree, but she did not think this had helped her particularly. She felt that having had some experience elsewhere had been more helpful:

> …nothing from Uni would have helped me…experience helped because I knew what my management strategies were; I knew how to program, knew how to do all those other bits and pieces. I'd been working for a while, so all I had to do was just kids, not the big multitude of bits and pieces.

Melissa found herself somewhat frustrated by what she perceived as a negative attitude to learning from the children and lack of support from their parents.

> I've actually got one kid and I said to him, well, if I give you home reading, are you going to read it? And he said, no, and I said, well, I'm not wasting me time giving you one then…His mother can't read, so it's not encouraged, so I thought, well, you know, you're fighting a losing battle. What's the point of him taking a book home if no one can read with him?

Beth, the second year two/three teacher was in her fourth year of teaching. She had previously held the position of music specialist in other schools in a regional centre and a large country town: "I wasn't trained as one but the Education Department employed me as one because I wrote it down as a hobby!" The previous year she had secured a position with School of the Air through the merit selection process. However, because of what she described as "differences with the people where I was working", she had pulled out of the contract:

> I did a year of a three year contract at School of the Air. I was the itinerant teacher there, so pre-primary to year seven, and just lived on the road in a four-wheel drive. Left on Monday morning, came home on Friday night. I was knackered all weekend…This is my first time in a normal classroom.

When asked if she thought she would remain at the school the following year, she replied, "You won't see me for dust!".

Beth and Melissa sometimes worked together. About twice each term they ran what they called "activity days", when the whole day was dedicated to activities around a theme. They did this to provide opportunities for the classes to mix with each other, and to add

interest to their teaching programs. During the second term, they had both happened to choose the same theme for their class work, so they had shared resources. Both teachers had some support in the classroom during their literacy block, from a Teacher Assistant and from an Aboriginal Education Officer. There was also a Special Education teacher who came to work with children who were assigned to the lowest performing group. This teacher focussed on the children's decoding skills, using THRASS materials. Melissa commented that she had noticed some improvement in the children's skills, but she thought this was more a result of the relationship the children had with the teacher, and her way of presenting the concepts, rather than the materials she used "I wouldn't actually attribute it to THRASS, but to the person who's teaching it".

Krystal, the pre-primary teacher at Emu Plains was a new graduate. She had not received her posting until after the school year had begun, so that when she arrived at the school in week three, she had missed out on the induction that was provided for new graduates by the Education Department's Central Office. Because of this, and concluding that as a new graduate, Krystal might need more support that the other teachers in the junior primary school, Liz, the Acting Deputy Principal with responsibility for the primary school, had tried to channel support in her direction. She had helped Krystal to set up her programs, had given advice regarding classroom management, and she allocated time for the Aboriginal Education Officer to provide assistance, as well as a Teacher Assistant. When Krystal went to her with concerns about the children's behaviour, Liz organised for Krystal to meet with the School Psychologist when he next visited the school. As the school year progressed, and Krystal's need for support did not decrease, Liz became increasingly frustrated, especially as there were increasing demands on her time. There were no relief teachers in the town, and when a teacher was away sick, if no internal relief could be provided, it fell to Liz to take their class if she was not already teaching. In turn, it seemed that Krystal's response to her difficulties was to take an increasing number of days off sick, and this only added to Liz's workload; either having to find someone to take Krystal's class, or to take the class herself. Krystal has been selected as a case study teacher and her experiences are discussed further in chapter 6.

At the end of the first year of the study, there was a huge turnover in staff. Of the twenty teachers employed at the school that year, only four returned the following year. This included Liz, whose Acting Deputy appointment had been made substantive. The Principal, now also appointed in the substantive position, saw this turnover of staff as an

opportunity for a new start; to turn around what she perceived had previously been a negative school culture with poor community relations.

Although a high teacher turnover was identified as an issue at all the schools in the study, Emu Plains presented an extreme example, to the extent that it was difficult to keep track of all the changes that occurred through the duration of the study. Table 5.2 below documents the changes that occurred over time, solely within the junior primary section of the school and the school leadership team.

Table 5.2: Teacher changes at Emu Plains District High School

1998	Term 2	Year 1 teacher leaves to take up another position. New Year 1 teacher appointed (early career teacher with one year's experience in UK). Principal moves back to Perth. Deputy 2 becomes Acting Principal.
	Term 3	Year 1 teacher leaves to take up administrative position in DO. Support teacher appointed as Year 1 teacher. Acting Principal moves back to Perth. New Acting Principal appointed from neighbouring school. Deputy 2 position appointed.
	Term 4	Most teachers terminate their contracts, including all teachers from P-3. Approximately 4 teachers elect to remain for 1999. Acting Deputy 2 contract terminated. Acting Principal reappointed as Substantive Principal for 1999. Acting Deputy 1 reappointed as Substantive Deputy for 1999.
1999	Term 1	Substantive Deputy 2 appointed. 2 experienced teachers appointed to Pre-primary (job-sharing) 1998 Year 5 teacher takes over Year 2 class (2nd year out). 1998 Year 4 teacher takes over Year 1 class (2nd year out).
	Term 2	Pre-primary teacher 1 takes maternity leave. Pre-primary teacher 2 continues full-time. Deputy 2 leaves to take up a position in another district.
	Term 3	Acting Deputy 2 appointed from existing staff. Pre-primary teacher 2 leaves to return to Perth. Relief teacher appointed for 4 weeks in Pre-primary to finish off term.
	Term 4	New graduate teacher appointed to Pre-primary.
2000	Term 1	New Principal appointed from neighbouring school New Deputy 1 appointed Acting Deputy 2 appointed from another neighbouring school New teachers appointed for pre-primary, year one and year two classes
	Term 2	Deputy 1 leaves to take a position in a more favourable country location New Deputy 1 appointed, but cannot immediately take up the position.

The high teacher turnover was reported to be a major factor which impacted on the school-community relationships, to the extent that at one point, the dissatisfaction of the community was reported widely in the local press. Despite the Principal's stated intention to improve these matters, in the third year of the study, the school leadership team changed completely yet again. Shelley, the new Principal, had previously been Principal of a neighbouring school, but had lived in the town for some ten years. She reported that both she and her new Deputy had been required to make a commitment to the community to stay for at least two years.

> I have made a commitment to be here for the next two years, and so has [Deputy Principal]. The community were really angry with the big changeover in admin, and in particular not so much the Deputies, but the Principal's role.

With the realisation that there was a need for some continuity beyond the two year commitment that the school leaders had made, they had set about developing a four-year students-at-risk policy. "The complaint against the school is that everything changes whenever anybody [new] comes in." The rationale for this was that if a four-year policy was developed, it would ensure continuity even though the school leaders and the teachers might change.

Shelley and her team had decided that they needed some baseline achievement data for every child in the school. They felt that the WALNA (Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment) data did not give teachers enough information; further, they only had these data for year three and year five children who had been present on the day the testing had taken place. With this in mind, they had embarked on a series of testing in reading, writing and mathematics, using "Easymark". Shelley reported that they had also collected data about children's attitude, although it was not clear if these data had also been collected using "Easymark". They also planned to conduct a Neale reading analysis (Neale, 1999) with all children. They had plans to re-organise the school using a middle school concept, with the primary school comprising years P-5 and the middle school, years 6-10. In this model, the primary school children would receive an intensive language and mathematics program, to prepare them for middle school.

The leadership team had also recognised a need to provide some professional development for teachers, especially a number of teachers who had trained overseas: "The big problem that we've got with overseas teachers is that they just don't know how to work with students at different levels in their class. And so we're putting in a lot of work with

those."   Another area that had been identified for professional development was the construction and implementation of Individual Education Plans: "The skill of the teachers in doing IEPs is really low. That's the other main goal that I've got this year is bringing up their awareness of IEPs and how to utilise them."

The newly developed plans were still in draft form, with the related school policies still being developed. Although Shelley agreed that there were some major health issues that impacted on the children's learning, she felt that these were being addressed as well as they could be with the available resources, so this aspect had not been written into the plan. One major issue that she identified was that a number of children would arrive at school having had nothing for breakfast at all, or having had a two-litre bottle of Coca Cola for breakfast. The ASSPA (Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness) Committee provided the funds to provide the children with fruit for morning tea, and also provided lunch for those children who did not bring their own or buy it from the canteen.

The other major health issue Shelley identified was that of Otitis Media. Nurses from the local Community Health agency visited the school twice each week to attend to children's ear problems. Children were identified and referred to them by the teachers. However, this would depend not only on teachers being aware of Otitis Media, but also on them recognising the symptoms and being sufficiently concerned to do something about it. Shelley admitted that she was unsure how many teachers would have this level of awareness. Other health-related issues that Shelley identified were related to substance abuse and anger management, although she felt that it was beyond the scope of the school to be able to address these in any way. She identified these issues as being equally applicable to the non-Aboriginal and the Aboriginal communities, and although the substance abuse problems were mostly apparent in the high school, some children as young as eight years old were known to be involved in sniffing glue and petrol, or smoking marijuana.

Although the leadership team had all made a commitment to remain in the school for at least two years, soon after this discussion with Shelley took place towards the end of the second term, one of the newly appointed Deputy Principals left the school to take up a similar position in a more favourable country location. The following year, Shelley had also left the school, despite her commitment to stay for at least two years.

One teacher and three children from this school feature in the case studies. Krystal was a newly graduated teacher who taught the pre-primary class in the first year of the

study. Her story appears in the next chapter. Emma, Edward and Troy were enrolled at the school from their pre-primary year through to year two (ages five to seven years), and their stories appear in chapter seven.

Stockman's Ridge

Census data retrieved from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996; 2006) reports the population of Stockman's Ridge to be 833 in 1998 and 851 in 2001. Twenty seven per cent of the population is Indigenous.

Stockman's Ridge is located approximately 550 kilometres from Perth, and just over 200 kilometres from Emu Plains. The town was established in the late nineteenth century, due to the discovery of gold in the area. Most employees at the local mine operate on a fly-in, fly-out basis, and live in single quarters at the mine, but a minority of mining employees live with their families in the town. The town is also a service centre for several local pastoral stations.

In Stockman's Ridge, there are two small supermarkets with a limited range of goods. Prices at both of these supermarkets seemed to be somewhat higher than they were at the supermarket in Emu Plains. One supermarket seemed to have slightly lower prices than the other, but it was suggested that it was wise to check the expiry date on perishable goods before buying them at this supermarket. There were a few other small shops in the town, including a bakery and a small newsagency/post office. At the time of the study, there was a nursing post in the town, but no doctor. Other community facilities included a library, which doubled as the Centrelink Office, and a town swimming pool, open in the summer months. There is also a caravan site in the town. Although Stockman's Ridge is not a large town, there are three hotels. All of the hotels seemed to be very busy every evening. One of the hotels sold take-away pizzas, and apart from a road house just outside the township, this was the only source of take-away food available in the town.

The most expensive hotel had a connection with one of the mines in the area. Itinerant workers and visitors to the mine generally stayed at this hotel, and accommodation was frequently booked out weeks in advance. The hotel had a pleasant garden area and a large room set aside as a family restaurant. The restaurant was dominated by a huge television screen, which the hotel boasted was the "largest television set in a hotel in rural Western Australia". During the day, a blackboard stood on the pavement outside the hotel, announcing the evening's entertainment in the public bar:

SKIMPY
TONITE
"JUNGEL
JANE"

At the time of the study, the District High School provided education for 150 students from kindergarten to year ten. Approximately 54 per cent of these students were Indigenous. At that time, there were 14 teaching staff and 11 support staff. Located away from the main road through the town, adjacent to a large recreation oval, the school mostly consists of transportable buildings. There was a new, brick-built administration building and separate staff room. The purpose-built pre-primary centre was at the front of the school, with one door opening to the front of the school, and another which opened onto a large, grassed play area, fenced off from the rest of the school and supplied with outdoor play equipment. The primary classrooms were towards the rear of the school, arranged around a grassed courtyard.

The kindergarten children, when there were any, joined the pre-primary children for two mornings each week. There was one year one class, and a year two/three class. The school was in receipt of funding from the Priority Country Areas Program, and had an ELAN (Early Literacy and Numeracy) teacher and a First Steps Focus teacher. School priorities listed for 1998 included literacy, numeracy, technology and social skills.

Stockman's Ridge District High School had one non-teaching Principal and a Deputy Principal with some teaching duties. The same Principal stayed at the school throughout the duration of the study; however, during the first two years, the Deputy Principal's position was filled by a series of people in an acting capacity. One of the school's two Aboriginal Education Officers, who was the longest-serving member of staff, observed that there had been no substantive Deputy at the school for the last twelve years. Almost all the teachers were either new graduates or early career teachers. Two or three of the high school teachers had more teaching experience, but had recently arrived in Australia from overseas. The pre-primary teacher was an experienced teacher with a primary teaching qualification, who was returning to teaching after a number of years working in the child care industry. The year one teacher and the year two/three teacher were both in their first year of teaching at the beginning of the study.

Carla, the Principal, was always very busy. She worked long hours; she was usually at school long before any other staff, and often stayed late as well. As well as her own duties, she also took on many of the duties of the Deputy Principal, as the school always seemed to be waiting for a newly appointed Acting Deputy to arrive, or one had just left. In the second year of the study, a new Deputy had been appointed at the beginning of the year, but had left before the end of the first term. At this point, the school was also unable to fill two vacancies in the high school. One vacancy had been filled by a student who was undertaking their final teaching practicum at the school, with the understanding that he would remain in the position if he passed his practicum. However, this student required supervision, and this added to Carla's already unmanageable workload.

When there was no Deputy, one of the upper primary teachers stepped into the breach and was given some teaching release time to take on some of the Deputy's duties, but the reality was that there was no-one available to provide administration relief, so in the end, most of this work was taken on by Carla. Although we arranged several times to have a discussion about the school policies and programs, this discussion never took place, because on each occasion, a crisis occurred which prevented the discussion from happening. Carla also dealt with any major behaviour management issues that occurred in the school, and there were always a number of children sitting outside her office, either waiting to be, or in the process of being "managed".

There appeared to be a relatively strong social culture at Stockman's Ridge. Unless they had playground duty, or other pressing business, most teachers were in the staff room during recess and lunch breaks, and they would regularly arrange to have drinks at the local hotel after work. On Fridays, teachers would take it in turns to bring in morning tea. Awards, in the form of "scratchies", were given away to staff members who had been nominated by others as having gone above and beyond the call of duty that week; for instance, giving up DOTT (Duties Other Than Teaching) time to provide internal relief for someone who had been on sick leave, or helping to organise the sports carnival. Although she was so busy, Carla always made a point of dropping into the staff room for morning tea on Fridays, or calling into the hotel when the teachers met there after work. However, she never stayed more than five minutes or so.

One corner of the staffroom had been set up with a computer and Internet access as an area for teacher preparation. Many teachers came into the staff room to do their preparation, and they appeared to readily share ideas and consult each other for advice or feedback. There appeared to be a heavy emphasis on the construction of worksheets.

The issue of teacher relief seemed to be significant at this school. There were no relief teachers in the town. One teacher was employed in the school to provide support and/or relief across both the primary school and the high school as it was needed. Often, this was not enough, and classes had to be combined if someone was away for professional development or on sick leave. At one point during the study, one of the teachers was required to spend six weeks in Perth in order to undergo a medical procedure, and being one teacher short over this extended period put considerable strain on the staffing resources at the school.

There was a nursing post in Stockman's Ridge, but the nearest hospital was at Emu Plains, some 250 km away, or the Regional Centre, 300 km away. If children were discovered to have medical problems, the Indigenous Education Officer would take them to the nursing post for attention. There were occasional visits to the school by the psychologist, the speech therapist and the occupational therapist, as they travelled round the district. However, if children were not a t school when they visited, they were likely to miss out on the screening or other services that they provided. There appeared to be no clear or well defined procedures to make sure children had access to these services.

The ELAN (English Literacy and Numeracy) teacher took the main responsibility for developing support mechanisms for those children who were identified as being at risk in literacy and numeracy. In the second year of the study, this role was handed over to Sue, the teacher who had previously taken the year two/three class, and who by that time was just beginning her second year of teaching. A new graduate took over her year two/three class, and Sue took the year four class. She was given one afternoon each week release time to undertake this role. There seemed to be no systematic method of screening children to identify them for literacy and numeracy support. Children were identified by their classroom teacher and referred to Sue.

Sue had instigated a program called "Catch-up Kids" for those children who required support in literacy. This was an intensive program, where someone, usually the Aboriginal Education Officer, worked one-on-one with a child with the idea that it would allow them to catch up with the rest of their peers. However, it did not appear to require any targeted assessment to identify particular areas of need for the children in the program. Robert, a newly appointed Aboriginal Education Officer, was helping Sue with this program. Robert had come from another area of Western Australia and had enrolled in a program of teacher training that was targeted towards giving Indigenous Education Officers the opportunity to gain a qualification as a Community Teacher. He was very keen to work on the program

and appeared to be quite knowledgeable about what reading involved. The program required a degree of parental involvement, and it seemed that Robert was instrumental in ensuring that this happened, as well as working with some of the children in lieu of a parent for the homework component.

Two teachers from Stockman's Ridge were selected as case study teachers. Jenna taught the pre-primary class and Anna the year one class. Both teachers were newly appointed to the school when the study began. More detailed descriptions of their experiences are presented in Chapter six. One child from this school, Jonah, was also selected to feature in the case studies. Jonah was in year one (age six years) when the study began.

Beacon Hill

Beacon Hill is much smaller than either Emu Plains or Stockman's Ridge. It is located approximately 70 kilometres from Stockman's Ridge, and just under 200 kilometres from Emu Plains. Australian Bureau of Statistics census data records the population as 731 for 1996 and 394 for 2001, representing a significant decrease in population over the five year period. In 2001, Indigenous people made up 29per cent of the total population. The average individual taxable income for the financial year 1999/2000 is reported as $37, 127 (Department of Local Government and Regional Development, 2003). Over the course of the study, unemployment in the town ranged between 2per cent in March 2000 and 5.1per cent in March 1999.

There is one hotel in Beacon Hill, a couple of small shops, a one-man police station, a petrol station and a general trading store which sells a range of goods from hardware to fresh produce. The staff at the school complained frequently about the cost of living in Beacon Hill. The prices at the general trading store seemed to be higher than they were either in Emu Plains or Stockman's Ridge; the range of goods on offer seemed to be much more limited, and they seemed to run out of goods more quickly. As well as servicing the local gold mine, the town also promotes itself as a tourist destination, as several of the original old buildings in the town are of historical significance.

The heritage-listed original school house housed two classrooms; one for the year two, three and four children, and one for the year five, six and seven children. This building also provided accommodation for a tiny staffroom, about the size of a large cupboard, and an equally cupboard-sized reception area and Principal's office. A demountable building to the side of the original schoolhouse provided a classroom for the kindergarten, pre-primary

and year one children. At the time of the study, the school provided education for children from Kindergarten to year seven. A bus provided daily transport to Stockman's Ridge for children in years eight to ten. When the study began, there were 69 children enrolled at the school, 71per cent of whom were Aboriginal. There were a total of four teaching staff, including the Principal, and five non-teaching staff.

The school was set in attractive, well-tended gardens, next to a large recreation oval. A brick-paved courtyard outside the original building served as an assembly area. Next to the building that housed the early years' classroom, there was a small play area with climbing frames and other outside play equipment. The school received funding from the Priority Country areas Program, and school priorities for 1998 were listed as English and Mathematics.

At that time, Beacon Hill Primary School had one Principal and three other teaching staff. The Principal did some teaching to provide upper school teachers with DOTT (Duties Other Than Teaching) time. In the first year of the study, the teacher who took the K/P/1 class was a new graduate, as was the Year 2/3/4 teacher. The teacher who taught the Year 5/6/7 class had been teaching at the school for two years. In term three of that year, the principal moved to Emu Plains, to take up the Acting Principal's position there, and the Year 5/6/7 teacher became Acting Principal at Beacon Hill for the remainder of the year. At the same time, she continued to teach her Year 5/6/7 class, as enrolments had reduced significantly towards the end of the year, and the decline in student numbers had some impact on the staffing entitlements.

Jenny, the IK/P/1 teacher, indicated at this time that she thought she would ask for a transfer at the end of the year. However, half way into the second year of the study, Jenny was the only teacher who had been at the school the previous year. The Year 2/3/4 teacher from the previous year had not returned to the school, and had been replaced by the teacher who had previously been the ELAN teacher at Stockman's Ridge. This teacher's partner was employed in the mining industry, and she considered herself to be settled in the area. She was happy to commute the 140 or so kilometres each day from Stockman's Ridge. The Principal, who had finished the previous year as the Acting Principal at Emu Plains, had been appointed there in the substantive position, and a new Principal had been appointed to Beacon Hill. This Principal had had considerable experience in an Aboriginal Community School. The Year 5/6/7 teacher started the year at Beacon Hill, but by the second term, she had followed her former Principal to Emu Plains.

This move left a vacancy that was filled for the remainder of the year by a series of teachers, with relatively long gaps in between, during which times the Principal took responsibility for the senior class. A number of teachers were appointed, but left again within two or three weeks. According to the other staff at the school, one teacher had arrived one day, and left the next. As a consequence of these discontinuities, the class had become progressively more unsettled and difficult to teach. In the middle of term three, a graduate teacher was appointed and remained until the end of the year. Unlike the rest of the teachers, she did not return the following year.

When Ella, the new Principal, arrived from the Aboriginal Community School in the second year of the study, she expressed interest in the study, and said that she had "done some research of her own" into the school literacy acquisition of Aboriginal children. Ella said that her research indicated that after year five, Aboriginal children who are learning English as an additional language get most of their knowledge about English from reading, rather than from writing, television, videos, environmental print or instruction. This is consistent with the findings of Graves (2005). With this in mind, her aim was to get children reading fluently at an early age, and to develop in them an enjoyment for reading so that they would do more of it.

A whole-school literacy program had been introduced to the school, using *Fitzroy Readers* (Berryman & O'Carroll), a reading series that supports systematic phonics instruction. Jenny had used these with the more capable year one children, but all children were using them once they reached Year two. The children had a kind of contract, which began with reading the book, then they cycled through a number of text-related activities and finished with another reading of the text to the teacher, before moving on to the next book in the sequence. The older children were using the same routines with high interest, low ability novels. Ella reported that for the first time, three year seven Aboriginal children were taking novels home to read – and bringing them back again.

Ella was also developing a program of pre-literacy and pre-numeracy activities for the younger children. She had received some extra funding, and she had passed this on to one of the parents who was a teacher but now helped her husband run a station nearby. She had commissioned this parent to develop and make up durable sets of games to develop pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills and concepts. Ella figured that if the resources were available, the teachers would use them.

Remote Community: Gibbs Crossing

From Emu Plains, it takes two to three hours, depending on the state of the unsealed road, to get to the remote desert community of Gibbs Crossing. Originally gazetted as a gold town over a hundred years ago, and once with a population of over 9,000 people, the town now serves as a base for several groups of Aboriginal people. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007) census data reports a population of 1,162 in 1996 and 898 in 2001; forty three per cent Indigenous. These figures include workers at a number of fly-in, fly-out mining operations in the area. The local shire council reports the population of the town in recent years to be around 300, with the Aboriginal population making up more than half of this number (Agreements, Treaties and Negotiated Settlements Project, 2007). The average individual taxable income for taxpayers in the local shire for the financial year 1999/2000 was $37,473.00, and unemployment during the time of the study ranged between 1.8per cent in March 1999 and 4.2per cent in June 2000 (Department of Local Government and Regional Development, 2003).

The oldest and most permanent-looking building in the town is the hotel. Most of the other buildings of any note are demountables, trucked in for services such as the Aboriginal Medical Service, the police, Family and Children's Services and other agencies who serve the community. There are about 20 dwellings in the town. Not all the families who live in the community live in houses. Some live in informal camps, constructed from wire mesh and trailer tarpaulins. Others live in "outstations", in what were once called "transitional housing", designed for remote Aboriginal settlements as transition housing as Aboriginal people moved from missions or reserves – small steel sheds with a bathroom and laundry attached.

The four or five patches of green in the town were all enclosed by chain-link fences; a recreation oval, the police compound, the caravan park and the hotel. The largest grassed area belonged to the school. Inside the two-metre high fence, topped with barbed wire, there were several demountable classrooms, a demountable pre-school centre, an old school building and a demountable manual arts building. The well-tended gardens contained an above-ground swimming pool, sheds for the school buses, an aviary, and a laundry and shower block. At the time of the study, staff included the Principal and six teachers. Support staff included two Aboriginal Education Officers, a part-time Registrar, a Pre-school Teaching Assistant, a gardener, a cleaner and a number of other community members who were employed in the school kitchen and laundry. There were around 70 students enrolled, grouped in six classes; pre-school, year one and two, year two and three,

upper primary (years 4-7), secondary and special education. Only three or four of the total student body were non-Indigenous.

The school served a highly mobile population. Apart from a small core of children, the group of children enrolled at the school in the first semester could be entirely different from the group of children enrolled later in the year. However, most of the children were enrolled at the school at some point during each year. A number of programs were offered by the school; breakfast and a hot midday meal was provided, as well as school uniforms, showers and laundering facilities. The Aboriginal Medical Service visited the school daily to attend to children's health issues, mainly ear infections, parasites and skin sores. A school bus transported children daily to and from school from the out of town camps and outstations, and there were numerous camps and excursions for children who attended school with any regularity. The school received significant extra funding due to its remote community school status, and was well resourced in terms of equipment and teaching resources.

Gibbs Crossing Remote Community School did not participate in the current study in the same way as the other schools. The school had been recruited as part of another study (Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland & Reid, 1998; 2002) and Catherine, the teacher who took the junior primary class, expressed her desire to participate in this study. However, because of the remoteness of the school and the difficulties in accessing the site on a regular basis, the school was only included in the study for the first year. For this reason, the leadership structures, staffing profile, policies and programs at this school have been described here only as they applied to Catherine, the teacher whose case study appears in chapter six, during her time at the school. A more complete description of this site appears elsewhere (Hill et al, 1998; 2002). Catherine was selected as a case study teacher in this project and her experiences are further described in chapter six.

The principal of the school while Catherine was at Gibbs Crossing was a man with many years teaching experience, who had held the position of Principal at that school for some time. His wife held the part-time position of school registrar. The school employed a number of Aboriginal community members; two ladies operated the school laundry, where children could change into a school uniform for the day while their own clothes were laundered. These ladies also maintained and laundered the school's stock of uniforms and the towels that were available for children who used the showers at school. Other community members ran the school kitchen, which provided morning tea and a substantial

hot meal at lunchtime. At various times, community members were also employed to maintain the school buses and the school grounds.

The local Aboriginal Health Service had a mobile unit at the school, and came daily to do ear washes and to attend to skin sores and other medical problems. The Principal took the school bus out each day to collect children from the outlying camps and outstations, and to return them again at the end of the day. Sometimes, community members from these camps or stations would get a lift into town with the school bus. The four-year-old Kindergarten children were accommodated on four full days each week as part of the Pre-primary program. As well as the four regular classes, there was also a "Special Education" class for those children who could not cope with the demands of the mainstream classrooms. The school employed two Aboriginal Education Officers, one of whom had been employed at the school for sixteen years. In her third year at the school, Catherine encouraged the younger of these women to enrol in a teacher education program for Aboriginal Education Officers at Batchelor College of Education.

This concludes the description of the organisational structures and staff profiles of the schools together with their school-level policies and programs. As might be expected, there were a number of similarities that were evident across all the schools. Student-related characteristics included populations of Aboriginal children enrolled at all of the schools, and with this, the transience of some students. There were also quite high numbers of students at each school who were at risk both in terms of health (mainly issues connected with nutrition and hearing impairment) and achievement of desired literacy outcomes. The health issues were observed to relate mostly to Aboriginal children, but the issues connected with achievement of literacy outcomes were apparent in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. Teacher-related characteristics that were similar across all the schools included the difficulties they experienced in attracting and retaining teachers, and the fact that teachers in these schools were mainly new graduates, early career teachers or teachers who had trained overseas and newly arrived in Australia.

There were also evident some differences between the schools. The most obvious differences were between schools in regional centre and the more rural schools, and these pertained to access to supports such as outside agencies for the provision of health or speech pathology services, or for staff to access to opportunities for professional development, or amenities that supported their personal lives, such as shops, sports and social organisations or restaurants and cinemas. Even though they were both located in the same regional centre, there were quite significant differences between the actual

schools at Bridgewater and Mineside. Mineside was more like the rural schools and this was probably due to the fact that it served a population that was almost entirely Aboriginal. Being a difficult to staff school, there was a high turnover of staff and there were also high numbers of children who were identifies as being at risk, both in terms of health and literacy achievement. The approaches to teaching did not differ significantly but the pace of the day seemed to be much more brisk at Bridgewater; classes started on time and ran at a steady pace without the interruptions that came from various health and other professionals seeing individual children, as occurred at Mineside. The children at Mineside were always busy, but because many of the children were collected by a bus which had to make at least two trips because it could not accommodate them all at once, and because some children, once they arrived at school, had showers and breakfast, the day was slow to get started at Mineside.

Another noticeable difference across all schools was that of the school culture. Similar to my experiences in different schools as an early career teacher, there were some schools in which I felt more comfortable, more accepted and more part of the school than some others, where I most definitely felt like a visitor. These issues connected with school culture are a part of the discussion that emerges later in the case studies and ensuing discussion.

CHAPTER 6:
TEACHERS' WORK AND WHAT WORKS FOR TEACHERS

It was sometimes more difficult to establish relationships with the teachers than it was with the students, because although the students were mobile, they moved around schools and then returned to their "home" school, whereas when teachers moved away, it was generally for good. The relationships I was able to develop with teachers varied from school to school and to some extent, seemed to be connected to the school culture. Generally, the relationships were positive and some developed into ongoing professional friendships. Good relationships seemed to easily develop where there was a good working relationship between school leaders and other staff; where teachers saw me as someone who was there to help and support, rather than examine and critique. At Emu Plains, one teacher begrudgingly allowed me to work with the children in the class who had parental consent to participate in the study, but simply refused to let me into her classroom. She gave the reason that she had just "spent three years at university with someone looking over my shoulder and I'm not going to have that happening now". As a result of her refusal, I had to withdraw children from her classroom when conducting the assessment tasks, which I felt put extra pressure on them. Although most of the staff at this school were more accommodating, they appeared to see me as connected with the school leadership team and this appeared to put some distance between us. The exception to this was Connie, the one Indigenous teacher at the school, who actively sought me out to discuss issues relating to supporting her children and her own professional development.

Workshopping the Assessment Data

At the end of the first year of the study, the principal at Emu Plains asked me to visit the school before the beginning of the next school year to carry out some professional development with the newly appointed junior primary teachers. The idea was that we would look at the data I had collected the previous year and discuss how they could use this to inform and organise their teaching. I drove up there, a round trip of more than 1500 kilometres, during the last days of January, to work with the teachers for two days during the non-contact days traditionally reserved by the Department of Education for teacher development.

I was asked to work with five teachers. The year one and two teachers were both in their second year of teaching, but both had taught children in the upper school the

previous year. Connie taught a composite class of year three/four and although she was a newly qualified teacher, she had many years' experience as an Indigenous Education Officer. Although there were no data for the pre-primary children, the two experienced pre-primary teachers had been asked to sit in on the workshop.

We met in one of the junior primary classrooms. The teachers had not seen the data prior to this; although I had given summaries of the data to both the previous teachers and the deputy principal who took responsibility for the lower school, the information had not been passed on to them, and no one knew where it was. The plan was for me to show the teachers the assessment tasks that I had used to collect the data, to talk about what information they provided, and to look at the data collected the previous year and work out ways that they could use this information to help them organise their teaching for the coming year.

Apart from Connie, who would not be involved in the data collection for that year, the teachers showed very little interest. The workshop had been imposed on them by the leadership team and they felt they had more important tasks demanding their attention. One of the pre-primary teachers excused herself after thirty minutes or so, saying that it did not apply to her because she was going on maternity leave at the end of the first term. The year two teacher asked, "How long is this going to take? Because I still have to get my room organised." In discussion with the teachers, it appeared that they already had planned how they were going to organise their teaching, and they were not intending to alter their plans.

I was cross and disappointed at the way most of the teachers responded to my visit. I had given up my time to drive over 1,500 kilometres in 40°C heat, to stay in a third-rate motel, and the teachers had not been given the data we were to work with, nor were they prepared to give up any of their time to see how it might help them. They clearly viewed my visit as an imposition and of little use to them.

What is it Like to be a Teacher in a Rural School?

This chapter examines the nature of teaching in remote and difficult to staff rural schools in Western Australia. Specifically, it seeks to explore the question, what is it like to be a teacher in one of these schools? The chapter attempts to present an account of the "lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990) of teachers as they live and work in relatively isolated rural communities. Four "snapshots" of classroom interactions will be presented in order to more closely view and examine the work of teachers in these contexts. The

discussion that follows will draw on these snapshots and other data from the study, together with the literature, to identify themes that emerge from the data and finally, comment on the teacher attributes that appear to combine to help teachers teach literacy effectively in these particular contexts.

Demographics of Teachers in the Study

A total of 19 teachers agreed to participate in the study during the first year of data collection. All these teachers were informally interviewed to gather information relating to their training, the number of years they had been teaching and the number of years they had held a position at that particular school. This information is summarised in table 6.1 below:

Table 6.1: Teachers involved in the study during the first year

School	Teacher	Case Study children	Year Level taught	Teaching Qualification	Years Teaching	Years in School
Gibbs Crossing	Catherine		1/2	B A (Primary)	1	1
Emu Plains	Krystal	Edward Emma	P	B A (Early Childhood)	1	1
	Gerri (2nd year)	Troy	1	B A (Primary)	4	0.5
	Melissa		2/3	B Ed (Special Education)	5	2
	Beth		2/3	Dip Ed (Primary)	4	1
	Connie		3/4	AIEW conversion to B A (Primary)	2**	10
Beacon Hill	Jenny		K/P/1	B A (Early Childhood)	1	1
Stockman's Ridge	Jenna		P	3-year Diploma of Teaching (Primary)	5*	0.5
	Anna	Jonah	1	Dip Ed (Early Childhood)	1	1
	Sue		2/3	B A (Primary)	1	1
Mulga Springs	Barbara		K/P	B A (Primary)	5	1
	Vanessa		1/2	B A (Primary)	2	1
	Judy		2/3	B A (Primary)	4	4
Mineside	Julie		P #	B Ed (Primary)	10*	5
	Justine		P #	B A (Primary)	8	5
	Jess		1/2	B A (Primary)	1	1
Bridgewater	Mandy		P	BA (Early Childhood)	4	2
	Luisa		P	3-year Diploma of Teaching (Primary)	4*	1
	Karen		P	3-year Diploma (Early Childhood)	5*	1
	Sheila		1	B A (Primary)	3	3
	Carole		1	B A (Primary)	5	3
	Kate		1/2	B A (Primary)	2	2

* Indicates teachers who have interrupted their teaching service to raise children. The figure indicates years of

actual teaching.

** Indicates years teaching with a full teaching qualification.

\# Indicates teachers who are sharing the same class as a tandem pair.

Experience

As can be seen from the data in Table 6.1, a high proportion of the teachers were in their first or second year of service and only two of the teachers had more than five years teaching experience. Although she had a total of four years' experience, one of the pre-primary teachers from Bridgewater, who was returning to teaching after what she described as "a very long period away…I don't even like to stop and think about how long ago it was" commented that she felt "almost like a first year out in some ways".

Another pre-primary teacher, who had recently returned to work for the Education Department after a break of twelve years, commented on the changes that had taken place in both policy and curriculum while she had been away, but felt that she had to some extent kept in touch with these changes by being involved with the education of her own children.

Qualifications

Most of the teachers in the study had attained a Bachelor of Arts in Education, in either primary or early childhood teaching. Three teachers, who had trained a number of years previously and had returned to teaching after a break, had three-year Teaching Diplomas. Two teachers had a Bachelor of Education; one in Special Education. Both of these teachers had undergone further study since receiving their initial teaching qualification, having originally graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Education). None of the teachers had completed any units in Aboriginal Education as a compulsory part of their pre-service training, but one teacher had taken some elective units in Aboriginal Education as part of the Bachelor of Education conversion degree that she was studying through Distance Education.

A number of the teachers in the study were working to upgrade their qualifications. Five of the pre-primary teachers had primary, rather than early childhood teaching qualifications, but four of them were taking steps to rectify this, either by completing a Graduate Diploma in early childhood education, or by enrolling in a Bachelor of Education conversion degree specialising in early childhood studies. One teacher had almost completed a Bachelor of Education conversion, and another had commenced a Master's degree in education.

Age

Roughly half the teachers were less than 30 years old. Not all the newly qualified teachers were young. Broadly, the newly qualified teachers in this study could be grouped

into three categories; those who had gone into their pre-service education straight from school, those who had entered pre-service education a few years after leaving school and who had spent time travelling or doing other jobs or other courses of study before settling on teaching as a career, and those who had entered pre-service education as mature-age students to embark upon a second career, usually after having had children.

Aboriginal teachers

Although no Aboriginal teachers were directly involved in the study, two Aboriginal teachers were employed at Emu Plains on separate occasions over the course of the three years of the study. Neither of these teachers taught classes in the early years of education. However, because of the insights that might be gained from these teachers in relation to teaching Aboriginal children, both of them were interviewed and were also observed teaching at their own year level.

During the course of the study, one of the Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers at Stockman's Ridge began a course of study to convert his qualification from Teacher Assistant to Community Teacher. Again, he was not specifically attached to any of the junior primary classes, but he was interviewed on a regular basis because of the unique insights that he was able to offer.

Professional development

During the course of the study, teachers at all of the schools were receiving professional development in the use of the Western Australian Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council, Western Australia, 1998). This professional development was being provided systematically by the District Offices. In addition, teachers in the junior primary area at Mulga Springs were also receiving professional development in stage one of the Literacy Net, trialled and developed in 1997/1998 (Department of Education and Training, Western Australia, 2005), also provided by their District Office.

Snapshots from the Classroom

The next section of this chapter presents four "snapshots" of classroom life in pre-primary or year one classes in the schools that were involved in the study. The vignettes were re-constructed using transcripts of the audio-taped interactions and the field notes that were taken at the time of the observations. These vignettes were chosen because they were representative of the kinds of issues teachers had to deal with in these contexts, and their responses represented the variety of ways in which teachers responded. Three of

the teachers were in the first two years of service, and the fourth had just returned to teaching after a break of some years.

Anna (Year One, Stockman's Ridge Primary School)

Anna had come to live in Stockman's Ridge because her husband was involved in the mining industry there. Before being married, she had completed a degree in business. After her youngest child had been at school for some years, Anna had decided to take up teaching, and had completed a one-year Graduate Diploma in early childhood education. After graduating, she and her three children had moved to Stockman's Ridge to be with her husband. The two younger children attended the District High School in Stockman's Ridge, and the elder boy was completing year eleven by correspondence, through the School of Isolated and Distance Education, based in Perth.

Anna had gained her position as a teacher at Stockman's Ridge by undertaking relief work in the school the previous year. When the year one teacher moved on at the end of that year, Anna was offered the position on a temporary contract. Anna's approach to teaching literacy was very much based on a whole-language philosophy. She believed that if she provided a print-rich environment and interesting learning experiences, the children would naturally take up the kind of behaviours and knowledge that would extend their literacy. This belief was based on her experiences with her own children, their peers, and others she had encountered during her relatively brief practicum experiences in the more affluent metropolitan suburbs.

Anna's classroom was one of four standard-issue demountable buildings arranged round a central quadrangle of grass. At the back of the room was a small wet area, with a sink, benches, a small fridge to hold the children's lunches, and hooks for the children's school bags. This area was divided from the rest of the classroom by a row of drawers – labelled, one for each child – where the children kept their books and other belongings. The top of the benches in the wet area were filled with various art materials and unfinished artworks, and on top of the drawers were piles of children's workbooks, an area that served as a nature table, and another area set aside for items that children had brought to school. To one side of the room was Anna's desk, and next to this was a computer, which had an old tablecloth draped over it as a dust cover. The children's desks were arranged in rows, at right angles to the windows which ran down one side of the room. At the front of the room, an area had been designated as a mat area. Anna's chair sat in the corner, next to the chalkboard, and a line of masking tape taped to the carpet defined the area where

the children were allowed to sit. In the other corner of the room were a couple of small bookcases, one of which was filled with a variety of both fiction and non-fiction books, a number of which were old and in a state of disrepair. The other bookcase held a number of construction games, board games and puzzles. Many of the board games too were falling apart or had pieces missing.

Learning about letters

Like the rest of the teachers at Stockman's Ridge, Anna started the day with literacy. This was a whole-school approach, based on the premise that because literacy was important, lessons should take place early in the day before the children became tired. On the day in question, the lesson started with the children sitting on the mat. After morning greetings, Anna asked if any of the children had news to tell. Several hands went up, and Anna selected Amanda to give her news, because it was her birthday. Amanda stood up and came to the front of the group, where she gave an extended description of the plans for her birthday party later that afternoon, including a full run-down of the guest list. The list included all of the non-Indigenous girls from the class, but none of the Indigenous ones.

Some of the children, particularly those who would not be involved in the party, appeared to become rather bored, and began to edge forward, closer to Anna's feet, while two left the group and began to play with the construction toys. Anna called these children back to the group and reminded the others that they should sit behind the line of tape. One of the children who had wandered off from the group did not return to the mat until Anna had threatened to send him to the "buddy classroom".

Amanda's news was rather extended, which left no time for anyone else to tell news. Once Amanda had concluded her news, Anna led the children in singing "Happy Birthday". When Amanda had returned to her spot on the mat, Anna introduced the next activity by singing the alphabet song, and the children joined in. Anna had prepared a blank exercise book for each child by writing an upper and lower case letter at the top of each page, in alphabetical order. The children were slowly working alphabetically through these books, compiling "personal dictionaries" by writing in words that they knew and illustrating them with pictures from magazines. They were now up to letter Ii. Anna briefly explained the activity. She asked for examples of words that began with I, and the children offered igloo, insect, ice-cream, itch and Italy. One child offered the word Internet, and there was some discussion of wether this word should begin with an upper case or a lower case letter.

Anna gave out the books and set the children to work. A number of the children seemed to be clear about what was required because they had done this for every letter of

the alphabet so far from Aa to Hh. These children were quick to get started with the task. Others seemed a little uncertain, and for a while simply observed the other children. Two of the children did not have books. Anna sent them to look for the books in their drawers, but they both came back empty-handed. She then spent considerable time searching the classroom for their books, before eventually giving each of the two children a piece of plain paper, telling them she would stick the pages into their books when they could be found.

By the time Anna had finished searching for the books, most children were off-task. Some of the more capable children had already written in several words and had either illustrated these with pictures from magazines or had drawn illustrations themselves. Others had done the same for one word and decided that was enough. Some children had started looking through magazines for suitable illustrations, had been unable to find them and had been distracted from the task. Some children had no magazines, nor had they written anything in their books. At the front of the room, a group of children were attempting to write on the chalkboard, kneeling on Anna's chair so that they could reach. When she noticed them, Anna reminded them that they were not allowed to use her chair, but did not redirect them to the task she had set. She directed a group of children who had finished the task to look for more I words in the books on the bookshelves, and moved to help those children who had begun the task but had become distracted.

At Anna's request, I went to help two children who still had blank pages in their books. There were many blank pages in their books. Neither of these children appeared to have any understanding of what they had to do to complete the task. Neither of them demonstrated that they understood what a letter was, that it had a name and represented a sound. They were unable to identify the letter I as distinct from any other letter, and they were unable to recognise words which began with a sound that was represented by a letter I. When I demonstrated the task by writing a word for each of them, they attempted to copy the words. They had little of the fine motor control needed for writing, and had a great deal of difficulty forming the letters. When one of the children found a picture dictionary on the bookshelf, we turned to the "I" pages. Both children became quite engaged in looking at the pictures, labelling them and talking about them.

By this time, the noise level in the room had risen considerably. Anna was working with three or four children at the back of the room. The rest of the children were milling around the room, seemingly off-task. A number of the boys had moved over to the activity area and were playing with the construction toys. A group of girls were talking about the birthday party that afternoon, and one of them was drawing herself wearing her party

clothes. The Indigenous Education Officer, who had just come into the classroom, moved over to this group and admired the picture. A scuffle broke out between two of the boys, and this attracted Anna's attention. By this time, Jonah, one of the boys, had kicked the other one on the shins, and the Indigenous Education Officer moved quickly to physically remove him from the situation. While Anna attempted to calm the other child, the Indigenous Education Officer grabbed Jonah and led him outside. He was clearly angry. She sat with him on the lawn outside the classroom while he took out his anger on the grass, pulling out great handfuls and throwing them away.

Anna called the class to order and announced that they could have "free play" until recess. She then attempted to calm Jake, the boy who had been kicked, and listened to his side of the story. Jonah returned to the classroom with the Indigenous Education Officer. Anna listened to his story, then she brought both boys together and made them apologise to each other for their behaviour. Later that day however, Jonah had transgressed again, and was sent to the Principal's office, where he remained for the rest of the day.

This snapshot of life in Anna's classroom demonstrates what appears to be off-task and non-compliant behaviour by a number of children. During the news telling session, several children moved out of their allocated area on the mat, and two children left the group to play with the toys in the activity area. One of these children ignored Anna's requests to return to the group until she threatened to remove him from the classroom altogether. When the children were set to work, a number of children produced a minimal amount of work and some produced no work at all. While Anna's attention was directed towards looking for the missing books, many of the children were noisy and off-task, playing with the construction toys, chatting, drawing, and writing on the chalkboard. The group at the chalkboard directly contravened a classroom rule by using Anna's chair. Finally, two children engaged in physical conflict and one of them had to be removed from the classroom.

Anna struggled to deal with these issues as they arose. She called the children back to attention, reminded them of the rules, and reminded them of the consequences for not complying with the rules. She spent considerable time and energy looking for lost equipment, attempted to extend the children who had completed the task by setting another activity, and requested support for children who clearly needed help. She also attempted to mediate a conflict that arose between two of the children. Finally, she resorted to allowing "free play" in the classroom for the rest of that teaching period.

The following year, Anna was assigned once more to the year one class. In the middle of the second term, she resigned, saying that she was needed at home to tutor her eldest child, who was taking his Tertiary Entrance Examinations that year. As no replacement teacher could be found to immediately take her place, the classes had to be reformed and teachers re-allocated. This re-organisation of classes impacted on every class in the primary section of the school.

Krystal (Pre-primary, Emu Plains District High School)

Krystal was in her first year of teaching when this study began, teaching the pre-primary class at Emu Plains. She had graduated from a three-year Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Studies degree the previous year, and like other graduates, had applied for a position through the Education Department's general staffing pool. Although Krystal had been willing to take up a position in a rural area, she had not imagined that she would be placed anywhere as remote as Emu Plains: "on my application I put as far out as Northam [approximately 2 hours drive from Perth] and I got here". She was appointed to her position after the start of the school year, arriving in week three of the first term. This meant that she had missed the official teacher induction course that the Education Department ran for new teachers at the beginning of the year, and she had also missed the Professional Development Days run by the school at the beginning of the year.

Krystal felt that she had been unprepared for many aspects of her situation. What struck her first was the remoteness and the relative lack of facilities:

> I get here, and it's just all dirt and everything like that, and I was saying, "oh no! Where have I come?"…[T]here was no-one out on the streets, and it just seemed really dead. And this was like at five o'clock in the afternoon, on Thursday, so you know, I was expecting people would at least be out at the shops or something, and there was no-one here!

Other aspects of her teaching situation for which she felt unprepared included the behaviour of some of the children: "some situations with behaviour, well I've never come across some of the things that happen". Krystal also commented that her teaching practice experiences had done little to prepare her for her current teaching position, firstly because the contexts were so different, and secondly because she did not now have the support which had been provided by her supervising teacher on her final practice experience. "I suppose I've always had cushy little schools in Claremont where I've done prac…When you have ATP [Assistant Teacher Program] it's third term, and all [classroom] routines are

established, you don't have to establish anything, you know, everything is done; [the children] know the rules."

Further, Krystal expressed her uncertainty about the content of what she was teaching "I really didn't have much of an idea of what I'm supposed to cover" and she also expressed some frustration that the teaching strategies she had learned in her pre-service course did not appear to be effective with the Indigenous children:

> "they work on prac., that's fine, but in towns like this, when out of twenty in my class, I think thirteen or fourteen [children] are Aboriginal, they don't all work. Those strategies just don't work. And then you've got to try to come up with things of your own…"

Mat session in Krystal's Pre-primary Centre

At 9.15 in the morning, the children in the Pre-primary centre were seated on the mat area in one corner of the room. There were about 18 children sitting at Krystal's feet, as she sat on an adult-sized chair. Next to her was a whiteboard on a small easel. The pre-primary centre was a relatively new, purpose-built building, on the school grounds, but just to one side of the main school building. The room was well-equipped, with one area set aside for a home-corner, another for blocks, and shelves around the room held puzzles, games and books. Although well equipped, the room had a rather bare look about it. There were a few posters, but no samples of children's work on the walls. All the books and games were neatly stacked away on the shelves, and there were no big books in evidence. Krystal explained to me that as it was relatively early in the second term, the children had not yet completed much work, and she had not yet had the opportunity to display the work that had already been completed.

The children had already been through morning greetings, and Krystal was introducing them to their first task for the day. For the first few weeks of the term she had chosen activities around the theme of nursery rhymes, and the children had been introduced to "Humpty Dumpty" earlier in the week. On the wall behind the whiteboard were some nursery rhyme posters, and Krystal directed the children's attention to the one that illustrated "Humpty Dumpty". She began by asking the children what had happened to Humpty, and why they thought he might have fallen off the wall. A few hands went up, some children called out, and Krystal called on one of the children at the front of the group to answer.

Teacher   Emma?

Emma   Em, because he broke to pieces.

Teacher	He broke to pieces
Emma	Because he was ... the wall was too dangerous for him to sit on.
Teacher	Oh, right, so is that why he broke?
Emma	Yep. Because the (other children talking over top) [clay wasn't dry].
Teacher	Oh, right. Well, we just have to wait 'til people stop being rude. (4 seconds) And we're still waiting. (5 seconds) Okay. So why do you think (children are talking again) [unclear].
Emma	Because the wall was too dangerous and the clay wasn't dry.
Teacher	Okay, so you think (writing on the whiteboard) *the wall* ..
Emma	was...
Teacher	*was*...
Emma	too dangerous
Teacher	Sit properly please Michelle
All	too....dangerous
Emma	...for him to sit on
Teacher	*For* ... Michelle! Move over that way! What's another reason, Michelle?
Michelle	He might have wriggled off.
Teacher	(writes on whiteboard) *Because..he.. was.. wriggling*...
Child	Miss Atkins!
Teacher	Yes?
Child	[Aiden] got a crayon

The activity that Krystal had prepared for the children was a worksheet which had an illustration of Humpty Dumpty's body parts – body/head, arms and legs. The idea was that the children would cut these out, colour them and join the legs and arms to the body with split pins. Krystal introduced the activity to the children by explaining that because Humpty had broken apart, the children were going to fix him. She asked the children how they might do this:

Teacher:	How do you think we could fix him?
Child:	Sticky tape!
Teacher:	Yes, what else?
Child:	Glue!
Teacher:	Anything else?
Child:	Staples!
Teacher:	Yes, anything else?
Child:	Medicine?

Child: Magic powers!

Teacher: Now you're being silly.

Krystal nominated the children's behaviour as one of the major difficulties she felt she had to deal with in her teaching. She frequently commented that they "didn't listen", "didn't sit still" or "called out all the time". She singled out one child in particular who she felt created particular problems. On the day of my first visit to Emu Plains, Krystal had been consulting the School Psychologist about her "problem student", and the Deputy had suggested that I sit in on the interview.

Krystal's "problem student" was Steven. Krystal had tried contacting Steven's mother in regard to his behaviour while at school, but had received no response. From this she had concluded that Steven's parents were not disposed to support the school. She felt that she had tried a number of strategies to encourage Steven to behave more appropriately, but none of these had worked. The School Psychologist attempted to get Krystal to define exactly what it was about Steven's behaviour that was unacceptable. All Krystal could come up with was that he "didn't listen", and "didn't follow instructions". The Psychologist talked to Krystal about using positive, rather than negative reinforcement techniques. It seemed to me that his focus was on getting Krystal to modify her own behaviour.

Towards the end of the year, I visited Emu Plains again. Krystal had rearranged the furniture in the classroom, and by now some of the children's work was displayed on the walls, but the classroom still looked somewhat bare. One of the few posters on the walls was a list of 20 rules that the class had negotiated together:

> *These rules are what we came up with as a class at the end of term 3 because we decided that we would like something always up to remind us of the rules we devised.*
>
> 1. *Always put your hand up*
> 2. *Don't call out*
> 3. *We don't swear at all*
> 4. *No throwing things in class*
> 5. *No hurting people's feelings*
> 6. *We always sit down properly with our legs crossed*
> 7. *We always flush the toilet and wash our hands*
> 8. *Don't bring marbles to school*
> 9. *No talking while the teachers are talking*
> 10. *Don't touch other people*
> 11. *We don't bog in*
> 12. *No pushing or pulling hair in line*
> 13. *Don't talk when eating fruit*
> 14. *No running inside*
> 15. *No talking in the toilet*
> 16. *We never steal*
> 17. *No punching or kicking*
> 18. *We always pick up after ourselves*
> 19. *Respect other people's things*
> 20. *We always listen to our teacher's* [sic]

During this visit, the school at Emu Plains became desperately short of teachers, as a number of teachers became sick towards the end of the year, and the Itinerant Relief Teacher had taken up a temporary position that became vacant at one of the other schools in the area when a teacher had left suddenly. When the year one teacher took two week's sick leave due to "stress", and there was no teacher available to take the class, the year one children were split into two groups. The higher achieving children were sent to the year two classroom and the lower achieving children were sent to Krystal's pre-primary class. When Krystal was presented with the list, she commented that she had "been given all the ratbags". The following day, a Friday, Krystal called in sick. The Deputy commented that Krystal "often seemed to be sick on Wednesday [DOTT day] or Friday".

Krystal's lesson with Humpty Dumpty attempted to build the children's skills in a number of areas. She used the theme of nursery rhymes, which she thought would be a familiar theme for many children, to facilitate their oral language, and posed questions to

extend thinking and reasoning. She modelled writing as she wrote their ideas on the whiteboard, but she did not do any print referencing; that is, direct reference to concepts about print such as letters, words, directionality and so on (Zucker, Ward and Justice, 2009). The colouring and cutting and the manipulation of the split pins would refine children's fine motor skills. Initially, the children were curious and interested in the topic, and appeared prepared to join in an animated conversation, but their attention began to dwindle as the focus shifted to the regulation of their behaviour. Further, it seemed that only some answers to the teacher's questions were appropriate; sticky tape, glue and staples were deemed acceptable possible ways to fix Humpty – medicine and magic powers were not. It may have been Krystal's intention for the children to correctly guess what she had in mind for the children to use, but it is unlikely that they knew what split pins were, or what they were called.

Krystal stated that she felt that most of her difficulties stemmed from the children's behaviour. She felt that the children would not be able to learn if they did not listen to her, and they could not listen if they were calling out, talking, wriggling or playing with someone else's hair or clothing. The children in her class did not match up to her expectations in terms of behaviour – they did not behave like the children she had come across on her practical experiences in the "cushy little schools in Claremont". She had come to realise that in these schools her supervising teachers had already established rules and routines, and that this had made her practical experiences easier: "You don't realise how much work is involved". She attempted to establish some order in her classroom by negotiating rules with the children and posting them on the classroom wall where they were clearly visible.

One child, she felt, stood out against the rest in terms of behaviour, and she had attempted to address this by contacting his parents. When this strategy had been unsuccessful, she had turned to the School Psychologist for help. The response of the Psychologist suggested that he appeared to locate the problem with Krystal, rather than with the child. As the school year progressed, Krystal was asked to take on the additional responsibility of half of the year one class, many of whom she identified as "ratbags". Her strategy then was to remove herself from the situation by frequently calling in sick, and at the end of the year, she left the school altogether, after applying for a transfer.

Jenna (Pre-primary, Stockman's Ridge Primary School)

The pre-primary classroom at Stockman's Ridge is located on the school grounds, with the Administration block on one side, and the junior primary classrooms to the other

side. Like most of the other classrooms, it is a transportable building, but it is relatively modern in appearance, with plenty of windows, and a kitchen and toilet block attached. At one side of the building is the sliding entrance door. At the opposite side, another door leads outside to a fenced-off play area with climbing frames and other outdoor equipment.

My first impression of Jenna's pre-primary class was that it appeared very "free range". A number of different activities were set up around the room, and children moved from one activity to another, as they desired. There was a block corner where a small group of boys were using the blocks to make tracks and bridges for toy cars to run along. In the home corner, a group of children played with child size kitchen furniture, a crib, a doll's stroller and two baby dolls, one black, one white. Another corner of the room was set up as a book corner, with cushions and a number of children's picture books. Near to this was a listening post, with a selection of tapes, and books so that children could follow along as they listened. At the back of the room were three small hexagonal tables. One of these was set up as a writing centre, with a variety of writing materials, paper, scissors, coloured pencils and colouring books. The other two tables were set up for structured activities, which were overseen by Jenna, her Teacher Assistant, or another classroom helper.

On the walls at the back of the room were displays of the children's work, and hanging from the ceiling were "planets" that the children had constructed from a variety of materials. Each planet was constructed in a different way. A large table stood towards the centre of the room, with a variety of interesting natural objects; shells, pieces of coral, rocks, some insect egg-cases. Sitting alongside these were several plastic "minibeasts"; a very large fly with shiny eyes, several different beetles, a redback spider, a grasshopper and a plastic snake. At the front of the room was an adult size chair, next to an easel. Several pieces of butcher's paper were clipped to the easel, and by the side of it were a number of big books.

Also next to the easel, propped up against the wall, was a weather chart, clearly under construction. By the door were pigeonholes for the children's belongings, each one labelled with their name. Also next to the door, there was a chart with figures that resembled gingerbread men and ladies. Each of these was labelled with a child's name. The chart was divided into two sections; one was labelled, "I am at school today", and the other section was labelled "I am not at school today". There were figures on both sides of the chart, but the majority were on the "here today" side.

At the time of my first visit, Jenna had held the position of Pre-primary teacher at Stockman's Ridge for only three weeks, returning to the education system after a break of some twelve years. This was the first time she had taught at the pre-primary level, as she had trained as a primary teacher and worked in primary education before leaving the system to raise her children. Before her children were born, she had taught in junior primary classrooms in a number of country areas. Her husband was in the mining industry, and this had meant that they had moved around Australia quite a lot.

Once their children had been born, Jenna had based herself in Perth, and had stopped travelling with her husband, who had continued to work away from home. During the last two years, she had worked as a child-care worker in a day-care centre:

> I had two of my own little ones and I decided that I wanted to go back to work. I thought, where can I work and see my kids, so I went into child-care. And they used to come with me, so I didn't actually leave them...

Now, with the youngest child at school, Jenna had brought the children to live in the town where her husband was working. "He's always worked away. You get tired of it after a while, so [we] came". After living in Stockman's Ridge for six months, Jenna was beginning to feel at home. The only surprise for her had been the size of the town: "I've been all over Australia, we used to travel around a fair bit and I've seen small towns and I expected this one to be a lot smaller....I quite like the town; I like a small town community".

On her arrival, Jenna had not planned to return to work full time, but had contacted the school to see if there was any relief work, feeling that this would give her more flexibility in working hours. However, there had been so many teachers leaving the school at the end of the previous term that she had been offered a full-time contract until the end of the year. She had initially been offered the position in year one, but this offer had later been changed to pre-primary. This had caused some initial concerns for Jenna, because her training and previous teaching positions had been in the primary area.

> I just thought, Oh, no, pre-primary! What the hell do you do in pre-primary? I don't know anything about pre-primary, and then when I came in here I thought, oh, hang on, this is what I've been doing in child-care, exactly!

Jenna considered herself lucky because she had not come into the job "cold". She had been able to spend time in the classroom with the outgoing teacher during the last two weeks of the previous term.

I have to admit I was lucky because I came into it before I actually was to start. That was a really good idea, I just think it was fantastic for me because I got to know the class, I got to know all the children by name, which made everything so much easier, no time wasted, and I could get started right away. And I got to know some of the staff.

A morning in Jenna's classroom

As the children drifted into Jenna's pre-primary classroom before the morning bell, they looked for their name on the chart by the door, and transferred their figure from one side of the chart to the other to indicate that they were present at school. Some children moved straight away to their activity of choice, other children spent time showing parents the work that was on display. Some parents stopped for a quick chat with Jenna or her Teacher Assistant.

Once the bell went to signal the start of morning school, parents who were still in the room drifted away and Jenna called the children over to the mat area by the easel. She started by greeting the children:

"Good morning, everyone."

"Good morning, Ms Johnson."

"Has everyone remembered to move their name across on our chart?"

Two children jumped up, ran over to the chart, quickly found their names and moved their little figures over to the other side of the chart. They then quickly returned to their spots on the floor. Jenna walked over to the chart, took it down from the wall, and brought it back to prop it up on the easel.

"How many people are not here today?"

The children counted, as Jenna pointed at each figure in turn. "One, two, three, four, five!"

"And how many are here?"

Again, Jenna pointed at each figure on the other side of the chart as the children counted to fourteen.

"How many would there be if everyone was here today?"

The children counted again, as Jenna pointed in turn to each of the figures on both sides of the chart. She propped the chart up against the wall, and put the weather chart up on the easel.

"Here's our weather chart. It's not finished yet, but we can put the day up. Who can tell me what day it is today?"

Several children called out, "Wednesday!"

"Wednesday." Jenna spread out some cards on the floor, with the days of the week written on them. "Can anyone pick out the card that says, Wednesday?" One of the girls at the front of the group picked up the correct card. "Well done Ashleigh. How did you know that it says Wednesday?"

"Because it says, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, so that one's Wednesday!"

"That's very clever of you. What days are missing?"

"Saturday and Sunday!"

"Why don't we have any cards for Saturday and Sunday?"

"Ms Johnson, we don't come to school on Saturday and Sunday."

"No, you're right, we don't. So we don't need labels for those days." Jenna fixed the Wednesday label to the chart so that it said, Today is Wednesday. Below that, the chart said, *The weather is…*

Jenna said, "This space is to show what the weather is like. We don't have those labels yet. What labels will we need? What's the weather like today?"

"Sunny!"

"Windy!"

"Yes, it's sunny, and it is quite windy, too. So we might need space for more than one label at a time. What other labels might we need?" Jenna flipped the butcher's paper on the easel over to reveal a clean sheet, and wrote, *sunny*, *windy*.

"Raining."

Jenna added *rainy* to the list. "What else?" The children seemed to have run out of ideas. She prompted them: "What's it like sometimes, when it's not sunny, but it's not raining?"

"Windy!"

"No, it might be windy as well. We've got windy. But if it's not sunny, why is it not sunny? What's covering up the sun?

"The rain!"

"No, it might not be raining. Let's go and look outside. Is it all blue sky?"

The children got up from the mat and Jenna led them out to the verandah near the play area. She pointed to the sky. "What can you see?"

"Sky!"

"The sun!"

"Clouds!"

"Yes! Today the clouds are small and white. But they're not always like that. Sometimes they're big and dark, and they hide the sun. And when they get very dark, rain comes from them." Jenna led the children back to the mat and waited for them to settle back down. "So we need another label, for our weather chart, for when it's not raining, but it's not sunny either. What will that label say?"

"Cloudy!"

Jenna added *cloudy* to her list. "Okay. We'll try to get those done by next week."

Jenna selected *Grandpa, Grandpa* (Cowley, 1980) from the pile of big books that were propped up beside the easel. She put it up on the easel, and asked the children to look at the front cover.

"What do you think this book is going to be about?"

Jenna took a few suggestions from the children without much comment. She then read the book, pointing at the words as she went. On the second reading, she invited the children to read along with her. The text had a rhyming pattern, and as she came to the end of the second line on each page, she stopped reading and let the children guess the word. At the end of the reading, she got various children to come up and show her a full stop, a word, a letter and a space.

Jenna then turned the children's attention to the activities that were set up around the room. She explained that as well as the usual activities for the children to choose from, Mrs Goldsmith (Teacher Assistant) would be available to help them make a planet Venus from black paper and pastels. She further explained that she would also be working with some children at one of the other tables. She wanted all the children to come and work with her, but they would have to take turns.

The children moved over to their preferred activities. Jenna called four children over to work with her. She set these children to work on a colouring, cutting and pasting activity to do with position. Jenna had made a big book, which the children had been working from recently. This home-made book had a simple story, and all the characters were minibeasts; butterflies, caterpillars, frogs and other similar small animals. The characters had the same names as some of the children in the class, for instance, there was Bianca the Butterfly; Caleb the Caterpillar; Gareth the Grasshopper. The book incorporated phonics (initial letter recognition), colours, position and numbers. Jenna told me that she had been unable to find a big book that was suitable for what she wanted, so she had resorted to making her own, and the children were completely charmed by it. They would read it over and over again.

The small group who were with Jenna seemed absorbed in their task. As I moved over to watch them, Kayla commented, "Ms Johnson, my pencil needs sharping". By now, each child had a little tray of coloured and cut out minibeasts, and Jenna was instructing them where to glue them on the picture that was spread out in front of them:

Jenna   Put your ant at the side of the anthill

Jenna had a checklist by her side, and after every instruction, she would make notes on the checklist. The children were busy pasting and sticking. Kayla became distracted when she spotted Jack's new shoes:

Kayla   Jack, where did you get them from? Now, which is after the

                                        ant?

By this time, Jenna had moved on to the worm. She told the children where she wanted them to put it.

Ashleigh   I can put my worm up the tree

Jenna   No, not up the tree.

Jenna worked with two groups of children on the colouring and positioning activity. By the time she had done this, it was fruit time. The three tables at the back of the room were quickly cleared, and three of the children got to pick up to five children each to sit at their table. The fruit was brought out on one platter for each table, complete with serving tongs. Each table had a "menu" – a laminated card which had pictures of the various fruits, next to the written word. The menu was passed around and as each child made their

selection, the designated "server" served the fruit with the tongs. An adult sat at each of the tables, to supervise proceedings and to initiate conversation.

Jenna told me later that this was an idea she had taken from her experience as a day-care worker. She considered oral language to be the foundation of her whole program, but had noticed that some children would hardly say anything, all day.

> I noticed that we could have a couple of the children there, come in in the morning and they could actually go home without saying anything to anyone for the whole day. But [this way] they can't get away with that, it's not possible. They actually have to say [what they want]…some of them even try it now and they point rather than say, and I normally try and sit at that table. I know who they are and I say to them that they need to ask for whatever they want….[W]e try and sit at the table so we can supervise them and actually get the conversation going a little bit more.

When the fruit was cleared away, and the children had gone outside under the supervision of the Teacher Assistant and the Indigenous Education Officer, Jenna showed me a duplicated sheet, which she was getting the children to complete each Friday. There were pictures to represent the various self-directed activities in the pre-primary room; computer, writing, home corner, blocks and cutting. Each Friday, the children were required to circle those activities they had worked on during the week. Jenna also had stickers for the children to indicate which activity they had enjoyed the most, and the one they would have liked to do more. She had introduced this as a way to keep track of the children's interests, what activities they were participating in and what they were avoiding.

At first glance, the activities on offer in Jenna's pre-primary classroom appeared to be relatively unstructured, and the five-year-old children seemed to have little direction in their choice of activities. A close and careful examination of the events of the morning, however, demonstrated that the children participated in many school-like activities. On entering the classroom, they were required to manipulate a chart, and this depended on them being able to recognise their names in print. During a thirty-minute mat session, the children were engaged in counting, addition, naming the days of the week and recognising these words in print. They were involved in discussion about the weather, and about the difference between school days and weekend days. They saw modelled writing and modelled reading and they participated in shared reading. They were exposed to a number of concepts connected with print and reading: prediction strategies, spoken word to written word correspondence, recognising rhyme, the concepts of a word, a letter, and simple punctuation. During fruit time, the children were actively engaged in the

conventions of the social behaviour required in school; making requests, taking turns, saying please and thank you. Children's oral language was scaffolded, extended and monitored by an adult with each small group. Further, the children were again exposed to the use of print as they made their selections from the "menus".

The self-chosen activities provided children with opportunities to follow their own particular interests, interact with their peers and learn at their own pace and level. As well as using this time for individual instruction and monitoring of children's learning, Jenna had devised a way of monitoring what activities children were working on, and where their interests lay. She then used this information to extend the children's repertoire of practices and ensure their engagement by building on their interests.

Moving schools

Jenna stayed at Stockman's Ridge for two years, after which time her husband's employers transferred him to a position in the regional centre and coincidentally Jenna successfully applied for a merit selection position at Bridgewater Primary School. She was appointed there with a special responsibility to support students at risk and their teachers.

Jenna wanted to involve the teachers much more in providing for their students at risk. Under the previous arrangement, they had simply identified the students, and someone else had taken the responsibility for supporting them, by devising a program of support, and withdrawing the children from the classroom to implement it. Jenna thought the classroom teachers needed to be made more accountable for children who needed extra support; that ultimately, this would increase their professional knowledge and allow them to provide continuous support for more children through improved pedagogy.

Initially, teachers had identified children who they considered to be at risk by using teacher judgement, as they had previously. Jenna had compared this with the assessment data provided by this study, and felt that many children who the teachers had identified as being "at risk" had been the children who had entered school with less school-related knowledge than some of the other children. Her aim was to put in place early supports that would potentially bring them up to the same level as their peers: "I would say that she probably didn't have as much of that home input before pre-school, because she came into pre-school with less knowledge. But that shouldn't actually make her remedial."

Jenna switched the focus of her role from purely supporting the children, to providing support to the teachers. She thought that the teachers needed more support to think through why they were identifying children as being at risk, and subsequently to think

through how they would support them through their day-to-day classroom teaching. First, she asked teachers to complete the Literacy Net for children who they had identified: "I decided that we needed some evidence, and I actually asked for the Literacy Net to be filled out…"

Following this, Jenna had developed a simple, three-page profile (shown below in figure 6.1) for teachers to complete for each child they had identified as being at risk. The purpose of this document was to help teachers to think through the support they would provide for the child, and also to provide a record that summarised the important information about the child and how they were being supported, that could be easily referred to if there were teacher changes mid-year or mid-term. She had tried to get the profile sheet down to just three pages, "so it's not too daunting for a new teacher".

ACTION PLAN

Date	Negotiated Goal	Support	Achieved

Planned Activities and Experiences			
Whole Class	Small Group	Individual	Notes

Teacher_____ Parent_____

Figure 6.1: Jenna's students at risk profile

The profile required teachers to firstly identify a student's strengths so that these could be built on. Further, it required goals for learning to be set, and provided for these to be ticked off as they were achieved. Finally, it required teachers to think through and identify the ways in which children would be supported through whole class, small group and individual activities:

> It's just a simple profile of what their strengths might be and something that needs to be looked at. And if the teacher can just write, in particular, what they're focussing on for that student, and then whether or not their academic, behaviour, social and emotional, whatever. And a long term goal…just a simple sheet like that. And then that's the actual, like an IEP [Individual Education Plan], an action plan…and what we are going to encourage was, that it would be something that's updated; it might have a further date there, or it might only be a short term thing, they might achieve it, then you go on with something else, but to focus on something in particular. I mean, you can't have a go at everything… So it would just be something simple like that, and just written down…I mean, it doesn't mean they have to be withdrawn; they could be

mainstream and still focus on that for that particular student. And that was the reason why I put that part there.

Jenna had attended network meetings at the local District Office. She saw her role as an opportunity to support teachers' professional learning by relaying back to them the ideas and information she gained at these meetings. She had plans to develop a set of competencies, or benchmarks, that the children should be able to achieve at each year level. She thought this would provide some focus for the teachers, especially if they were new graduates, or new too that particular year level, and unsure about what children should be achieving. However, she was also aware that the teachers needed to be involved in developing the benchmarks.

> …teachers need ownership of what they're doing, so it really isn't good enough for me to say, you need to do this. They need to see, okay, if I do this, how is it going to help me? How is it going to help me in my own class? And if they can't see that, they won't do it. And not just how is it going to help their students, how is it going to help them? How is it going to help them implement an IEP or whatever?

Jenna had arranged with the Deputy Principal to work with some of the teachers at the beginning of the year, during the non-contact days, and incorporate the project as part of the school planning: "I think if it's presented at the beginning of the year, when we have our school planning days; as school policy at the beginning of the year". She had already lined up some teachers to work with her on the project. These teachers had expressed an interest, and still intended to be at the school the following year.

> I spoke to a couple of teachers here, and I said, do you want to work with me…and I asked a junior primary, an upper primary, I asked about three of them, and I said if we got together, brought students' writing, and had a look at it, and just sort of annotated it to see what you think they should reasonably be displaying at that point… I think once that's done, it will be…like a benchmark, basically, but only at this school. At this school, this is what we believe children in year one should be able to do by the end of year one, in writing, or whatever. So that's the next thing I'm working on.

Jenna continued in that position for the rest of that year and the following year, after which the whole family returned to Perth, where Jenna again successfully applied for a merit selection position, which she still holds.

Catherine (Year One/Two, Gibb's Crossing Remote Community School)

Catherine was a young woman in her middle twenties. The daughter of European immigrants from different cultural backgrounds, she grew up as part of a large extended

family in a metropolitan suburb populated by people from a number of different cultures, including Indigenous Australians. She did not begin her teacher education straight from school, but had a number of different jobs before deciding to train as a teacher. When she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Primary Education, she made herself available for jobs state wide: "I thought, if I'm going to be more than three hours from home, I may as well be anywhere."

Catherine's first placement was at Gibbs Crossing Remote Community School. She received her placement before the commencement of the school year, so she was able to attend the Teacher Induction Course, and meet her Principal, who told her at this time that she would be undertaking the duties of a support teacher. At that time, Catherine was not quite sure what this involved: "I had no idea what a support teacher is, but I said, 'Okay!'"

In the role of support teacher, Catherine taught all year levels of the school for art, drama and physical education, to provide regular classroom teachers with DOTT (Duties Other Than Teaching) time. In addition to this, she took the "special education" class each morning. This was a class of children of various ages who had been identified as making minimal progress in literacy and numeracy. The "special education" class was almost as large as any of the "regular" classes in the school. Towards the end of the year, however, the year one and two teacher left the school, the classes were reconfigured, and Catherine suddenly became the teacher of the junior primary class.

Catherine's language lesson

When I visited Gibbs Crossing towards the end of her first year, Catherine had taken her first tentative steps as the classroom teacher of a year one and two class. Most of her pre-service experience had been with older children: "I was predominantly upper primary. I'd never had anything to do with the really young ones and I thought I never want to have anything to do with them...[but] it was the best thing I ever did!" A year later, Catherine had relaxed into the role. The vignette that follows paints a picture of life in Catherine's classroom during part of a language lesson.

Catherine began her language lesson with the children sitting on the floor in the mat area. There were about fifteen Years One and Two children at school on that day. They sat cross-legged, facing the wall, the lower part of which was covered with a huge felt pin-up board. Catherine also sat cross-legged on the floor, with her back to the pin-up board. Attached to the pin-up board with velcro dots were numerous flashcards, with the days of the week, months of the year, numbers, cards which described the weather, a clock with moveable hands, and many examples of the time written in digital format. Catherine sent

one of the children outside to look at the weather. "Ashlyn, can you go out and see what sort of weather we've got outside?" Ashlyn immediately jumped up and ran to the door.

Catherine asked the rest of the children, "What day is it today?"

"Wednesday"

"What day was it yesterday?

"Tuesday"

"What will it be tomorrow?"

"Thursday!"

"Let's read the days of the week"

The children chorus read the days of the week, as Catherine pointed to the flashcards.

"What day is it today?"

"Wednesday"

"Which is the card that says Wednesday?"

Catherine selected one of the children to find the card. She moved the flashcards around on the pin-up board until she had made a sentence:

Today is Wednesday, 21st October. The weather is

Ashlyn had come back into the room.

"What's the weather like Ashlyn?"

"It's a little bit cloudy, a little bit sunny".

Catherine found some more flashcards and added them to the sentences.

Today is Wednesday, 21st October. The weather is cloudy and sunny.

She pointed to the cards in turn, and without any further direction, the children read the cards as she pointed.

Catherine moved the hands on the cardboard clock.

"What time is it?"

"Eleven!"

The little hand's pointing to the eleven. What's the big hand pointing to?"

"Miss! Quarter!"

"Quarter past, or quarter to?"

"Quarter past!"

"Quarter to!"

"Quarter past. It's on this side of the twelve. Quarter past what?"

Miss! Quarter past eleven.

Catherine put up some more flashcards. The sentences now read,

Today is Wednesday, 21st October. The weather is cloudy and sunny. The time is quarter past eleven.

The children read the sentences again, Catherine pointing as they went. Catherine pointed to the clock again. "Is this digital time or analogue?"

Miss! Analogue!

"What would quarter past eleven look like on a digital clock? Come and find it for me Stella"

To the right hand side of the pin-up board there were a number of flashcards with the time in digital format. Stella's hand hesitated between the flashcards that said 11.00 and 11.15. The child next to Stella pointed at the card that said 11.15 and Stella pulled it off the board and placed it near the sentences.

This session on the mat took about ten or fifteen minutes. After this, Catherine directed the children to sit at the desks according to their spelling groups. There were three groups, and each group was a mix of both year one and year two children. One spelling group worked on activities connected with letter identification and sound/symbol recognition. One of these activities was a game of Bingo using the "Letterland" characters. The children in another spelling group were looking through their reading books to find clues to the missing letter in a number of words on a worksheet. The third group of children was working on an activity that involved sorting words into groups according to their letter patterns.

There was considerable negotiation within the groups as children checked their answers and understandings with each other. There was a fair amount of noise in the room, but Catherine could still be heard as she circulated around the groups, providing individual or group instruction where needed. About five minutes after the children had

started on their work, the Aboriginal Education Worker arrived in the classroom. Catherine went over to her, spoke to her for a few moments, then returned to the group she had been working with. The Aboriginal Education Officer moved over to the group of children who were playing Letterland Bingo, and joined in their game.

Catherine described herself as "a resilient person". She had not been too concerned about where she was posted, rationalising to herself that if she was going to be away from home, she may as well be anywhere in the state. She had made it one of her duties as a support teacher to be responsible for the store cupboards and teaching equipment, using her spare time to tidy the cupboards out and become familiar with what resources were available. She also had many teacher-made resources that she had constructed to meet the needs of the children in her class.

Catherine's mat session was fast-paced. The session involved the children in reading and re-reading sentences that Catherine had constructed, and for which she had provided a context. On other days, children would be actively involved in constructing their own sentences. As they manipulated and read the sentences, and Catherine pointed to the words, the children were making a connection between the written words and the spoken words. They were learning about concepts connected with time as they read the time in both analogue and digital formats. In the seatwork tasks, children were given opportunities to practice concepts related to letter identification, sound/symbol recognition and common letter patterns, according to their level of development.

When Catherine interacted with the children, she afforded them equal status as part of a community of learners. She directed proceedings, but the interaction was flexible and informal, while clearly part of a well-established routine. During the mat session she sat on the floor with the children. She did not insist on hands up. She allowed the children to collaborate to construct their answers and understandings. She used many hands-on activities with materials that the children could manipulate.

Catherine spent considerable time observing the children and looking closely at what they could do and what they understood about school and community literacy and mathematics. She kept copious records, and referred to these frequently when planning her learning activities. She also frequently consulted the Aboriginal Education Officer to find out what was going on in the community and in children's families, and consulted her whenever she constructed new learning activities, to make sure that they included at least some aspects that would be familiar to the children.

Catherine stayed at Gibbs Crossing for three years. Towards the end of her third year, she married a local policeman, who was also originally from Perth. He was transferred to a large rural centre, where Catherine successfully applied for an advertised position in the District Office that served Mineside and Bridgewater Primary Schools.

Approaches to literacy instruction in the case study schools

So far this chapter has presented snapshots of four teachers as they went about teaching literacy with their young learners. The teachers responded in a variety of ways to the challenges of teaching that were presented to them in the course of their work. The final part of this chapter describes in more general terms the range of literacy teaching practices that were observed across the all seven of the case study schools.

News telling

Except for at Mineside, news telling was a common feature of the year one and year two classrooms across all the schools. This usually happened at the beginning of the day, so children who arrived late generally did not participate. I did not see any instruction occur; often the activity was self-directed by the students while the teachers carried out administrative tasks such as compiling absentee lists. Occasionally, teachers would join in by directing a question to the speaker, or telling a child when their time was up and directing them to choose the next speaker. The news telling sessions were very formulaic; almost like a ritual, and included formulaic responses, which somewhat surprisingly were exactly the same from one school to another. Each child would begin their news:

Good morning girls and boys, followed by the choral response from the rest of the group:

Good morning [child's name]

The news always finished with:

Thank you for listening to my news, followed by the choral response from the group:

You're welcome [child's name]

Shared and modelled reading and writing

Shared or modelled reading with big books and other enlarged texts was one of the most common features of the literacy program in all the classrooms that were visited. However, the ways in which teachers approached the shared reading differed quite significantly, from Gerri's "reading" of Hansel and Gretel with her year one children at Emu Plains, where she simply flicked through the pictures and asked children questions about

what they thought was happening, to Jenna's and Barbara's approaches in their pre-primary classes at Stockman's Ridge and Mulga Springs.

At Stockman's Ridge, Jenna read the book "Grandpa, Grandpa" (Cowley, 1990) twice; the first time to model the reading and let the children hear the rhythm and pattern of the text, the second time to allow the children to join in where they could predict the rhyming words. She also used the book to demonstrate and check the children's understandings of various concepts about print. The same book would be used again several times that week, with the children joining in with more confidence each time the book was read.

With her pre-primary class at Mulga Springs, Barbara used big books in a very similar way to Jenna. When introducing the book, there would be a discussion of the cover, with Barbara pointing out the title and names of the author and illustrator, and some discussion of their roles in producing the book. She also discussed with the children the illustration on the front cover and asked the children to predict what the story might be about. After that, she flicked through the pages and allowed the children to comment on the illustrations before returning to the front page to read the book while the children looked on.

Using the stimulus of a big book of the story of "Hansel and Gretel" with her year one class at Emu Plains, Gerri initiated a discussion with the children about the witch's house, which then led into a drawing activity where the children were required to draw their own version of the house. This was supposed to then lead into a writing activity (but this did not occur, because time ran out). Apart from one of the children, who had a copy of the book at home, the children had not seen the book prior to this discussion and many of them did not know the story. There was some discussion of the pictures and what was happening in each of the pictures, but there was no focus on the actual print. It may have been the case that the class returned to the book in a future lesson to read the story.

At Mineside, modelled and shared reading and modelled writing occurred quite frequently; perhaps almost every day. Through modelled reading, the pre-primary, year one and year two children were exposed to a range of text types, both narrative and non-fiction, usually around a theme. The pre-primary and year one/two classes often worked together and participated in a lot of language experience-type activities. This would then lead to a shared writing activity, and completed texts would be displayed around the room for the children to return to.

At the other schools, modelled and shared writing appeared to take place much less frequently. Pre-primary teachers appeared to model writing incidentally in the form of lists

of things to do, or recording children's thoughts and responses; for instance, Krystal wrote the children's ideas about why Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall and broke. Preparing for a language experience lesson with the children at Mulga Springs, Barbara wrote a list of instructions on the board as she described to the children what they would need to do. Catherine, at Gibb's Crossing, constructed a sentence from ready-made words with the purpose of getting the children to read it.

The following vignette describes a lesson conducted by Beth, teaching year two at Emu Plains. The purpose of her lesson was to explicitly teach the children how to write up the science experiment that they had completed a few days earlier.

Beth: The writing lesson

Beth's science lesson with year two children began with all the children sitting on the mat in front of her while she sat in her chair. She started by reminding them about the experiment they had done a few days earlier. The children responded with animation, recalling and recounting the event. They were interested and motivated to participate in the discussion. From the responses in the discussion, they had clearly seen the point of the experiment and were able to make some generalisations as a result of this.

Beth then moved on to the main purpose of her current lesson, which was to write up the experiment in their science books. She sent the children back to their seats, handed out their science books and told them to turn to the next clean page and rule up. This took about five minutes as children searched for lost rulers and red pencils. Once this had been completed, and all children were sitting with a clean, ruled up page in front of them, Beth used the blackboard to demonstrate how to arrange the results of the experiment in a table.

Having completed the demonstration, Beth told the children to pick up their pencils and rulers. She told them to count down four lines from the top of the page, then to measure in two centimetres from the margin and put a dot at this point. Then she went round to check that everyone had done as required. Next, she told the children to count down another ten lines, measure in two centimetres from the margin and put another dot. Once she had checked that they had all done this, she got them to use the ruler to join up the dots.

The whole table was drawn up in this manner. When the table had been drawn up, it was filled in, line by line, with the children copying from the board. The children, who had been so animated at the beginning of the lesson, now appeared bored and disengaged

from the task, and Beth looked bored also. When I asked Beth later about this approach, she defended it, saying that the children preferred to do things this way, as it gave them more structure and support.

Although Beth's intention was to provide the children with explicit instruction, her version of the approach resulted in what was really an exercise in following instructions and copying from the board. There was no discussion or explanation of the audience or purpose for writing, the features of procedural text types or of writing for science. There had been no statement of the learning intention, so one could question how much the children might have learned from the exercise that might transfer to another situation or writing exercise.

Guided instruction

Guided Reading was not observed at any of the schools in the study. Several teachers appeared use the "traditional" (Antonacci, 2000) method to group their children for reading activities. At Emu Plains, Gerri was one teacher who did this, and this was something of a step forward for her, as she had begun the year with whole-class reading instruction only.

In classrooms where children did work in small groups, they were grouped by ability in order to complete independent tasks, while the teachers rotated around the groups. At Beacon Hill, Jenny, the kindergarten/pre-primary/year one teacher sometimes had so few children and so many adults in the room that adults were able to work one-on-one or one adult to two or three children, and this made it much easier for her to tailor children's learning experiences to their specific needs. At Mineside, one of the teachers ran an intervention program along the lines of Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993b), which provided children with one-on-one instruction at their point of need, but to ensure that this was cost effective, this program was only offered to children who attended regularly.

Independent reading and writing activities

Independent reading and writing provides children with opportunities to practice those aspects of reading and writing that they are currently learning or have just learned, and to increase fluency and control in both reading and writing. Texts selected for children's independent reading need to be texts which they can read with a high degree of accuracy (95% or higher), and independent writing tasks should present opportunities to safely "try out" skills and devices that have recently been taught and that the children now feel they can undertake with a fair degree of competence.

Other activities that can occur independently to practise and consolidate skills in both reading and writing are games and puzzles in "activity centres". A whole range of commercially produced and home-made games and activities can allow children to consolidate and practise skills in small groups and independently. These kinds of activities may include, but are not limited to letter-matching games; word building; sight word bingo, memory or "snap"; retelling and role playing favourite stories using puppets, felt boards or masks. Role-pay corners such as a home corner, shop or cafe, doctor's surgery or hospital, present multiple opportunities for children to role play and practise their developing literacy skills. These independent activities provide good opportunities for children to work independently while the teacher works with a small group in a guided reading or writing lesson.

These kinds of activities were evident in pre-primary centres in all the schools. However, it was not really clear to what extent intentional teaching was built around activities such as these. Mostly, the children were allowed to self-select their activities and the teachers did not appear to have any particular intent around them, other than a general understanding of play as a means of learning (Beecher & Arthur, 2001). Of all the teachers, Jenna, at Stockman's Ridge, seemed to be the most intentional in the activities she provided for the children, and while she allowed them to self-select some activities, she also monitored their selections so that she was not only aware of their interests, but also aware of what activities they might be missing.

In the pre-primary classrooms the role play centres were generally set up as home corners with dress-up, dolls, prams, play food and child-size furniture, but none of the teachers made opportunities to transform their role play corners into other kinds of scenarios, for instance, a shop, an office, or even the witch's house from Hansel and Gretel, nor did they encourage role play of literacy practices by including literacy materials in the role-play corners.

Phonological awareness and phonics instruction

Instruction in both phonological awareness and phonemic awareness as well as phonics has been identified by the various reviews (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rose, 2006; Rowe, 2005) as crucial to children's success in literacy. The term "phonological awareness" describes a broad set of skills that includes being able to identify words as separate entities, hearing alliteration and rhyme, identifying, segmenting and blending syllables, onsets and rimes. These skills tend to be hierarchical in nature, and at the top of this hierarchy is the skill of phonemic awareness. Instruction in phonemic awareness

(hearing, manipulating, blending and segmenting phonemes) is considered to be essential to support children's reading and spelling. As has already been signalled, explicit instruction in the various levels of phonological awareness would be extremely important for all children but for Aboriginal children in particular, because of the differences in phonology between Aboriginal English and Standard English, and because of the higher incidence of Otitis Media.

Instruction in phonological awareness was not evident, even at Mineside, where the teachers were relatively tuned into the needs of Aboriginal children. Apart from discussion of letter sounds and identification of the first phoneme in words, which usually began when children entered year one, the only activities that were observed that would facilitate the development of children's phonological awareness occurred in the pre-primary centres, and involved singing chants and rhymes as part of the transitions from one activity to another, or as part of games.

Phonics Instruction teaches phoneme-grapheme correspondences. This supports children with the decoding aspects of reading and encoding for spelling. The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that phonics instruction that is systematic and explicit is more effective than other types of instruction at supporting children's word recognition and spelling. In addition, the panel claimed that systematic and explicit phonics instruction was widely effective, regardless of children's cultural and socio-economic status, and that systematic and explicit phonics instruction also supported children's development in reading comprehension.

Synthetic phonics instruction occurs when children are first taught phoneme-grapheme correspondences, and then how to combine (synthesise) these to form words. Analytic phonics instruction occurs when children break words apart (analyse) to identify phoneme-grapheme correspondences. The remit for the (2006) Rose review in the United Kingdom required a consideration of synthetic phonics instruction, and while the review concluded that "…'synthetic' phonics instruction is the form of phonics work that offers the vast majority of beginners the best route to becoming skilled readers."(p.19). However, the review cautioned that any phonics instruction was better than no phonics instruction at all.

Most of the teachers in years one and two taught phonics in some way. They understood that for the children to be able to manipulate the alphabetic code, they would need to be able to match sounds to the symbols that are the letters of the alphabet. However, a variety of approaches were used, across schools, and at times, across the one

class. The year one teacher at Bridgewater stated that she firmly believed that phonics should be taught in a structured way. However, she went on to say that she was not given any guidance about how to do this through her pre-service training, but she believed it helped her (as a child) so she asked other, more experienced teachers how they taught it and learned from them. It seemed that in the absence of any direct formal instruction of how they should go about teaching phonics, a number of the teachers turned to books of black line masters and sometimes commercial programs to teach phonics. At Stockman's Ridge, Anna devised her own system of working through the alphabet from A to Z, teaching the sounds and getting children to identify objects that began with the sound. At Emu Plains, Gerri mostly used worksheets that involved children sorting and writing words according to letter patterns. At Beacon Hill, Jenny used an embedded, analytic approach, starting with reading an enlarged text and then inviting children to identify letters in various words. This was similar to the approach used at Mineside and at Mulga Springs, and at Mulga Springs, this approach was supplemented by worksheets similar to those used by Gerri. Probably the most structured approach was that used by the year one teacher at Bridgewater, who was working through a list which started with single sounds, then consonant and vowel digraphs, and then moved on to teaching blends. She used a form of drill and practice with her students.

In a number of classrooms, there was a THRASS chart on the wall, but only in one classroom was a teacher observed to be using it. This teacher also used a recording of someone pronouncing the phonemes. The children also each had a copy of the THRASS chart, and while the recording was played, the children had to point to the grapheme as the recording gave the phoneme. However, as they did this, no-one was checking to make sure that they were pointing to the correct grapheme. A number of children were observed to be just stabbing their fingers randomly on the chart, rather than pointing to the grapheme in question.

Almost everyone, therefore, spent time teaching children the names and sounds of all the letters, and there was some demonstration and guided support of segmenting sounds in the context of writing and spelling (*What sound can you hear? What letter makes that sound? What sound can you hear next?*), but apart from during the "Reading Recovery" type lessons at Mineside, there was no evidence of demonstrations of blending phoneme/grapheme correspondences to read. Moreover, the lack of consistency in approaches within a school, and for some transient children, across schools could be very confusing. In the first year of the study, the year one children had a series of three

different teachers, each using a different approach (*Letterland*, THRASS and *Jolly Phonics*). For children who at year one had very limited letter knowledge, this had the potential to be very confusing.

Monitoring of student progress

Teaching is going to be far more effective if it is directed to the point of need of individual children (their zone of proximal development, as described by Vygotsky, 1987). If the learning is pitched at too low a level, valuable time is wasted re-teaching something the child already knows. If the learning is pitched too high and no scaffolding is provided, it is likely to be equally useless. In order to direct teaching towards children's specific needs, monitoring of progress is essential. This is especially the case for children who may come and go and possibly not be attending school for weeks at a time.

There was relatively little evidence of the systematic collection of useful information about students' literacy development. One teacher who did was Catherine (Gibbs Crossing). Catherine carried out Clay's (1993) Letter Identification Test, running records and administered the Duncan Word List (Clay, 2002) more than once with each of the children and kept them in student files which she used to inform her planning. At Mineside, systematic records were kept on all the children as they progressed through the Reading Recovery informed intervention program. Also at Mineside, Justine, one of the experienced pre-primary teachers, used the "Time for Talk" assessment materials (Education Department of Western Australia, 1998) to systematically collect information on the oral language development of every child in the school. However, this was so time-consuming that by the time she had finished collecting data for every child, there had been a change in Principal, and even Justine herself was ready to move on to another school. The Principal did not use Justine's data to implement any language programs for the children. At Stockman's Ridge, Anna implemented an intensive program of teaching her children high frequency words, and over a period of about four weeks, she kept a checklist of which words each student had learned to recognise as sight words. At Mulga Springs, the teachers used the Literacy Net (Department of Education and Training, Western Australia, 2005) to monitor student progress. The Literacy Net was used to identify children who were not making desired progress and those who were considered to be most at risk were withdrawn from their own classrooms every day during literacy time to work in small groups with an Indigenous Education Officer. While it is better than nothing, the descriptors provided by the Literacy Net are quite broad and more fine-grained information might be needed to inform more effective teaching.

Storage of and access to children's records and assessment data proved to be problematic in some cases, particularly when there was a significant turnover of staff from one year to the next, as is indicated by the following vignette:

During one of my visits to the schools each year, I spent one-on-one time with each of the child participants in the study, to administer the assessment tasks. I would then collate these data into a class profile for every class and give copies of the profile to both the classroom teacher and one of the school leaders. The aim was for teachers to be able to use this information to plan their teaching, and part of the arrangement was that I would not only share the data with the classroom teacher, but also I would be available to assist them in their interpretation of the data and any aspect of their planning, for instance, discussion of groupings for instruction, discussion of instructional practices, and where appropriate, I would find accessible literature to support and develop their classroom practice. Most of the teachers were appreciative of the support, and made use of it ways that suited them. However, in schools where there was a continuous turnover of teachers and leaders, this practice became useless, as there seemed to be no central storage for the student data. By the time I returned the following term, a new teacher was in place and no-one knew what had happened to the profile for that class. As a consequence, the teacher was developing learning activities which were not directed towards the specific needs of any of the children, because she was guessing at their level of development.

Summary

This chapter has attempted to paint a picture of the reality of teaching in classrooms in rural and remote locations. It is clear that teaching in such classrooms offers challenges, particularly for inexperienced teachers who are still learning their craft. Nevertheless, such classrooms also present opportunities for learning, but this may be contingent on the kind of supports that can be offered. Although there was not a lot of variation in the actual teaching activities that were used across classrooms, there were variations in the ways in which these were implemented. There were also variations in the kind of supports that were offered to teachers, and in the ways in which they were able to respond to these supports.

CHAPTER 7:
RULES, RITUALS AND ROUTINES

I visited each of the schools approximately once a term for three years. I came to realise that although the constant travelling and driving long distances and staying in motels was tiring and disruptive to home life, it presented unique opportunities. Many of the children came from large family groups, with various relatives spread across the region. Whenever I came across familiar surnames or facial features, I would ask the children about the relationships. Sometimes I would visit a school to find a child I knew from another school, on an extended stay with relatives. In this way, I came to know a lot about the various families; who was related to whom; who was speaking to whom and which branch of the family they weren't speaking to. When children went missing from school because they were "staying with relatives", I could make an educated guess about which school they might be attending – or at least, which town they would be visiting. One of the phenomena I noticed was that when children had relatives come to stay, this was often a time when they chose not to attend school, preferring instead to spend time with their relatives. Interestingly, the schools did not seem to communicate with each other about the movements of some students, largely because teachers found it difficult to find out from very young children where they had come from, and by the time they had put into place all the required processes to find out where newly enrolled students had come from, they had disappeared again. Parents did not tend to front up at school to enrol their children; they simply sent them along with their older siblings or cousins. As teachers came and went, and as many children moved around schools in the region, at the end of the three years, I realised that even though I only visited once a term, educationally speaking, I had been one of the most stable people in the lives of some of the children.

What is it Like to be a Child in a Rural School?

This chapter attempts to present a picture of life for children in rural schools. The case studies which follow are presented to provide "snapshots" of the experiences of three children as they progressed through school from their pre-school year to year two, and one child from year one to year two. Each case study begins with a presentation of data collected relating tho the child's attendance and concludes with discussion and analysis of the assessment data that were collected from that child over the course of the study.

Snapshots from the Classroom

In the following pages, snapshots of life in school are presented for four children. Selecting children for the case studies was slightly problematic for two reasons. First, their attendance at school during the assessment task data collection periods needed to be sufficient to be able to collect a full set, or nearly a full set of data, and preferably to have ongoing data in order to comment about progress over time. The second issue stemmed around the teachers. It was not originally expected that there would be such a high turnover of teachers. It was anticipated that once teachers had agreed to participate in the study, they would be at the school for the duration of the study and the children would be observed as they moved through the year levels. When this did not occur, some potential case study children moved into classes where teachers "inherited" the study, but they declined to participate. Observing and reporting the experiences of the children necessitates some reporting of what the teachers did, and where teachers had not signed on to participate in the study, this had the effect of limiting the choices that could be made in this regard. Another criterion that influenced the selection of case study children was that their experiences present opportunities to examine and discuss particular issues which typically arise for children in these contexts. The four children we are introduced to here are from two of the schools; Emu Plains and Stockman's Ridge. Three of the children, Jonah, Troy and Edward, are Indigenous children. A fourth child, Emma, is a non-Indigenous child. The discourse of her home life was very similar to that of the school. Her story provides an opportunity to examine the degree to which this supported her as she entered school and progressed through her junior primary years.

Jonah, Stockman's Ridge District High School.

I followed Jonah's progress as he completed years one and two (ages six and seven years) at Stockman's Ridge District High School. He came to my attention early on my very first visit to the classroom; a Wednesday morning, towards the end of the term. Jonah had just been told by his teacher that he would receive a merit certificate at the school assembly on the Friday of that week. On hearing this news, he appeared delighted. However, within the next ten minutes, he had been told off twice, and his teacher had threatened to withdraw the merit certificate. I wondered if he would make it to the end of the week without losing the award.

Jonah had six older siblings, four of whom were enrolled at the school. He also had at least three younger siblings. The eldest of these, Joseph, was enrolled in Kindergarten during 1998.

Attendance

Although Jonah was not often away from the community for extended periods of time, his attendance records showed that at certain times, he had a high number of absences from school. He was also frequently recorded as arriving late. Jonah's family lived in the town, and on days when he was not at school, he could sometimes be seen playing or wandering in the streets, usually with a younger sibling in tow. Table 7.1 below documents Jonah's absences from school over a period of two years. Jonah's attendance over the period of the study ranged between 40-60 per cent, which according to Zubrick et al (2006) put him significantly at educational risk.

Table 7.1: Number of half days absent, by year and by term: Jonah

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Total
1998 (Y1)	0	8	20	16	**44**
1999 (Y2)	39	9	2	7	**57**

In the classroom

The morning started with news on the mat. The teacher explained to me that the class didn't normally have news that day, but she had a birthday girl and when it was a child's birthday, that child would get to tell news. While the birthday girl was telling her news, one of the girls was playing with the hair of the girl in front of her. This child had a long plait down her back, and by the end of the news telling session, the hair band had been removed and the plait had come completely undone. The child with the plait appeared completely unconcerned. Other children were lying down or playing with their shoe laces. One or two children got up from the group and began to move around the classroom. One of these children was Jonah. The teacher asked him to sit down again, but Jonah continued to look through the books on the bookshelf. Jonah's teacher threatened to send him to the buddy classroom, and he eventually complied.

The lesson continued with a writing activity. Most of the children were working independently, apart from four or five children who the teacher considered needed extra support. They sat at a table at the back of the room, and the teacher worked with that group. Soon after she had set the children to work, Jonah had left his seat and was moving around the classroom, talking to some of the other children. When the teacher noticed

this, she told Jonah to return to his seat and get on with his work. Jonah went to get his book and sat down next to the child he had been talking to. The teacher once again threatened to send him to the buddy classroom if he did not do as he was told, and Jonah reluctantly complied.

Towards the end of the language lesson, the noise level in the classroom was quite high. The teacher was still working with the group of children at the back of the room. A number of other children were milling around the room, seemingly off-task. Some of the boys had moved over to the activity area and were playing with the construction toys. A group of girls were talking about the birthday party that afternoon, and one of them was drawing herself wearing her party clothes. The Indigenous Education Officer, who had just come into the classroom, moved over to this group and admired the picture. A scuffle broke out between two of the boys, and this attracted the teacher's attention. Jonah and another boy were having a disagreement about something. Jonah had kicked the other boy on the shins, and the Indigenous Education Officer moved quickly to physically remove him from the situation. While the teacher attempted to calm the other child, the Indigenous Education Officer grabbed Jonah and led him outside. He was clearly angry. She sat with him on the lawn outside the classroom while he took out his anger on the grass, pulling out great handfuls and throwing them away.

The teacher called the class to order and announced that they could have "free play" until recess. She then turned her attention to Jake, the boy who had been kicked, and listened to his side of the story. Jonah returned to the classroom with the Indigenous Education Officer. The teacher listened to his story, then she brought both boys together and made them apologise to each other for their behaviour. Later that day however, Jonah had transgressed again, and was sent to the Principal's office, where he remained for the rest of the day.

Making friends with Jonah

Jonah had a fascination for my tape-recorder, an item of equipment that I carried around with me constantly. The tape-recorder was of the "Walkman" size, and I would use it to record interviews with teachers, principals and other school personnel, small-group classroom interactions, and the children when they read to me. The first time I used the tape-recorder with Jonah was when we were doing the assessment tasks. As I switched it on, he eyed it suspiciously.

"What's that?"

I explained to him that I wanted to listen later to what we said, and that the recorder would tape our conversation. I offered to let him listen to it when we were finished. When we had finished the assessment tasks, I wound the tape back, and switched it on. An incredulous expression came across Jonah's face as he listened to himself speaking.

"That's me!" he exclaimed. "And that's you!".

From his initial reaction, it might be safe to infer that Jonah had never come across a tape-recorder before, but from that moment, he was hooked. It was difficult to get him away from the tape-recorder. Whenever I was in the classroom, he would hover close by, waiting for an opportunity to hear it working. When I arrived at the school one Monday, Jonah was absent. I sent a message home with one of the other children: "Tell Jonah that I'm here and I have my tape-recorder with me". The next day, Jonah turned up at school, and attended for the rest of the week. After school, when all the other children had gone, he would stay behind, offering to help me pack up my papers, books and other equipment, all the time hoping for another opportunity to use the tape-recorder. I would often use this time to get him to read to me, with the promise that he could listen to himself when he had finished. This was a huge motivation for Jonah, and he would readily pick up a book and attempt to read it to me, when he was reluctant to do so in the normal class situation.

There are at least two ways of viewing Jonah's participation and behaviour at school. The first way of interpreting Jonah's actions is through the lens of school expectations. Jonah came to school with a reputation that was preceded by his older brothers and sisters. According to their teachers, they too displayed what was regarded as inappropriate behaviour in the classroom; they did not attend school regularly and they seemed to be disenfranchised with the school. Jonah, like his brothers and sisters before him, was often absent from school, apparently without a valid reason, his parents did not enforce his regular attendance at school, and this was interpreted as disinterest in education from both Jonah and the rest of his family.

In the classroom, Jonah demonstrated behaviours that his teacher did not expect from her students. He did not stay seated on the mat or during seatwork tasks; instead, he left his seat to talk to another child or to look at a book, and when the teacher asked him to return to his seat he apparently ignored her requests and only reluctantly complied after she threatened him with punishment. During these times, he appeared to be off-task. His attention appeared to be engaged elsewhere; either with a book, or in conversation with another child. A disagreement with another student ended with a physical fight and the

result that Jonah had to be temporarily removed from the room. Before the day was out, Jonah had caused so much disruption to the teaching and learning in the classroom that he had to be removed on a more permanent basis so he spent the rest of the day outside the Principal's office.

There is, however, another way in which Jonah's actions might be interpreted. When Jonah did not attend school, it was not unusual to see him around the town with his younger siblings. It was known that Jonah had several brothers and sisters younger than he. In Aboriginal families, it is an expectation that children, even as young as Jonah, will take some responsibility for looking after younger family members (Malin, 1989; 1990; Fleer, 2004). It is possible that at least on some of the occasions that Jonah was seen in town with his younger brothers and sisters rather than at school, he was the only caregiver available to look after the younger children. It is also possible that Jonah found school a difficult place to be. He was constantly reprimanded for not behaving in the appropriate way, and he was often required to complete tasks without any scaffolding or support. Using the tape-recorder was something that had captured Jonah's interest, and given the chance to use it; he readily came to school and was happy to stay there long after the other children had gone home.

When Jonah got up and walked around the classroom during mat time and seatwork tasks, he appeared to be off-task, but alternately he may have been behaving appropriately according to the expectations of his community. Aboriginal children tend to be more used to learning with and from each other, rather than independently (Harrison, 2011; Hughes, Moore & Williams, 2004; Malin, 1994), so taking his book over to sit with the other child may have been his way of complying with the directive to "get on with his work".

Jonah and I first made a connection through the tape-recorder. This relationship was further developed during the times he hung around after school. On the basis of this relationship, I was usually able to get Jonah to comply with my requests. He trusted that I would not ask him to do something that was not in his interest. This is consistent with much of the literature around working with Aboriginal children, which points to the value of building respectful and trusting relationships (add in references) in order to secure their engagement in classroom activities and their compliance in terms of desired behaviours. The literature (references) cautions against the continual "spotlighting" of individual children in terms of behaviour. Sometimes it may be advantageous to ignore minor misdemeanours with the goal of minimising disruptions to the flow of the learning and keeping the rest of the students' attention on what is being taught.

In August 1998 (Y1), Jonah was able to identify 24 upper-case and 25 lower-case letters by name on the letter identification test (Clay, 1993a). He recognised two sight words (*I* and *up*) from the first 45 words on the year one high frequency word list. When presented with the word *on*, he said "no". The Concepts about Print test (Clay, 1993a) demonstrated that Jonah was able to find the front of the book and was aware that the print carried a message. He noticed both the inverted print and the inverted picture, showing that he knew how print and illustrations are supposed to appear in books. He was able to identify a capital letter, a full stop, and match upper and lower case letters. He also demonstrated that he understood the difference between words and letters.

In a test of phonological awareness (adapted from Bowey, 1995), Jonah was able to recognise and produce rhyming words. He demonstrated a limited capacity to blend words at the syllable, onset-rime and phoneme levels, but had difficulty segmenting words at all levels.

Jonah looked through a caption book with a repetitive text, and told the story from the pictures, using a "book reading" tone of voice and using book-like language (Sulzby, 1985).

Two of Jonah's writing samples are displayed below. For the first writing sample, the children were required to match the verb with the animal following a whole-class reading of a story book. The second writing sample was a letter, which was not finished because Jonah was sent to the "buddy" classroom when his behaviour became disruptive.
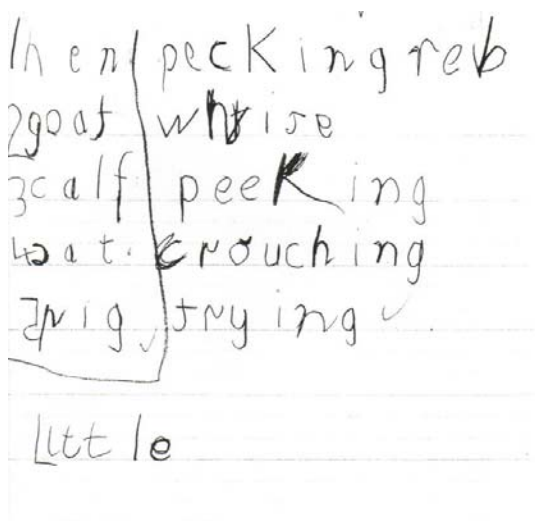
Figure 7.1: Jonah's writing sample, 8.10.98   **Figure 7.2: Jonah's writing sample, 4.11.98**
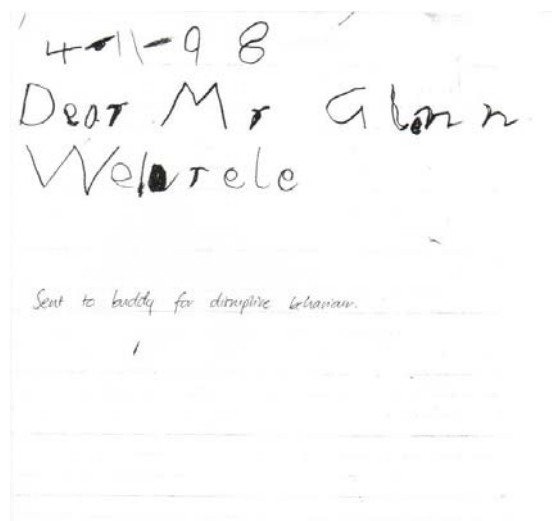
A year later, in August 1999, Jonah was able to correctly name all 26 upper case letters and 27/28 lower case letters in the letter identification test (Clay, 1993a). He was able to correctly identify 24 of the first 45 words on the high frequency word list. The concepts about print test (Clay, 1993a) demonstrated that he now also understood concepts about the directionality of text; that text starts in the top left hand corner, and runs from left to right and works down the page, and that the left page is read before the right. He also noticed an error in line sequence, demonstrating that he was paying attention to the print as the text was read to him.

In the test of phonological awareness (adapted from Bowey, 1995), Jonah was once again able to recognise and produce rhyming words. He was also able to successfully blend words at syllable, onset-rime and phoneme levels. He successfully segmented all the words at onset-rime level, but had difficulty segmenting words by syllable and by phoneme.

In the dictation (hearing sounds in words) test (Clay, 1993a), Jonah was asked to write the following sentence, which was dictated to him:

I have a big dog at home. Today I am going to take him to school.

One point was allocated for every sound which was recorded, regardless of whether the word was spelt correctly. Jonah scored 27 out of a possible 37, demonstrating that he was well on his way to being able to hear individual phonemes in words and represent the phonemes with graphemes, even though his choices in this respect were not always correct.
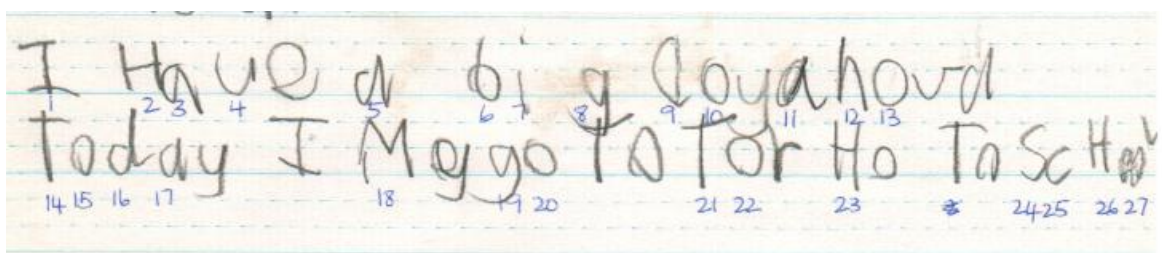
Figure 7.3: Dictation (hearing sounds in words) test, August 1999

Once again, Jonah read a caption book with a repetitive text. Although he relied heavily on the pattern of the text and the illustrations to support his reading, he also made some attempt to decode the words.

Samples of Jonah's writing taken at this time are displayed below:
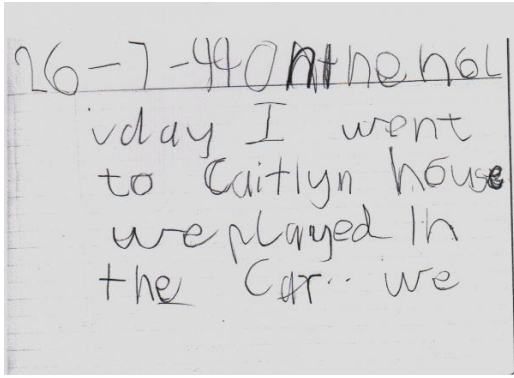
Figure 7.4: Jonah's writing sample, July 1999   **Figure 7.5: Jonah's writing sample, August 1999**
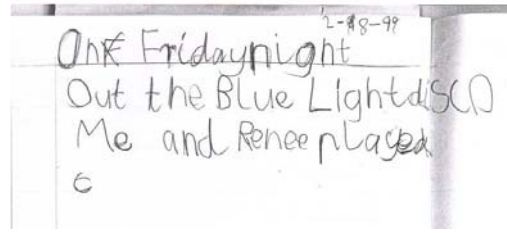
An examination of Jonah's writing book showed a number of similar pieces of writing. Almost all of them were incomplete, and most of the pieces were recounts about playing with friends. The only elements that changed were the venue and the characters. There was never any elaboration. This suggests that Jonah had developed what he saw as a relatively successful "formula" for writing at school.

The figure below provides a graphic representation of the growth of Jonah's knowledge about school literacy as he moved from year one to year two. It can be seen that during this time, he made progress in all aspects of literacy, although the trajectories of learning are not steep. In the third year of the study, Jonah was in year three, and therefore no data were collected from him at this time.
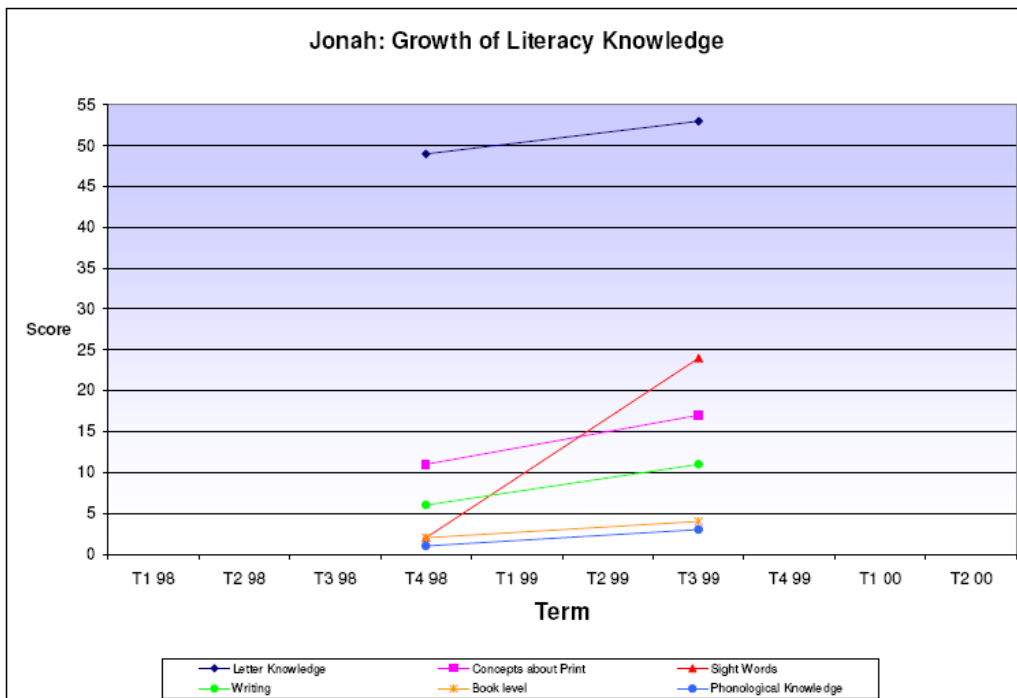
Figure 7.6: Jonah: Growth of literacy knowledge

Troy: Emu Plains District High School

It was only by accident that Troy came to my notice, due to the event described in the following passages. He was a very quiet child who just seemed to blend into the background at Emu Plains District High School; indeed, he seemed to put effort into *not* being noticed. He was rarely at school when the siren went for the start of school, and tended to slip quietly into the classroom halfway through the morning, giving the impression that he had somehow just materialised.

Attendance

The attendance data collected for Troy show that he was not enrolled at school during term one of his preschool year, and had a very high number of absences during the rest of that year, although the number of absences decreased as the year progressed. During term one the following year, he was taken off the roll at Emu Plains, due to his extended absence. There were no records to confirm that he was attending school elsewhere during this time. He returned to Emu Plains in term 2, when he missed only one full day; however he had a significant number of absences through terms three and four of that year. Table 7.2 below shows Troy's attendance data collected over the course of the study.

Table 7.2: Number of half days absent, by year and by term: Troy

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Total
1998 (P)	not enrolled	88	38	24	**150**
1999 (Y1)	not enrolled	2	14	10	**26**
2000 (Y2)	6	20	data not collected		**26**

Year One at Emu Plains

School starts early at Emu Plains. By 7.30, groups of children were already making their way across the town towards the school. When the siren sounded at 8.00, the children lined up at the bottom of the staircase. Gerri, their teacher, moved them quickly up the stairs and into the classroom. Some children went straight to the mat area and sat down, waiting. There were thirteen children in the classroom at this point. The day began with morning greetings, then news. Gerri chose Jason to tell his news first, and he came out to stand in front of the group. From where I was sitting, behind the group on the floor, what he said was completely unintelligible. He looked at the floor, spoke very quietly and indistinctly, said as little as he could get away with, and returned as quickly as possible to his spot on the mat. Once there, he turned round to talk to Kelly, and at that point he could be heard quite distinctly.

At 8.10, another child arrived and joined the rest of the group on the mat. Now it was August's turn to tell news.

"We got a big fish pond and there was all seaweed in it. And we got a big fish in it and that fish did bite my finger."

At 8.15, Raylene wandered into the classroom and seated herself at the back of the group on the mat. August's news was very extended, and she was still going. She was now telling a story that involved Rita, and Rita found August's retelling of the event hilarious. Finally, Gerri told August to wind up her news and August said, "Thank you for listening to my news. Any questions?" Rita asked a question that was almost as extended as August's news.

Troy was called upon next to tell his news. Like Jason's, Troy's news was also very short and almost unintelligible. While this was happening, Gerri was collecting lunch money and completing absentee lists. Some of the children began to get restless and stopped attending. Gerri called them to attention:

> Excuse me August, would you sit on your bottom properly. Right, Raylene, Vera, sit on your bottom! Show some manners, please! I can't believe we've got one, two, three rude people in this class not listening. Everyone else is listening beautifully. Unbelievable! Ella, here's your star, and I love the way you are listening! Ashleigh, fantastic! Jaime, Jack and Kelly, absolutely fantastic listening! I loved the way they sat there, didn't move, listened very, very, very nicely. We've got a few names on the board, but Kelly's name's probably going to come off very soon, and he won't have to do lunchtime detention. Right, first thing we're going to start off with, let me see…Emma, Jaime, Jack, Ashleigh, August, Rita. Right, word sorts. You guys, look at the words, put them into groups.

Gerri had a sheaf of worksheets in her hand, which she passed out as she called out the names. On hearing her name, August immediately responded with "No, I'm not doing a hard thing." She took the worksheet anyway. As she took the worksheet, she said, "Miss, I'm sitting next to Rita?" Gerri responded in the negative. August tried again: "Miss, I'm in charge?" Gerri said, "No, Emma's in charge."

The worksheet was a word sort. The children had to sort a number of words into groups according to their spelling patterns, and then at the end of each list they had to identify and state the spelling rule that applied to that group of words. One group was words that begin with the digraph *sh*. Another group involved words that had the *a-e* pattern and the final group was for words with the *i-e* pattern. At this point they had been given no further instruction or explanation.

Gerri directed another group of five children over to a small hexagonal table to play *Concentration* with sight words. Gerri told one of the children from the group that he was in charge.

This left a third group of children still sitting on the mat, waiting for instruction. The third group included Jason, Ella, Troy and Vera. They also had a word sort worksheet, but they had to sort their words according to initial letters. The words were *milk, sugar, lollies, lost, money, sun, monkey, smarties, lion, long, Mum, smile*. On the worksheet there was a grid with three columns for children to write their words in lists, and at the bottom there were four or five cloze sentences, each of which required one of the words from the list to complete the sentence. At the bottom of each list, there was a space for children to write in other words from around the room. Gerri had blown an example of the worksheet up to A3 size on the photocopier and she worked through the first example with the children on the mat.

> Everyone, grab your sheet, come up here. I love the way Emma and Ashleigh are straight to work, that's fantastic! Now, we've got a letter sort. We have to sort them into one, two, three groups. Okay, give me a word, what's your word, Troy? *(Troy points to a word, but doesn't say what it is.)* Okay, this is **mm**ilk. **Mm**ilk. (Emphasising the /m/). Who can tell me another word that's going to go into this group? Vera? What's another word that can go into this group? Which one? *(Vera points to word.)* Excellent, that's **Mm**onkey. Jason, what's another word that goes in that group? **Mm**oney. Excellent. And Ella, can you tell me the last – oh, beautiful, she had /m/u/m/, Mum. Okay, who can tell me, why do those words all go together in the same group? Jason? They all start with the same sound, don't they? /m/ M up there. Okay, look around the classroom, what's another word that begins with M? Another word? Jason? I want another word. Look around the classroom and give me another word that begins with M. (Long pause.) Okay, go and find one, walk around the classroom. I can see one right now! I can see an M-word! Vera, can you see an M-word? That? That's **Mm**onday! Right, come and sit down. Monday. So I'll just write **Mm**onday here.

While Gerri was working with this group of children, August came up to her and asked for help with her worksheet. Gerri sent her back to her seat. By now it was 8:45, and Steven arrived at the door, accompanied by another staff member. His hands, his t-shirt, his mouth and his lips were covered in some kind of green substance. He entered the room and sat at the back of the group with whom Gerri was working on the mat. He was not directed to do anything.

By this time, several children from the first worksheet group had their hands up, and one or two, like August, were out of their seats. Gerri told them she would be with them in

a minute. "Hands down, guys, I'm working with this group, then I'll come and help you." She went through the next group of words with the group on the floor and then sent this group of children to their seats: "What we're going to do now is, you're going to go back to your seat and you're going to do this all by yourselves." She then she turned to Steven: "Steven, up here, please!" She told him to go to the toilets and wash his hands and face, then come back to class. "Okay, Emma's group, down here, sitting on the floor. Off you go!"

The children came down to the mat and Gerri began to demonstrate to them what they were required to do. The group who were playing *Concentration* so far seemed to be managing fairly well without any direction. Occasionally there was some argument about the rules of the game and who should be allowed to pick up which cards. Despite Gerri's nomination of Jamie as "in charge", Kelly appeared to have appointed himself as the leader of the group, and was issuing instructions to all the others, telling them when it was their turn to have a go. All this time, he kept up a steady drum-beat on the table. Jason, who was supposed to be doing the initial sound word sort, kept wandering over to their table to see what was going on. The children at this table began to sing the alphabet song, but after a few minutes, they were making so much noise that they attracted Gerri's attention. By this time, she had finished working with the group of children on the mat, and she came over and spent some time playing *Concentration* with this group.

Troy, who had been given the activity that involved sorting words by their initial letter, was sitting quietly at his desk, looking around the room. He had not yet attempted anything on his worksheet. I decided to move over and spend some time working with him. While I was working with Troy, I noted that he seemed to be unsure about the terms "word" and "letter". When I asked him to point to a letter M, he pointed to a whole word. He appeared to use the two terms interchangeably. He could find all the words that started with a lower case m, but he did not demonstrate that he understood that upper case M was the same letter as lower case m.

When he wrote his answers, it appeared that Troy was simply copying the words as they appeared on the worksheet. The worksheet had been typed in a font that used the representations **a** and g, rather than the ***a*** and ***g*** representations that were more common in the classroom. When Troy wrote words that included these letters, he copied them as they were represented on the worksheet. He had very poor motor control, and found it difficult to form the letters.

I concluded from this interaction that Troy did not really understand the activity, and, because he did not have enough letter knowledge, it was beyond his level of capability. Later that day, I mentioned my assessment of what Troy understood about print with Gerri. She disagreed wholeheartedly, saying, "He knows it. He can do it. He just doesn't want to do it." However, my assessment appeared to be confirmed when Troy participated in the literacy assessment tasks that were part of the study, and these data are reported below.

Troy was a relatively quiet and compliant student who usually appeared to be participating in classroom events. I watched him carefully for the next few days. When on the mat, he appeared to be attending. He often raised his hand when the other students did, but was never called upon to supply an answer. When assigned seatwork tasks, Troy would sit at his seat, pencil in hand and head down, but I noticed that he spent a lot of time watching others, and rarely completed much, if any of the assigned task. It seemed to me that he had developed coping strategies for the classroom. He was working at becoming an invisible child. He had worked out how to get through tasks without drawing attention to himself, or being "shamed" because he did not have to demonstrate his lack of proficiency with print. However, this strategy also worked against him. When Gerri's attention was drawn to his difficulties, she judged that he did not complete the work because he was "lazy", rather than because he needed some more instruction.

Assessment data for Troy were not collected during his pre-primary year, as he was absent from school at the time the assessment tasks were conducted.

Literacy assessment: Year One

Troy was able to identify nine upper case and five lower case letters in Clay's (1993a) Letter Identification task. He was unable to identify M or m, a, g, a or g. He made a number of substitutions, particularly in the case of the upper case letters. For instance, when presented with the upper case B, he said A; for H he said G, and for J he said S. He scored five points on Clay's (1993a) concepts about print task. He was able to find the front of the book, recognised that the picture was inverted, and that the print was inverted. He knew what a full stop was, and he was able to show one and two letters. However, when he was asked to show one and two words, he demonstrated this by showing letters again. He was not able to identify any words on the list of sight words. He was able to both recognise and produce rhyme, and he was able to blend three out of eight words at the syllable level.

Troy was given a simple caption book (Foundations, level 1) to read. He "read" the book by labelling the pictures, using a "book-reading" tone of voice (Sulby, 1985).
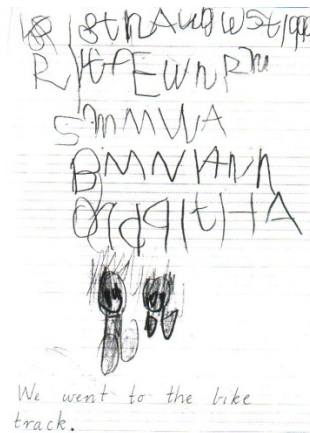
Figure 7.7: Troy's writing sample, term 3, 1999

A sample of Troy's writing, taken at the time the assessment tasks were conducted, demonstrates that at this time Troy knew what writing should look like and showed him experimenting with strings of letters and letter-like signs. Although he assigned a message to his writing, he had yet to learn about and demonstrate proficiency in using the alphabetic principle.

Year Two

When Troy was assessed in year two, he was able to identify 12 upper case letters by name and two by sound (Clay, 1993a). He also identified 12 lower case letters by name, and four by sound. He was able to identify both the lower and upper case forms of seven letters. He scored eight points on the Concepts about Print test (Clay, 1993a). He was able to find the front of the book, and demonstrated his understanding that the print carries the message. Once again, he noticed the inversion of the picture and the print, and he was now able to demonstrate that he understood the directionality of print. He was able to point to a full stop. He was not able to adequately show his understanding of the terms "word" and "letter" (items 22 and 23).

Once again, Troy was unable to identify any of the words on the list of sight words. In the test of phonological awareness adapted from Bowey (1995), he was able to easily recognise rhyme, but had difficulty producing it, correctly answering only one item out of four. However, he was able to correctly answer all the items that required him to blend at the syllable level, although he was not able to segment them.

Once again, Troy "read" a simple caption book (Foundations, level 1), using a "book-reading" intonation. It was difficult to collect a writing sample from Troy at this time. An examination of his writing book revealed that there were no pieces of writing that had been carried out without assistance. There were few samples of writing of any kind, but figure 7.8 below is typical of the few samples available. This was a photocopied worksheet, with the instructions, "Write a Viking poem" and "Draw a sea monster". The poem on Troy's worksheet had been scribed by an adult, and Troy had traced over the top. It was not evident whether the composition of the poem was Troy's, which had been dictated, or whether it had come from some other source.
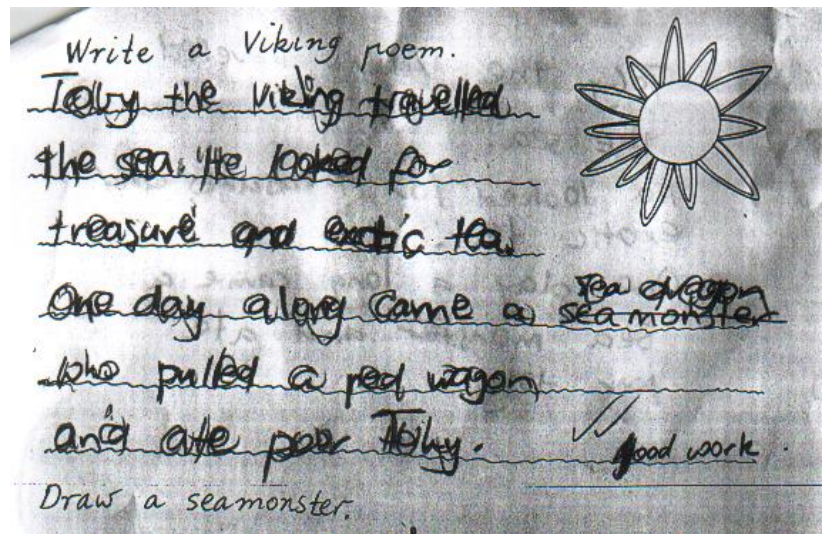
Figure 7.8: Troy's Viking poem: 2000
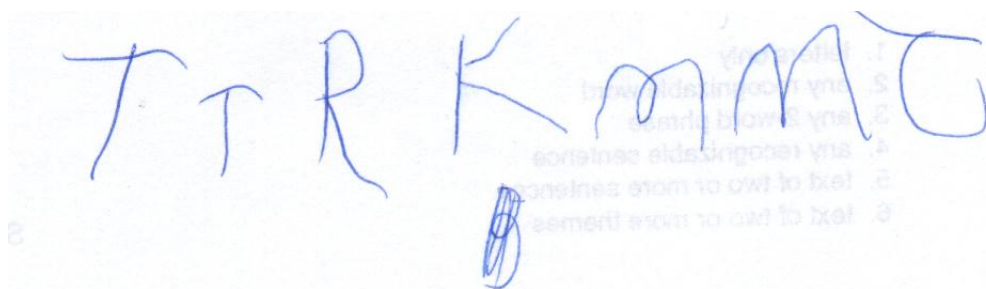
Figure 7.9: Independent writing sample: Troy, 2000

Because I wanted to get an idea of what writing Troy could do without assistance, when the assessment tasks were carried out, I introduced the idea of a written conversation. I wrote a sentence and then read it out to him. I asked him to respond by writing his answer. His response was the writing sample shown above in figure 7.9. When I asked him to read it, he shook his head. Troy had correctly identified the upper case letters

T, R and K in the Letter Identification test (Clay, 1993a), but he had not been able to name the letters M or J.

Figure 7.10 below shows the growth of Troy's knowledge about school literacy as he moved from year one to year two. It appears that the only area of significant gain is a minimal increase in letter identification. Troy's writing samples suggest a decline in confidence. When he was in year one, Troy's writing sample shows that he was using letter-like forms to approximate writing, and that he assigned a message to his writing. In year two, he used the letters he could remember, but he had a very small bank of known letters to draw from, and he had difficulty forming them. He knew that his writing did not carry a message. It appeared that what he had learned about literacy over the last nine months was that he could not do it.
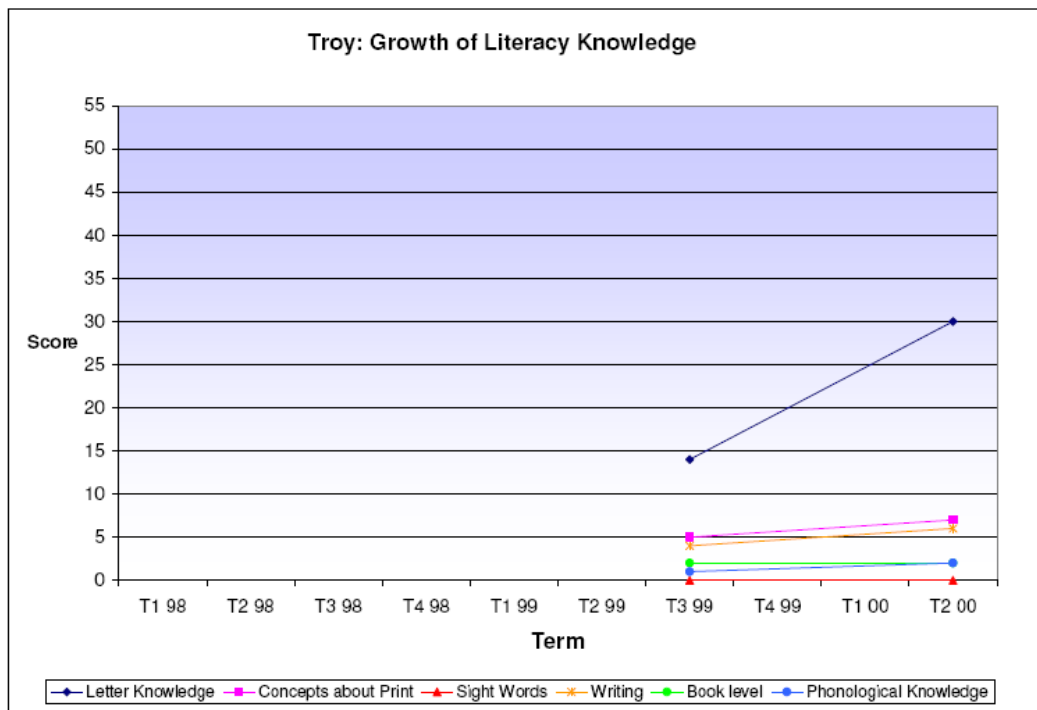
Figure 7.10: Troy: Growth of literacy knowledge

Edward, Emu Plains District High School

Edward was a student who I first encountered in the Pre-primary class at Emu Plains District High School. He was physically small and slight in relation to his peers, and often had a rather unkempt appearance. He was one of the group of children who teachers at the school referred to as the "bush kids", meaning that they lived out of the town.

In the Pre-primary classroom, Edward was a quiet child. He did not actively participate in class activities; he usually sat at the edge of the group when the children were on the mat, often appeared distracted; was slow to get started on seatwork tasks and

often had made very little progress towards completing the task when the group moved on to the next activity. The following year, I decided to make Edward the focus of my observations in the year one classroom.

Attendance

Although Edward first enrolled at the school during the Pre-primary year, his attendance was spasmodic, and there were relatively long periods when he was absent from school and did not appear to be attending school elsewhere. Edward was notably absent for a total of 173 half days during his pre-primary year. He was not enrolled until term two. The number of Edward's absences decreased as he moved into years one and two; however, the number of absences would still place him in the "at risk" category (Zubrick, 2006).

Table 7.3: Number of half days absent, by year and by term: Edward

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Total
1998 (P)	not enrolled	88	25	60	**173**
1999 (Y1)	16	46	52	32	**146**
2000 (Y2)	43	56	data not collected		**99**

In the classroom

As usual, the morning began with the children telling news. The children were gathered on the mat at the front of the room, near the teacher's desk, and facing the empty teacher's chair. Gerri, their teacher, sat on one of the children's desks, to one side of the group. Half her attention was directed towards supervising the news telling session, but at the same time she was organising lunch orders, completing the attendance roll and filling in non-attendance slips for children who were absent that day. She nominated one of the children to come to the front of the class and "tell their news". The child came up to sit in the teacher's chair and spoke to the rest of the group:

Student: Good Morning, everyone.

Class: Good Morning Raylene.

Student: Well, yesterday, after school, August came over my house and we built a cubby.

Raylene continued to recount the events of the previous afternoon, and then asked, "Does anyone have any questions?"

One child asked a couple of questions, and the news session concluded:

Student: Thank you for listening to my news.

Class: You're welcome, Raylene.

Jack was called upon next:

"Yesterday it was my brother's birthday and he got a man in a spaceship and on Saturday he got a trampoline and yesterday we jumped on it and told stories. Thank you for listening to my news."

Edward was the next child to be asked to tell his news. He sat in the chair and thought for a long time. When he did speak, he looked down at his feet and his speech was indistinct.

Edward: Good morning everyone.

Class: Good morning Edward.

Edward: My uncle got a truck. [long pause]

Teacher: Come on, Edward, what else? Have you been somewhere in the truck?

Edward nodded.

Teacher: Well, where have you been? Where did you go in the truck?

Edward: Bush.

Teacher: What did you do in the bush?

After a further long pause, Edward shook his head, mumbled, "Thank you for listening to my news", slipped off the chair and returned to his spot on the mat. The teacher called upon the next student.

After the news-telling session, the children were split into three groups of six children for phonics instruction. Edward was in the first of these groups, and they were directed to a small table to work under the supervision of Jasmine, the Aboriginal Education Officer. Jasmine was sixteen years old and had just been employed in this role, straight from school. The task they were assigned was to look through magazines to find the letters that made up their names, cut these out, and glue them in the right order onto a blank sheet of paper. As the teacher was getting the various groups sorted and on-task, another child arrived and was allocated to this cutting and sticking group.

After five minutes at this task, Edward had cut out and stuck several letters; E, d, W. a, r. Rachelle had cut out three letters; R, A, C. Jasmine was sitting with the children, but

she was reading the magazines. Kelly tried to cut her magazine. She said, "Kelly, do your work".

Edward completed this task quickly and accurately. He was the first in his group to finish, and then he began to wander around the classroom because he did not have anything to do. Rachelle had managed to stick three letters onto her piece of paper. They were the correct letters from her name, but they were just stuck in random fashion; not in the correct sequence or with any sense of directionality.

Gerri brought this part of the lesson to a close, calling the children back to the mat. She announced that it was time for daily writing. Gerri took a large sheet of paper and wrote the date on it.

"Let me see, who's going to tell me their news today? I'm looking for people who are not calling out! Raylene, would you like to tell me your news? You've been sitting there beautifully all the time".

"Yesterday…"

Gerri corrected her. "On Tuesday,"

"On Tuesday, me and Jason and August played in the cubby".

Gerri fished out a chart headed "Recounts". It read,

> **Recounts**
> We need to remember the following information
>
> 1. When. When did the event happen?
> 2. Who.
> 3. Where. Where was the event?
> 4. What. What happened?
> 5. Why. Why did the event happen?

She directed the children's attention to the chart. "Alright, what did you do in the cubby, cause you've told me *when* you played in the cubby, *who* you played with, *where* you were playing, what did you do in the cubby?"

Raylene started to give a detailed account of everything that occurred as the children were playing in the cubby, but Gerri interrupted her, saying,

Now, how about we stop right there, okay, and I'll start writing now. How will I start my sentence? Oooh! How will I start my sentence? August, would you turn around please, come and sit down, right at the front here. Right at the front, where I can see you. On Tuesday, we made a cubby, so I'm going to start with a capital letter. Who's being rude down there? (Writing) On Tuesday, ah, stop! Right August, that's mine, thank you, until recess, I'm sick of you having money in your mouth! Now if I have rude people sitting on the floor, I will not put up with it, okay? Your name will be straight on the board, and you'll be in lunchtime detention! Everyone knows how to sit on the floor properly. Everyone knows not to talk. We were listening to Raylene's news, and some people were so rude, they weren't even listening. I found it hard to listen because people were talking. When you are asked, I want everyone looking at the board, listening to what I'm saying about our writing. On Tuesday, and we have a capital letter for Tuesday, because it's a day of the week, on Tuesday, Jason and August, Jason, there's his name, Jaas/on, comma, because we've got another person, Au/g/u/st and I went, where's the cubby?

Gerri was sounding out the names as she wrote them, and the children were joining in.

"Went to … his house, your house? The cubby… at the back of your house? On the side?" (Writing once more) "At the side of their house. And I'm going to put a full stop right there because I've said lots in that sentence".

She had written:

On Tuesday, Jason, August and I went to the cubby at the side of their house. We played inside and made a fire to keep warm.

Then she read what she had written, pointing at the words, matching one-to-one. Next, she called on individual children to come out and circle the capital letters. When they circled the capital letters, Gerri asked the class why a capital letter had been used in that particular instance.

Rachelle was sitting at the back of the group of children on the mat, playing with her hair. Edward was in the middle, sitting next to Kelly. Unlike Rachelle, he appeared to be attending to what was happening. When Kelly was called up to the front to circle a capital letter, Edward gave him a congratulatory nod as he returned to his place on the mat.

Gerri sent the children back to their seats group by group, as two of the children handed out pieces of paper. As they moved back to their seats and got started on their own writing, Gerri moved over to a large chart and used a stamp to put up stars for those children who appeared to get down to work straight away.

There were a number of teacher-made charts displayed around the room, including *class helpers*, *shapes*, *days of the week*, *members of my family*, and *some of our favourite foods*. One of the charts was *when to use capitals*:

When to use Capitals
- To start a sentence
- Someone's name
- Days & months
- Places, towns, cities, countries
- Movies, books, computer games
- Teams
- Schools, shops
- Special events

To support children's writing, there were alphabet charts above the board, and a chart of frequently used words for the children to refer to:

Words we often use

and	that	was	have		
the	but	he	you	with	they
said	not	are	for	so	about
from	we	do	in	been	

The class settled down to complete their writing, and Gerri and Jasmine circulated around the various children, helping where required. A number of children were sitting with their hands up. Some had left their seats and had wandered over to talk to other children. Jasmine appeared to be writing Edward's diary for him. She had written the date, then she had written: *On the weekend my dog had puppies*. Edward traced over her writing in red coloured pencil.

Later that day, in conversation with Geri, I mentioned that I was making Edward and Rachelle the focus of my observations in her classroom, as they seemed to be two students who were particularly at risk. I expressed my concern about Edward's progress, commenting that he seemed to be a bright little boy, but he did not attend school much. Gerri's reply was that she did not think he was bright. She commented, "At least you can have some sort of conversation with Rachelle, but he's hopeless, he can't even talk properly; you can't have any sort of conversation with him. He'll say *I played home*, instead of *I played at home*". I pointed out that this was an appropriate structure for Aboriginal

English, to which she answered, "Oh, well, I know they all speak Aboriginal English, but they don't all talk like that".

The following day, I was carrying out some of the assessment tasks with Edward. Once again, he had been cutting pictures out of magazines, and before we got started on the assessment tasks, I helped him to gather up the magazines and put them away. As we were doing this, I chatted to him about his family. I commented that he had not been at school the last time I had been there, and asked where he had been. He said he had been living out in the bush with the rest of his family. He told me that his uncle had a big truck, and he described how he and his brothers and sisters and cousins had been out shooting kangaroos with his uncle and his father. I asked him what they did with the kangaroos.

"Cook 'im in the ground, Miss. Taste real good. You like kangaroo cooked like that?"

At this point I had to admit to him that I had not eaten kangaroo cooked in that way. Indeed, I had never eaten kangaroo meat at all. My experience of kangaroo meat was as something to be avoided on menus meant for tourists, or wrapped in plastic and sold as pet meat in the freezer section of the supermarket. This conversation, for me, brought sharply into focus the difference between my world experience and that of this little boy. The experiences that he spoke of were completely outside my field of experience, yet he clearly expected that they would be the same as his. The tables were turned. I felt embarrassed that I was unable to participate in his discourse when he clearly expected that I should. This exchange with Edward gave me some small insight into what it must be like for children like Edward to come to school and be expected to be able to participate in a discourse which often makes little attempt to build on, or even take into account the life experiences of the children who attend.

This incident caused me to reflect on the ways in which young children such as Edward are presented with opportunities to demonstrate, build on, and develop their language skills in classrooms in Western Australia. One of the accepted ways in which teachers attempt to do this is through daily news telling sessions.

Rituals similar to the one described above are played out in classrooms throughout Western Australia, and as I reflected on this event, I questioned, not for the first time, exactly what was being achieved through interactions such as this.

Was this a real opportunity to extend children's oral language development, or was it an opportunity to engage the children in "busy work" while the teacher attended to some administration tasks? This kind of discourse did not feature in the repertoire that the

children used at home or in the community. No scaffolding appeared to take place to ensure that all children could operate effectively in this discourse, nor was there any teaching of when it might be appropriate to use a discourse such as this, or even any acknowledgement of the differences between the structures of spoken and written language. Both the teacher and the children appeared to simply accept it as one of the classroom routines. My point here is that the value of this kind of discourse remains unquestioned in the school context. Because it is perceived as "normal", teachers judge the communicative skills of children not by their ability to communicate effectively with each other and others in their communities, but by their ability to assimilate these discourses.

Edward had been judged by his teacher to have poor and ineffective communication skills, and as a result of this, his teacher had made a further judgement that "he was not very bright". Perhaps a more accurate judgement would have been that he was unable to effectively participate in school-like discourses. When he was gathering up the magazines with me, and talking about a topic and people he was familiar with, in a situation where he held equal status, he was able to communicate very effectively. When I observed him in the playground with the other children, he appeared to be able to communicate effectively, and the stories that he told me about his family and community indicated that he communicated effectively there also. I wondered how many opportunities he would be given to develop and demonstrate these skills in the classroom situation, and how explicitly he would be introduced to the code of communication that would be required for him to succeed in school-like situations.

Literacy assessment: Pre-primary

When testing took place in term three of the pre-primary year, Edward was able to show the front of a book, and he recognised the inversion of the picture in the Concepts about Print Test (Clay, 1993). When presented with the Letter Identification Test, Edward counted the first row of letters. He was able to make a one-to-one correspondence. He was able to identify the first letter of his name, but did not know the name or sound. He was able to recognise rhyming words, but he was unable to produce them. Edward was asked to "read" the book *Shopping at the Supermarket* (Foundations, level 1). He looked through the book and labelled the pictures, using the same pattern for each page:

"Some milk. Some butter. …"

When writing at this time, Edward was still experimenting with marks on the paper. Some of the marks appeared to be letter-like forms. There appeared to be no real sense of directionality.
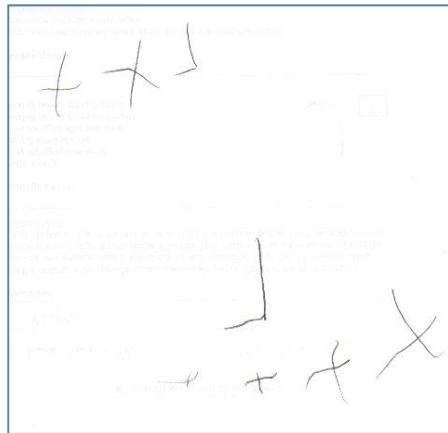
Figure 7.11: Edward's writing sample, Term 3, 1998

Year One

When he was assessed in Year One, Edward was able to identify five upper case letters and five lower case letters by name. Four of the letters were upper and lower case versions of the same letter. Although he was able to point to the letters that made up his name, Edward was only able to name the letter A. He did not attempt to identify any letters by sound. In the Concepts about Print test (Clay, 1993a), he was able to show the front of the book (item 1), and showed that he understood that the message was in the print, not the pictures (item 2). He identified that the print and the picture were inverted (items 8 and 9), and he was able to show that he knew that the print started at the top left and worked towards the right (items 3 and 4), although he was not able to demonstrate the return sweep (item 5).

On the test of phonological awareness adapted from Bowey (1995), Edward was able to recognise rhyming words, but could not produce them. He did not recognise any of the words on the list of sight words. When he was asked to read a book at Reading Recovery Level 2 (Foundations), he looked through the book and talked about the pictures, but made no attempt to read the print. Samples of Edward's writing which were taken at this time show that he was able to copy the date, and that he attempted to use some letter-like forms. It was very difficult to obtain samples of independent writing from Edward at this time. There were almost no examples of independent writing available from classroom work, as all his writing attempts had either been copied, or they had been written for him

to trace over. Edward was able to dictate a sentence to be scribed by the teacher or Aboriginal Education Officer (Figure 7.12).
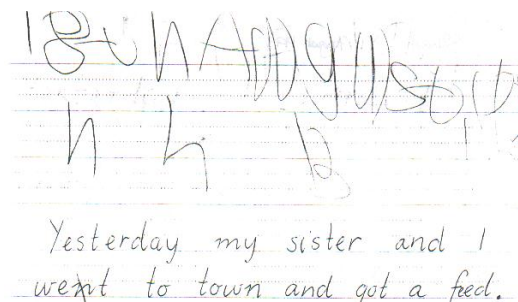
Figure 7.12: Edward's writing sample 1, term 3, 1999

Figure 7.13: Writing sample 2, term 3, 1999

The second writing sample (figure 7.13) was collected from Edward during a lesson that was observed. The children had looked at the pictures in the big book Hansel and Gretel, had been asked to make predictions about the story from the pictures, and then had been asked to draw the witch's house from the story. Edward has drawn the witch's house, and he has also attempted to accompany his drawing with some writing. He did not assign a message to his writing, stating simply that it was "some writing". The date had been copied from the board. Edward has written a random sequence of letters and there is some sense of directionality.

Year Two

Nine months later, when he was in Year Two, Edward correctly identified 14 upper case letters by name and three by sound, and 16 lower case letters by name, making 33 letters in total. Some of the answers he gave for lower case letters were reversals, for example, when presented with a lower case q, he said, "P"; he thought a lower case d was B, and for w, he answered "M". He correctly scored a total of twelve items on the Concepts about Print test (Clay, 1991). By now, Edward could also demonstrate the return sweep (item 5), the concept of first and last (item 7), and that the left page is read before the right page (item 11). He was also able to identify a full stop (item 16) and a capital letter (item

24), and he could show one and two letters (item 21). However, when asked to show one and two words (item 22), he again showed letters.

Edward was now able to identify two words on the list of high frequency sight words; *a* and *in*. In the test of phonological awareness adapted from Bowey (1995), he was able to recognise rhyming words but not produce them, but now he was also able to blend words at the syllable level. Edward "read" a book at Reading Recovery Level 2, making up a story to go with the pictures and using a book-reading tone of voice.

A writing sample that was collected from Edward's classroom work is shown below. This piece of writing was scaffolded by a teacher demonstration and words written on the board for reference.
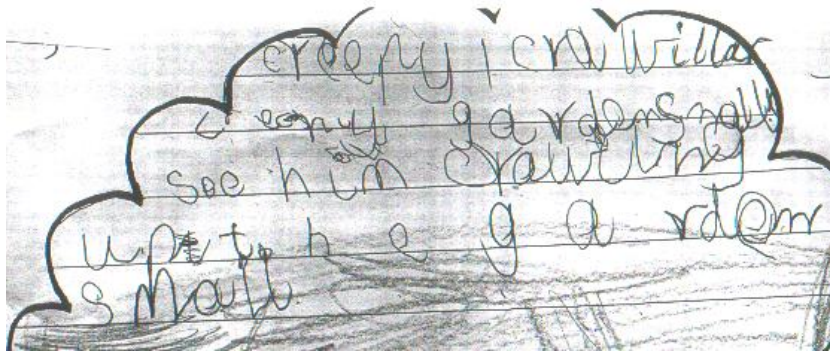
Figure 7.14: Edward's writing sample, term 2, 2000

Figure 7.15 below shows the growth of Edward's knowledge about literacy as he moved from his Pre-primary year, through Year One, and into Year Two. While there has been some growth in all aspects of literacy over the two years, the most significant area of growth has been in letter knowledge. Progress in all areas, however, is slow.
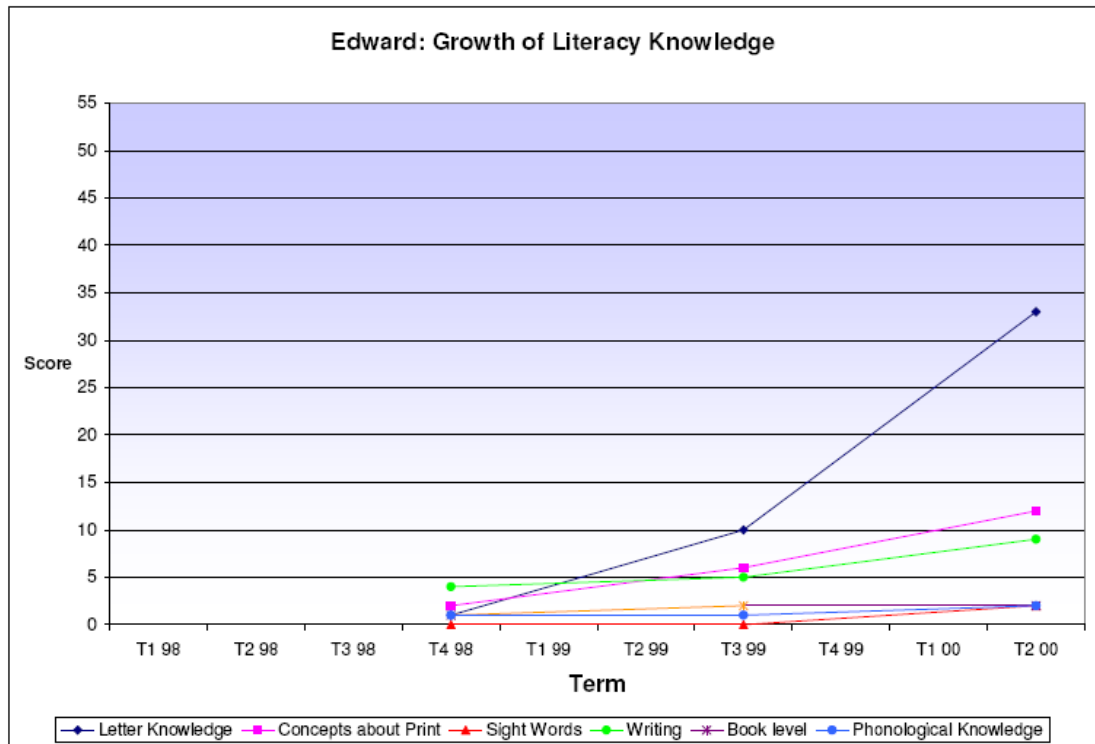
Figure 7.15: Edward: Growth of literacy knowledge

Emma: Emu Plains District High School

When she was in the Pre-primary class, Emma's mother described her as "five, going on thirty five". Both of Emma's parents were employed in professional positions by the local mining company. Emma was an only child, friendly and outgoing with both her peers and adults. She participated with enthusiasm in all classroom activities, and particularly seemed to enjoy those that involved any kind of social interaction. She participated in the literacy assessments with interest and confidence. Emma was selected as a case study child because she began school with a significant amount of knowledge about aspects of school literacy. She seemed extremely comfortable with the discourse of school and seemed to be able to negotiate the discourse easily. Because of Emma's high rate of attendance, it was possible to collect information relating to classroom interactions at every observation point.

Attendance

Table 7.4 below documents the number of half days that Emma was absent from school. These data show that she had relatively few absences from school.

Table 7.4: Number of half days absent, by year and by term: Emma

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Total
1998 (P)	0	4	0	0	**4**
1999 (Y1)	2	16	0	2	**20**
2000 (Y2)	2	4	data not collected		**6**

Because she had so few absences from school, Emma was one of the few children who was present for all the classroom observations and who was able to participate in all the assessments. The following pages present snapshots of Emma in the pre-primary, year one and year two classrooms, to give a sense of how her school life unfolded through the years

In the Pre-primary classroom

Emma was playing in the home corner with two other little girls; Jaime and Ella. The home corner was set up in one corner of the pre-primary centre, with a child-sized cooker, sink, dresser, bed, wardrobe and mirror. In a large wooden doll pram, there were two life-sized baby dolls, one white; one black. A large box held various dress-up clothes and other bits and pieces for pretend play. There was no print on the walls in this area. The girls were playing at the cooker with the pots and pans. Emma was directing the play, busily organising the two other girls:

"Let's make a cake! Let's make it the baby's birthday and we're having a party."

Emma was rummaging through the dress-up box and pulled out doll clothes and some cups and plates. She handed the doll clothes to Ella.

"Ella, you need to dress the babies, and get them ready for the party. Jaime, you can put out the party food. What are we going to have?"

The other girls made some suggestions:

"Fairy bread!"

"Chips! And lollies!"

Emma was still rifling through the dress-up box. She pulled out a battered old handbag.

"We need to go shopping, to get the food for the party. We need to make a shopping list. Miss Atkins! Miss Atkins, can you play with us? Because we need you to write down a shopping list for us."

The teacher came over to where the girls were playing and told them to pack away the toys, saying, "it's fruit time now. You need to go and wash your hands and get your hats."

The two other girls threw their toys back into the box, but Emma said, "Miss Atkins, can we carry on playing this after fruit time?" The teacher replied that she had something else organised for the children to do after they had had their fruit.

After washing their hands, the children went outside to the outdoor play area, where they sat on the grass in a large circle. The fruit had been cut up into pieces and put into two large plastic bowls, which were handed round the circle of children. Once again, Emma was organising; making sure that no-one missed out on their share of the fruit, asking other children to pass the bowls along when they stopped going round the circle.

In the Year One classroom

The literacy routine for the morning followed the usual pattern. After the news-telling session, the children were separated into three groups to do spelling and phonics activities with worksheets. Emma's group was given a worksheet with a number of words on it that represented the different ways to spell the sound ei: -ay, ai or a-e. The children were required to use a grid on the worksheet to sort the words into groups according to the pattern, then they were required to write a sentence using each of the words. When the worksheets were collected up, the teacher, Gerri, called the children onto the mat area.

She picked up the big book *Hansel and Gretel*.

Teacher:	Who can tell me something about the front cover? Who can tell me something about Hansel and Gretel? Kelly, you are not looking at the cover. Excuse me, Justin, turn around and look at the front cover! Who can tell me something about the cover? Anything at all?
Child:	Fun?
Child:	Story?
Teacher:	Yes, we know it's a story. But what's something you see, on the front cover? What's the story going to be about? Who are the main characters in the story, do you think? The main two people in the story? Emma?

Emma started to speak, but was interrupted by Gerri:

"Sorry, Emma, can you stop for a minute, because we've got babies over here, can't sit on the floor properly, keep touching each other; who are the main two people in the story?"

Emma attempted to answer again, but was interrupted once more.

Teacher:	I'm sorry, I can't hear you Emma, because I've got people talking, people are still showing off in this class; you usually don't sit on the floor and talk. I don't know why you're doing it now. Like I said, we've got two minutes at recess. Let's get that two minutes off! I'm going to start taking blocks out of that container in a minute, because I'm not happy with you. No! Don't "Miss" me without your hand up! Now sit on the floor properly! Thank you! Now, who are the main characters?
Emma:	A girl and a boy. I've got this story at home.
Teacher:	Have you? Now, where do you think Hansel and Gretel might live? Jason?

Jason pointed vaguely somewhere in the direction of the picture.

Teacher:	Over there? Can you see a house there? Emma, where do you think?
Emma:	On a farm?
Teacher:	On a farm? Why do you say on a farm?
Emma:	Because you can see a little bit of a gate.
Teacher:	A bit of a gate? Right. What about, what do we see in the background; in the back of the picture? Jason?
Jason:	Bushes?
Teacher:	Bushes. Are they big trees? So do you think it could be a forest?
Children:	Yes.
Teacher:	Let's find out. Okay, Hansel and Gretel, this is the title. We've got Hansel and Gretel, by Brothers Grimm, and illustrated by Kirsten [unclear]. What's the author's job? What's another name for the author? What does the author do? Kelly?
Kelly:	Colour the pictures?
Teacher:	No, that's not the author, what does the author do?
Jaime:	Writes the story.
Teacher:	Right, and what's the illustrator? Jack?
Jack:	Pictures?
Teacher:	Right, well done. We're going to open it up. Look at the pictures. I want everybody looking very hard at the pictures. There'll be no talking, because everyone's looking at the pictures. Looking at the pictures.

Gerri slowly turned the pages of the book, allowing the children time to look at the pictures. All the children appeared to be looking quite carefully. One of the children, who was sitting right at the front of the group, shuffled forward and pointed to various items on the pages. The pictures showed Hansel and Gretel being taken into the woods, leaving a trail of breadcrumbs behind them. When she came to the picture showing the children arriving at the witch's house, Gerri stopped turning the pages.

Teacher:	Right, we'll stop there. Who can tell me what they think has happened so far in this story? Emma?
Emma:	They've come to the witch's house.
Teacher:	How did they get to the witch's house? Can anyone tell me how they got to the witch's house?
Emma:	Walked?
Teacher:	They walked there. Who did they start walking with?
Emma:	Their Mum and Dad.
Teacher:	Their Mum and Dad. So what do you think happened to their Mum and Dad?

The children did not seem able to supply an answer to this question, so Gerri flicked back to the picture of the children being taken into the woods and directed their attention to the trail of breadcrumbs. She asked the children why they thought the children in the book were leaving the trail.

Teacher:	Why is he dropping the bread?
Child:	Feed the birds!
Teacher:	Do you think he wants the birds to eat the food?
Child:	The birds will follow him!
Teacher:	He wanted the birds to follow him; that's a good guess. (flicking forward again) And then they're alone. How do you think they got by themselves? Why do you think they're by themselves?
Several children:	'Cause they walked there.
Teacher:	*Why* did they walk there? Why did they just go walking? Emma?
Emma:	Because they needed a warmer spot because it was freezing cold?
Teacher:	Maybe. What happened to Mum and Dad? We had Mum and Dad at first; what happened to them?
Child:	Got lost.
Teacher:	Mum and Dad got lost? And do you think the little girl and boy are lost now?

Some children said "yes"; some said "no". Gerri moved on to a discussion of the witch's house:

"Okay, the first thing we're going to do, just look at the pictures, and we're looking at the witch's house right now, aren't we? Okay, that's just a picture of the outside. Who can tell me some of the things we can see on the outside of this house?"

Some of the children began to call out their suggestions, but Gerri stopped them:

"Right, hands straight up in the air! Everyone! Everyone's hand should be up, because everyone can see this picture! Right, Steven, what are some of the things we can see at the witch's house?" Steven did not respond, but Ashleigh called out:

Ashleigh:	Biscuits!
Emma: (to Ashleigh)	Ashleigh, put your hand up!
Teacher:	What are some of the things in the picture?
Emma: (to Ashleigh)	Ashleigh! Put it up!
Teacher:	Emma, don't touch her! Steven?
Steven:	Biscuits?
Teacher:	Biscuits. Right, everyone sit on their bottoms right now! Fold your legs! Hands down! Hands on heads! Hands on shoulders, heads, nose, hands on ears, shoulders, fold your arms! Now, Steven said biscuits, we can see some biscuits. What else can you see? What else is the house made of, Ella?
Ella:	Lollies!
Teacher:	Lollies, yes, what else? What else do you think that house might be made of; we've got lollies, biscuits…
Child:	Lollipops?
Teacher:	Lollipops, right. Now, I'm just going to leave that picture there, like that (puts open book on the easel). Now, everyone's getting very restless, so we'll do this straight away, okay? Now, what we're going to do; I won't start until everyone's sitting on their bottoms, legs crossed, arms folded, 'cause I'm not going to say this two hundred times. Kelly, I'm waiting. I love the way Mitchell's waiting; I'm going to give him a star. Jason, I'm going to take your name off the board, because I love the way you've been sitting there the whole time, and you haven't been annoying anyone, which is great! So Jason, your name's not on the board any more. August, your name's gone on the board! Now on this piece of paper, you're going to draw what you think the witch's house looks like. So you're going to draw…maybe if you think the witch's house is made out of biscuits; made out of lollies; whatever you want! I just don't want a small picture in the corner. I want a big picture. Big, bright pictures! You need a front door; you need windows, what else is a house made of? Rachelle?
Rachelle:	Lollies!
Teacher:	What else have you got in a house? You've got doors, windows; what's on top of the roof? Roof, chimneys; you might have a little garden with it. Something really, really nice, because you want other kids to walk past your house and go, that's a nice house! So your house must be really, really nice. Okay, we're going to use wind-ups [crayons], but only those people working really nicely are going to get wind-ups. If you can't work well, you won't be able to use the wind-ups. The first

thing we do is we draw in pencil, then we're going to go over it and colour it in in wind-ups. But those who cannot draw quietly with lead pencils will not get to colour in with the wind-ups. Right, August and Jaime, paper for everyone, please.

While the two girls handed round paper, the rest of the class made their way back to their seats. There were tubs on the desks, one for each row, and the children selected their pencils from these. Those who got to the tubs first, got the best pencils. Those children who got the tubs last had to make do with blunt or short pencils. Rachelle started to do her drawing in red pencil. Gerri turned her paper over. "*Lead* pencil, I said!" She told her to start again. Rachelle took a chewed-up looking lead pencil from the tub on the desk and drew a pattern across the top of her paper. After about ten minutes, she swapped the lead pencil for a coloured pencil and continued to draw her pattern.

Gerri came over to Rachelle. She asked, "Where's your front door Rachelle?" Rachelle started to draw something that looked like a front door. Two minutes later, Rachelle had lost interest. She was out of her chair and talking to Emma. A few minutes later, Gerri asked the children to pack their things away and line up to go outside for daily fitness.

The Year Two classroom

The following year, a change in school leadership initiated a different approach to literacy instruction in the lower school. After roll call, children from years one and two joined each other and were then split into three ability-based groups for literacy instruction. The year one and year two teachers were joined by a third teacher, whose role was to provide literacy support. Each of these teachers took responsibility for working with one of the ability groups. Emma was assigned to the most able group, who received instruction from the year two teacher. On the day these observations took place, attendance was very low, due to a funeral, and there were only ten or so children from the year two class present. In Emma's group that day, there were three non-Indigenous and two Indigenous children.

This small group of children sat on the floor, in front of the teacher, who was sitting on her chair. She handed each of them a laminated "THRASS" chart. This chart listed the most common graphemes to represent each of the 44 phonemes of English. A larger, identical chart was displayed on the classroom wall. The teacher put a tape into a portable tape recorder and pressed the play button. The voice on the tape pronounced all the phonemes, and, as they were pronounced, the children pointed to the corresponding graphemes on their chart.

Once the teacher had played the tape, and the children had pointed at all the graphemes, the charts were collected up again, and several copies of a reading book were handed out. The book was from the *Fitzroy Readers* series. There were only four copies of the book, so two of the children had to share. The children read the book together, taking turns to read a page each. Each child was then given a packet of words from the book, which they had to paste onto a blank sheet of paper to form sentences. One of the sentences in the book was *Dot has a pot of hot milk*. They did not receive any actual reading instruction.

These snapshots of Emma have been included in this chapter to highlight how some children might be privileged over others with regard to the way schools, classrooms and learning experiences are structured. As a child with parents who work in professional positions, Emma came to school in her pre-primary year with significant knowledge about literacy and literacy practices, and this was highly congruent with the knowledge that is required to be successful at school literacy. Additionally, she was well-schooled in the discourse of school and the types of interactions and learning events that were presented to her, and clearly communicated confidently with both her peers and with adults.

When she was playing in the role play area in her preschool year, Emma attempted to enlist her teacher's help to write a shopping list for their play. It would be difficult to speculate whether she did not attempt to write the shopping list herself because she knew she was not able to write conventionally, or because there were no paper or writing implements readily available.

During a shared reading lesson in Year One, Emma is able to follow the teacher's line of questioning as the class looks at a big book of the story of Hansel and Gretel. Emma knows what is worth noticing and talking about, and she understands the kinds of answers the teacher is looking for. Emma knows the story; she has a version of it home. It has probably been read to her several times; she may even have attempted to read it herself. Already, in her relatively short life, Emma is highly familiar with the themes, the structure and the language of European fairy tales.

The interaction, however, is constantly punctuated by directives from the teacher to various children about their behaviour, and Emma, who knows what kinds of behaviours are required, attempts to assist by telling Ashleigh she is supposed to put her hand up and wait to be called to answer.

In Year Two, Emma has been assigned to the most advanced reading group and it appears that the group is still learning the single phoneme-grapheme correspondences, even though Emma could identify 52 out of 54 upper and lower case letters by name and sound by the middle of Year One. This group were assigned to read a simple decodable reading book and to reconstruct sentences from the same book. From the assessments carried out at this time, the indications are that these tasks were well below Emma's capacity in literacy and even though they were to be completed independently, they would have presented no challenge for Emma.

Literacy assessment: Pre-primary

When the assessments took place in her pre-primary year, Emma was able to identify a total of 48 upper and lower case letters by name. Initially, she confused the upper case letter Q for O, but quickly self-corrected this mistake. She confused the lower case letters p/q, j/l, a/g, l/I, and d/b.

On Clay's (1993a) Concepts about Print test, Emma achieved a score of 17. She was unable to correctly answer the questions that related to word sequence (item 12), letter order (item 13), and re-ordering letters within a word (item 14), and she was unable to give the function of the comma (item 17) or the quotation marks (item 18). She did not successfully make the upper case/lower case correspondence required in item 19, nor could she locate a capital letter (item 20).

Emma was able to correctly recognise two words on the list of high frequency words, *I* and *on*. In the test of phonological awareness adapted from Bowey (1995), she seemed to have difficulty recognising rhyme but was able to easily produce rhyming words. She was able to blend at the syllable level, but had some difficulty segmenting words at this level. Emma was shown the book, *Shopping at the Supermarket* (Foundations, level 1). She quickly picked up the pattern of the text, and "read" the book using a book-reading tone of voice (Sulzby, 1985). A sample of Emma's writing taken at this time shows that, as well as being able to write her own name, Emma also had a small repertoire of relevant words (*Mum, Dad, dog, love*) in her vocabulary for writing.

Figure 7.16: Emma's writing sample, term 4, 1998

Year One

When Emma was assessed in Year One, she identified 52 upper and lower case letters by name, confusing both the upper case and lower case Y for U. She correctly scored 20 items on Clay's (1993a) Concepts about Print test. She incorrectly answered items related to line sequence (item 10), word sequence (item 12), letter order (item 13) and re-ordering letters within a word (item 14). The test of phonological awareness adapted from Bowey (1995) showed that Emma was able to recognise and produce rhyme, blend and segment words at the onset-rime level, and blend words at the phoneme level. Emma accurately identified 42 of the 45 words presented to her on the list of high frequency words. Emma read the book *Fast Food* (Foundations, level 7) with 95 per cent accuracy. A copy of the running record is shown below in figure 7.17 and the text is shown alongside in figure 7.18.

RUNNING RECORD SHEET

Name: Emma   Date: August 1999 D of B 05.03.93. Age: 6 yrs 5 mths

School: Emu Plains PHS.   Recorder: H.

Text Titles	Errors Running Words	Error Ratio	Accuracy	Self-Correction Ratio
Easy			___ %	1: ___
Instructional Fast Food RR7.	6/112	1: 18	94 %	1: 6
Hard			___ %	1: ___

Directional Movement _____

Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections
Information used or neglected [Meaning (M) Structure or Syntax (S) Visual (V)]

Easy _____

Instructional Usually integrates all three cues; possible tendency to over-rely on

Hard ___ Little evidence of self-monitoring, low S/c rate; visual cues?
                                              no re-reading.

Cross-checking on information (Note that this behaviour changes over time)

Page	Title	Count E	Count SC	Information used E MSV	Information used SC MSV
2	T / Come no|BC / on| ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	1	1	MS(V)	(M)(S)V
	T / ✓ ✓ Something ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	1			
4	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓				

Page	Title	E	SC	Information used E MSV	SC MSV
4	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ fishbun / fishburger	1		(MSV)	
6	✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ ✓				
8	✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ ✓				
10	✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ / ✓ Went / Want ✓ ✓	1		MSV	
12	✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓				
14	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓				
16	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ hungry / hamburger	1		(MSV	
	✓ fishbun / fishburger	1		(MSV)	
	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓				
	Reading was quite fluent, with appropriate Phrasing and intonation	6	1	MSV x2 / SV x1 / V x1 / M x1	MS x 1

Figure 7.17: Emma's running record, *Fast Food* (RR Level 7)

"Come on"
Said Uncle Joe
"We are going to get
something to eat.
Come on Jake.
Come on Sam.
Come on Pete and Maria."

Jake is eating a hamburger.
Sam is eating a hot dog.
Pete is eating a fishburger.

Uncle Joe said,
"Here is a hamburger, Maria."
"No" said Maria.

Uncle Joe said,
"Here is a fishburger, Maria."
"No" said Maria.

Uncle Joe said,
"Here is a hotdog, Maria."
"No" said Maria.
"Ice cream!
I want ice cream!"

Jake is eating
a hamburger.
Sam is eating
a hot dog.
Pete is eating
a fishburger.

Maria is not eating.

Uncle Joe is eating
a hamburger,
a fishburger,
and a hot dog!

Figure 7.18: Text, *Fast Food*

Analysis of the errors in Emma's running record indicates that she makes errors based on both meaning and the visual appearance of words; she has substituted the made-up word *fishbun* for *fishburger* (which makes sense), and further on she has substituted *went* for *want*, which does not make sense. Later on she substituted the word *hungry* for *hamburger*, a substitution which suggests she was attending to meaning, but not to the syntax of what she was reading. She made only one self-correction in six errors, which suggests that she was not monitoring her reading.

Figure 7.19: Emma's writing sample, term 3, 1999

Emma's writing sample, shown here in figure 7.19, shows that she had written a simple recount with some sense of audience and purpose. She had provided a brief orientation and had written in past tense, using simple and compound sentences with appropriate conjunctions. Temporal connectives were not used. There was no concluding comment. Emma's spelling demonstrated that at this time she spelt most words phonetically, but that she was beginning to be aware of some common vowel digraphs such as ai, even though it was not used correctly in this instance.

Year Two

When Emma was assessed in Year Two, she correctly identified 53/54 upper and lower case letters in Clay's (1993a) Letter Identification test. She incorrectly identified the upper case letter E as I. Emma went through the list of letters very quickly, and it is likely that this was the cause of this incorrect identification. Emma correctly answered all items on the Concepts about Print test (Clay, 1993a). Emma correctly identified all 45 words on the Year One list of high frequency sight words, and a further 110/113 words on the Year Two list. The test of phonological awareness adapted from Bowey (1995) indicated that she was able to accurately blend and segment words at the phoneme level, so the Yopp-Singer test of phoneme segmentation (Yopp, 1995) was administered. Of the 22 words on the list, Emma segmented 18 at the phoneme level, and the remaining four words at onset-rime level.

In the dictation (hearing sounds in words) test (Clay, 1993a), Emma was asked to write the following sentence, which was dictated to her:

I have a big dog at home. Today I am going to take him to school.

One point was allocated for every sound which was recorded, regardless of whether the word was spelt correctly. Emma wrote the sentence correctly and scored 37 out of a possible 37.
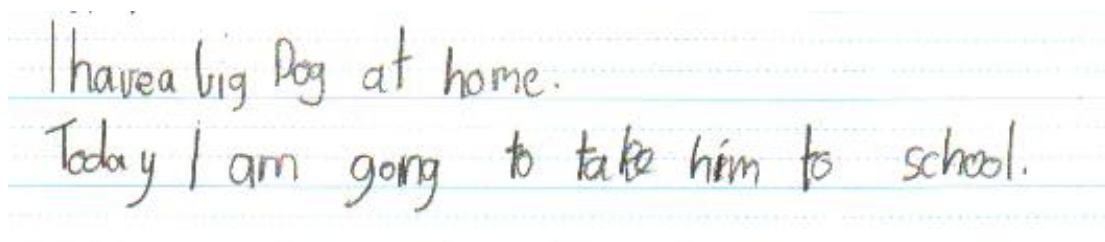
Figure 7.20: Dictation (hearing sounds in words) test, August, 1999

Emma read "*The Terrible Wild Grey Hairy Thing*" (Chapman, 1986), levelled at the equivalent of Reading Recovery level 24, with 93 per cent accuracy, making this her instructional level. Emma's reading of this book was mostly fluent, with appropriate intonation, expression and phrasing, slowing down slightly when she came across words that she was not familiar with. The words she had most difficulty decoding were words that may not have been in her everyday vocabulary; examples of miscues included substituting *possies* for *posies*; *lollied* for *lolled*; *posed* for *poised* and *shouted* for *shouldered*. She did not attempt to re-read or self-correct and she did not attempt to sound out unknown words or break them into syllables to assist with decoding. She asked for assistance with two words: *eiderdown* and *undignified*. When asked, she was able to give a rudimentary definition for the word "*undignified*", but she did not know what an *eiderdown* was. Discussing the story after reading, Emma demonstrated a good understanding of the events. The story is about a home-made sausage that unintentionally gets "lost" behind a piece of furniture and grows mouldy and rotten. When the home-owners find it, it has changed in appearance so much they mistake it for some kind of animal. Although she missed some of the details, Emma was able to infer that the characters in the story were scared of the sausage because it had changed in appearance, and even asked why the other sausages, which had been hung in the kitchen to dry, did not become mouldy as well.

Two samples of Emma's writing which were collected at this time are displayed below. One of these pieces of writing (figure 7.21) was taken from Emma's writing book. The second writing sample (figure 7.22) is a self-initiated letter which was written to me at the time of my final visit to the school. This has been included as an example because of the paucity of school-generated writing samples that were available at the time.
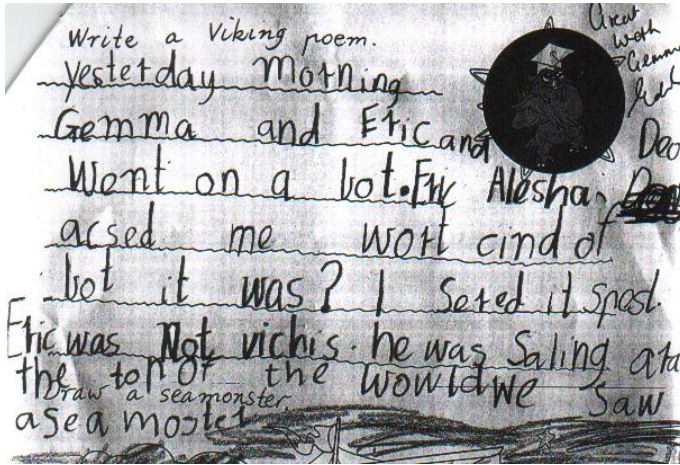
Figure 7.21: Emma's writing sample, term 2, 2000

Figure 7.22: Writing sample, term 2, 2000

Although they are different genres from the writing sample that was collected nine months earlier, there appears to be little evident progress demonstrated in Emma's writing samples. The instructions given for the writing sample shown in figure 7.21 was to "Write a Viking poem", and to "Draw a sea monster". Poetry, as a genre of writing, pays particular attention to using language to create images and to language features such as expressive vocabulary, use of devices such as metaphor, simile, assonance or onomatopoeia, and rhyme or rhythm (Annandale at el, 2005; Wing Jan, 2009). It is not clear if any instruction or modelling was provided regarding the writing of poetry, or to what extent oral work, if any, preceded the writing. The writing sample concerned roughly follows a narrative genre, but there are some teaching needs evident in terms of cohesion. There appears to be a shift in voice from third person to first person, and the details appear to be presented without any sense of order. In this case, Emma does not appear to have any sense of audience or purpose. Conversely, the second writing sample, a personal letter, seems to be constructed with a clear sense of audience and purpose. Emma's spelling still places her very firmly in the phonetic (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997), or within word pattern (Bear et al, 2012) stage of spelling development.

Figure 7.23 below shows Emma's growth in literacy knowledge as she progressed from her pre-primary year to the first half of Year Two. The graph shows that Emma entered school with significant knowledge related to school literacy, in particular, knowledge about letters, concepts about print and writing. As these are "constrained skills" Paris (2005), that is, they are skills in which growth is finite, the trajectory of learning here is not steep, as Emma had almost fully learned these concepts when she entered the school system. The areas where growth in literacy has occurred at school are a steady

increase in book level, and a marked and rapidly increasing growth in instantly recognised sight words (an "unconstrained" skill). The steep trajectory in Emma's sight word knowledge suggests that she gets plenty of practice with reading, which supports the development of a large bank of sight words, and that this is likely to be an activity that is undertaken outside school as well as at school.
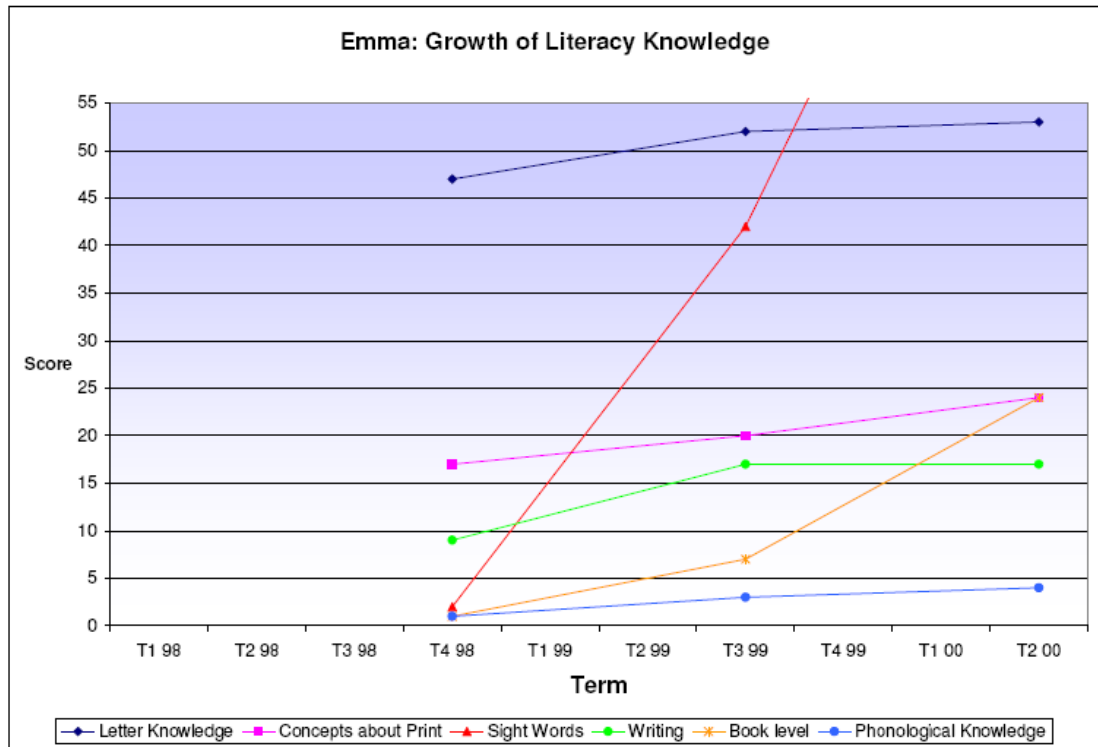
Figure 7.23: Growth of literacy knowledge: Emma

Summary

This chapter has introduced four children who were participants in the study, with the aim of presenting a snapshot of their lives as students in regional or rural-remote schools as they begin their academic journey and learn to read and write. For one student, Emma, the journey seems to have begun in a relatively easy way and the future holds promise. For Jonah, things could go either way. He seems to have made some progress in getting to grips with the skills required for effective reading and writing, but already, his behaviour while at school has the potential to interrupt his progress and there is doubt about his motivation. Troy and Edward both seem to have made a somewhat shaky start. There is little doubt that school will be difficult for them as they try to navigate the requirements of school with the resources that they bring with them.

The next chapter reports on the results of the assessment tasks that were carried out with all the participating students over the course of the study, and reports more generally on the literacy teaching practices that were observed across the participating schools.

CHAPTER 8:
FRAGMENTS OF ORDER IN A CHAOTIC LANDSCAPE –
TEACHING AND LEARNING LITERACY

What the Children Knew About Literacy in Pre-primary, Year One and Year Two

This chapter reports the quantitative data that were collected as part of the study. First, the results of the assessment tasks that were carried out each year with the children at six of the schools, are reported, with some interpretation and discussion of each set of data. This is followed by presentation of the data that were collected to monitor children's attendance at school over the period of the study.

There are a number of limitations in reporting of the data from the assessment tasks. The first of these is that the data were impacted by student mobility. Not all students were at school each time the assessments were carried out. In a very small number of cases, I was able to catch up with a particular child when I visited another school to carry out the assessments, but this lucky happenstance only occurred on a small number of occasions, so for some children, there are gaps in their data. Additionally, some children moved away during the three years and were lost to the study altogether, and others arrived and joined the study. Therefore, apart from a small core group of children, the groups of children who were assessed in year one were not exactly the same groups who had been assessed the previous year in their pre-primary year, and the same applies to those children who were assessed in year two.

The second limitation is that these data cannot give a full picture of children's literacy development, as in the main, the assessment data collected from the children focussed on the more constrained, cognitive skills that mostly contribute to unlocking the code of written texts. It is also acknowledged that there is much more involved in reading and writing proficiency than these particular skill sets. Nevertheless, for beginning readers, these skills do play a crucial part in unlocking written texts (Adams, 1990; Konza, 2006; Rose, 2006), and without them, children will continue to be at a serious disadvantage in terms of their progress in school literacy. It would have added to the data set to be able to collect data relating to children's broader language development skills: for instance, measures of oral comprehension, oral language proficiency and vocabulary; however, these skills are not easy to quantify, assessment is time consuming and the constraints of travelling long distances to collect assessment data made this range of data collection an

impossibility. Because of this, it has been necessary to use observations to monitor individual children's progress in these areas and attempt to represent their development through the qualitative data.

A third limitation is that there are not large enough numbers of children, from class to class or from school to school, for any real comparisons to be made. These data do not represent every child in each class. In almost all classes, there were some parents, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who did not want their child's data reported as part of the study. As a consequence, the data reported here represents roughly 75% of the children in any class at one time. Nevertheless, it was decided that it would be worthwhile to report the data that was available, as they do present a general picture of children's literacy development over time.

As has already been signalled, many of the skills that were assessed as pre-requisite to early literacy development are, in fact, constrained skills (Paris, 2005). The constrained skills underpin the development of the five main skill sets identified in the reviews (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rowe, 2005; Rose, 2006); for instance, phonics knowledge cannot be achieved unless children can identify and name individual letters. Because there is a ceiling to their development, constrained skills were easier to quantify than the unconstrained skills for the purposes of reporting here. The unconstrained skills, such as writing knowledge, story book reading behaviours and reading levels had to be quantified by imposing a somewhat artificial process of assigning values to degrees of mastery. However, as the purpose of quantifying these data was to look at children's progress from one year to the next, this approach provided a useful way to develop snapshots of children's progress that could be compared from one group of children to another and from one year to the next.

What follows next is an overview of the skills and conceptual knowledge that were tested over time. The data collected for each of the skills are then reported in a series of figures which allow for comparison of one cohort against another and also show progress across the year levels. The colours behind the graphs show the progress of each cohort as they moved from one year to another. It should be remembered, however, that because there was significant movement of children from one school to another, while each cohort retained a core group of children who remained in that cohort for the full duration of the study, there were others who came and went, so the membership of each cohort may not have been the same from one year to the next.

Environmental print

Children's knowledge about environmental print was tested using an environmental print activity that was developed and used by Hill et al. (1998). This activity involved looking at photographs of print in the environment – at a fast food restaurant and a petrol station – and labels on items that might be familiar to children, such as packaging for popular children's cereal, chips, a well-known cool drink and Lego. Although there were no fast food restaurants in any of the rural towns, it was thought that most children would at some point have visited a fast food restaurant in their nearest large town in addition to having seen advertising on the television. Tasks included labelling items, pointing to writing, identifying letters and numbers, and identifying letters which were the same. Answers to each task were coded; 0 for an incorrect, or no answer, 1 for a partially correct answer and 2 for a fully correct answer. One of the items (capacity of a cool drink bottle) scored 3 if the children could identify the numbers correctly and also state the function of the numbers (e.g., "*it tells you how much is in it*".)

Overall, children's responses showed that from their pre-primary year, children were able to identify the items that were represented on the signs and labels, although it was noted that the Aboriginal children generally referred to items by generic terms, rather than the actual brand, brand, for example, "burgers" or "chicken", rather than "McDonald's", or "cool drink", rather than "Coca-Cola". Non-Aboriginal children were more likely to use brand names. The charts show that in general, younger children, particularly Aboriginal children tend to be less "tuned in" to environmental print than older children, but by the time they reach year two, most children seem to be able to use environmental print quite well.

	Pre-primary	**Year One**	**Year Two**
1998			
1999			
2000			
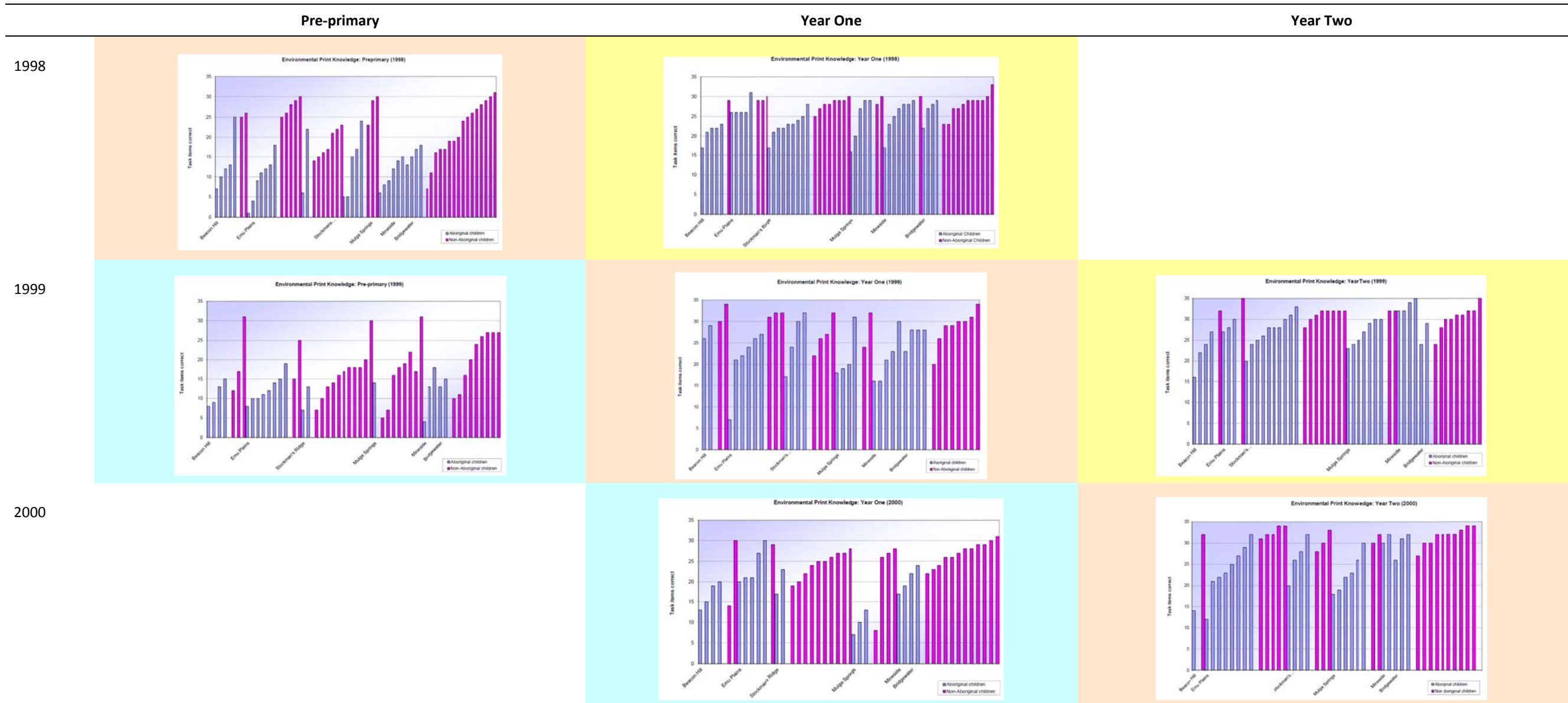
Figure 8.1: Environmental print knowledge

Concepts about print

The children's understandings about concepts about print were assessed using Clay's (1993) Concepts about Print Test. A different stimulus book was used at each point of data collection; *Sand* in 1998, *Stones* in 1999 and *Follow Me Moon* in 2000. Each of these stimulus texts tests the same concepts.

The data suggest that when children first enter school in the Pre-primary year, there is a large variation in their understandings of print concepts; a proportion of children enter school understanding around 10-15 concepts, whereas many others understand only one or two. At this point, the children who have the most developed understandings tend to be non-Aboriginal children, although this variation is not so evident in the 1999 cohort of pre-primary children. By year one, a similar variation is demonstrated; no children have reached the ceiling of 24 concepts, but many know between 15 and 20, and very few children demonstrate that they understand fewer than 5 concepts. Again, the non-Aboriginal children are likely to demonstrate an understanding of more concepts than Aboriginal children. The biggest variation between the figures for years one and two appears to be demonstrated by Aboriginal children. While there is not a great deal of variation for the non-Aboriginal children between the number of concepts understood in years one and two, Aboriginal children appear to make further gains at this time. In year two, however, there are still a very few children who demonstrate they understand 11 or fewer concepts, and there remains a question about whether they continue to develop further understandings, or whether this knowledge fails to develop further. At this point it seems that most non-Aboriginal children have developed most understandings, and the children who seem to be under-performing in this area appear to be predominantly Aboriginal. In particular, there were some Aboriginal students in year two who seemed to be confused by the terms "word" and "letter" (when asked to point to a letter, they pointed to a word, or vice versa), and this misunderstanding has the potential to cause difficulties as they continue through school.

In many classrooms, concepts about print are not explicitly and directly taught. Rather, they are demonstrated during shared and interactive reading sessions, both at school and at home, and children who have many interactions around print tend to "pick up" an understanding of these concepts through these interactions (Lane & Wright, 2007; Zucker, Ward & Justice, 2009). In contrast, it seems that children who have had few interactions with print tend not to pick up these understandings as easily. There is perhaps

a case, then, for more direct and explicit teaching of print concepts in order to more effectively support these children.

	Pre-primary	Year One	Year Two
1998			
1999			
2000			
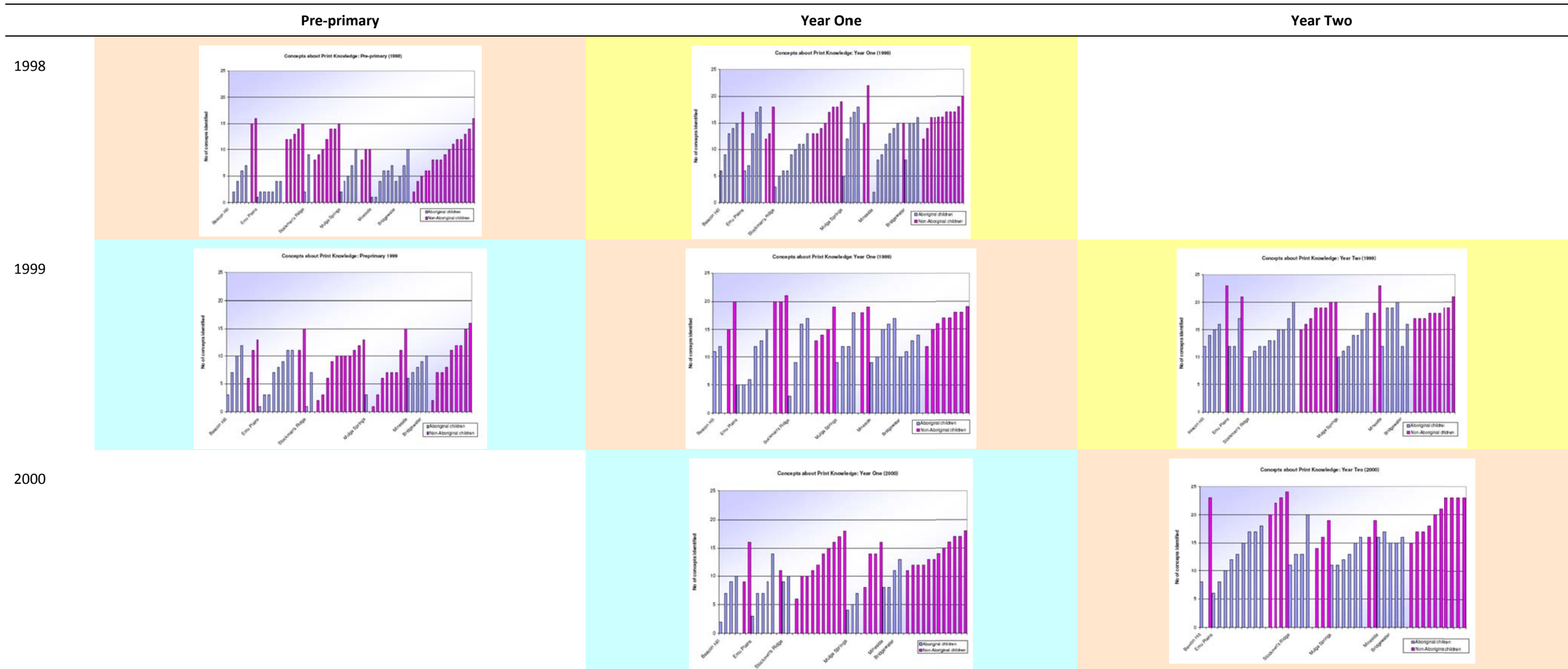
Figure 8.2: Concepts about print

Letter recognition and naming

Letter recognition and naming was assessed using the letter identification test from Clay's (1993 Observation Survey. Children were shown the sheet of upper and lower case letters (including two different forms of letters a/ɑ and g/ɡ) as they are presented in the survey. The children were asked if they knew the name or the sound of the letters, and a note was made about their preferred mode of identification. It was interesting to note that many children identified lower case letters by sound, and upper case letters by name. If children did not know the name or sound of a letter, they were asked if they knew any words beginning with the letter. Any confusions were noted.

Figure 8.3 reports the data from the administration of the Letter Identification Test (Clay, 1993). The scale of 1-54 represents the number of upper case and lower case letters (including both forms of a/ɑ and g/ɡ) that children were able to identify using either the letter name or the sound of the letter.

The figures show that in the pre-primary years there were a number of children who had substantial letter knowledge, although no children knew all 54 letters. There were also a number of children (around one third) who knew fewer than five letters. As a group, the 1998 cohort were able to identify more letters than the cohort the following year. By year one, a number of children had mastered or almost mastered this knowledge (50-54 letters), while many others are well on their way to mastery (knew roughly 25-30 letters). By year two, most children had achieved mastery, but there were still some children who had not yet mastered this knowledge, and a very few of them still only were able to identify between 10 and 20 letters. It can be seen that all cohorts made progress in this skill from one year to the next.

As a general trend, non-Aboriginal children seemed to master this knowledge before Aboriginal children, although this trend is more evident in the pre-primary years than it is in year one. There is a definite difference between the letter knowledge of the year one children in 1999 and that of the year one children in the following two years. In 1999, all non-Aboriginal children and many Aboriginal children knew more than 40 letters, but in the following two years, a number of both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal children knew fewer than 30 letters. The snapshots tend to suggest that while mastery of letter knowledge might generally occur for non-Aboriginal children in year one, for many Aboriginal children, this is more likely to occur in year two. Of particular concern are the one or two Aboriginal children who by year two, still only knew very few letters (less than 20).

	Pre-primary	**Year One**	**Year Two**
1998			
1999			
2000			
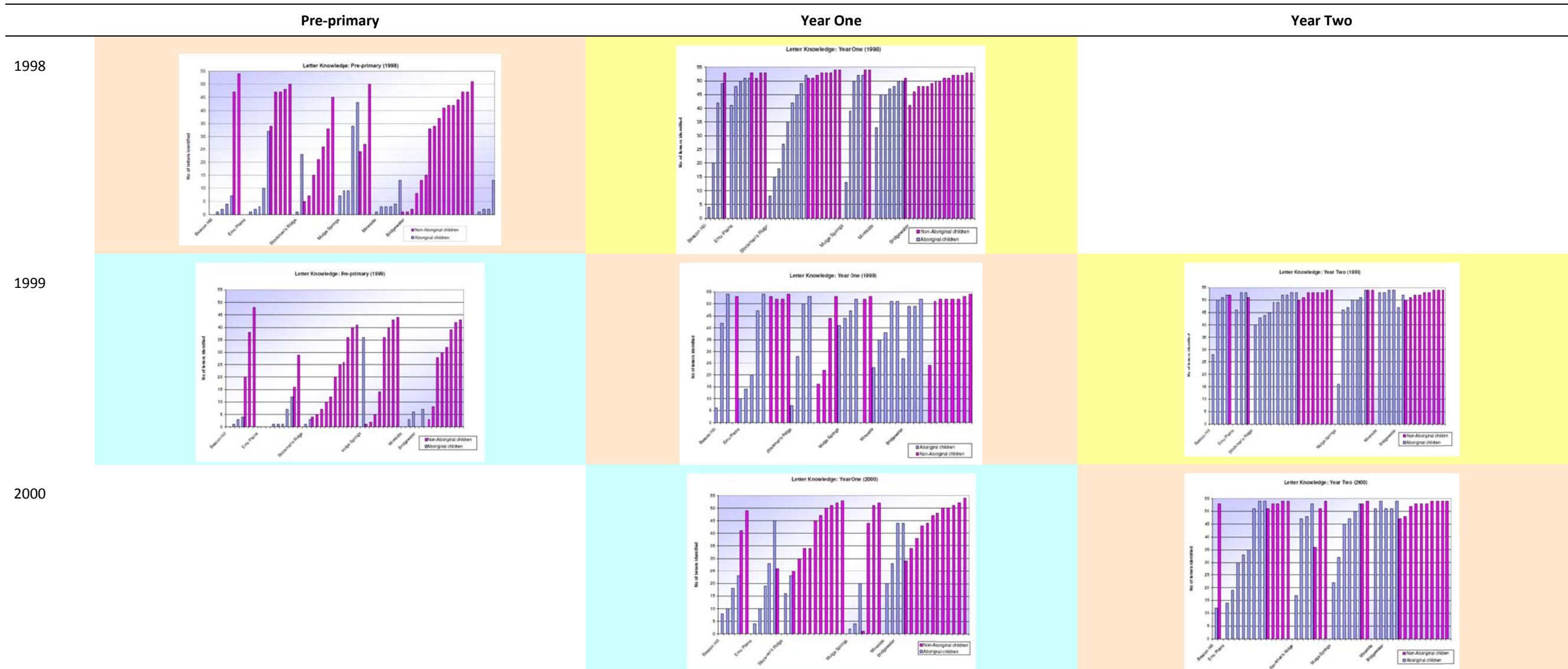
Figure 8.3: Letter recognition and naming

Phonological and phonemic awareness

Children's phonological awareness was assessed using a series of phonological awareness tasks constructed especially for the purpose, and adapted from Bowey (1995). The assessment consisted of a series of tasks at different levels of phonological awareness. To code children's responses, each task was assigned a level, according to the degree of difficulty. Children were considered to have achieved mastery of a particular level if they were able to correctly answer all, or almost all items at a particular level (i.e., one error only).

Table 8.1: Phonological awareness tasks adapted from Bowey (1995)

Level 1	Rhyme	Rhyme detection (oddity task)
Level 2	Rhyme	Rhyme production
Level 3	Syllable	Blending
Level 4	Syllable	Segmenting
Level 5	Onset-rime	Blending
Level 6	Onset-rime	Segmenting
Level 7	Phoneme	Blending
Level 8	Phoneme	Segmenting

The results of this task demonstrate that while a number of non-Aboriginal children enter their pre-primary year with some level of phonological awareness, and some of these children's phonological awareness is well-developed, this is much less likely to be the case for Aboriginal children. However, when they were assessed again in year one, many children from both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups had quite well-developed phonological awareness. Although many of the non-Aboriginal children had, by this time, developed some degree of phoneme awareness, there were still a number of Aboriginal children who were yet to demonstrate any phonological awareness at all.

By Year Two, most children, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, had achieved a level of phoneme awareness; however there were still some Aboriginal children who did not demonstrate phonological awareness at any level. What is also interesting to note is that most children, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, seemed to hit a plateau at level 7, which indicates that they were able to blend phonemes, but that they could not as easily segment them. This phenomenon may be a reflection of an approach to teaching which demonstrated to children how to blend phonemes for reading but did not have the same focus on demonstrating or teaching phoneme segmentation for writing and spelling.

Similar to the development of concepts about print, children's early development of phonological awareness skills may be a reflection of their experiences prior to school entry. Those children who come from language-rich environments with many exposures to nursery rhymes, chants and word-play are more likely to be tuned-in to the idea of words as made up of multiple sounds and be able to manipulate them accordingly. For Aboriginal children in particular, there can be a number of issues which impact on their development of phonological awareness. First, many children who speak Aboriginal English as a first dialect are not exposed to all the sounds of standard English (Eades, 1993; Education Department of Western Australia, 1999) and therefore will find it harder to make the distinction (for example, the difference between the sounds /b/ and /v/ may be harder to discern for Indigenous children, as these sounds tend to be the same in Aboriginal English). Second, although many young children suffer from bouts of Otitis Media (Glue Ear), it is well documented that the severity, frequency and length of occurrence is more prolonged in the Aboriginal population, and that this can seriously impact children's hearing and language development (Collins, 1999; Zubrick, 2006).

	Pre-primary	Year One	Year Two
1998			
1999			
2000			
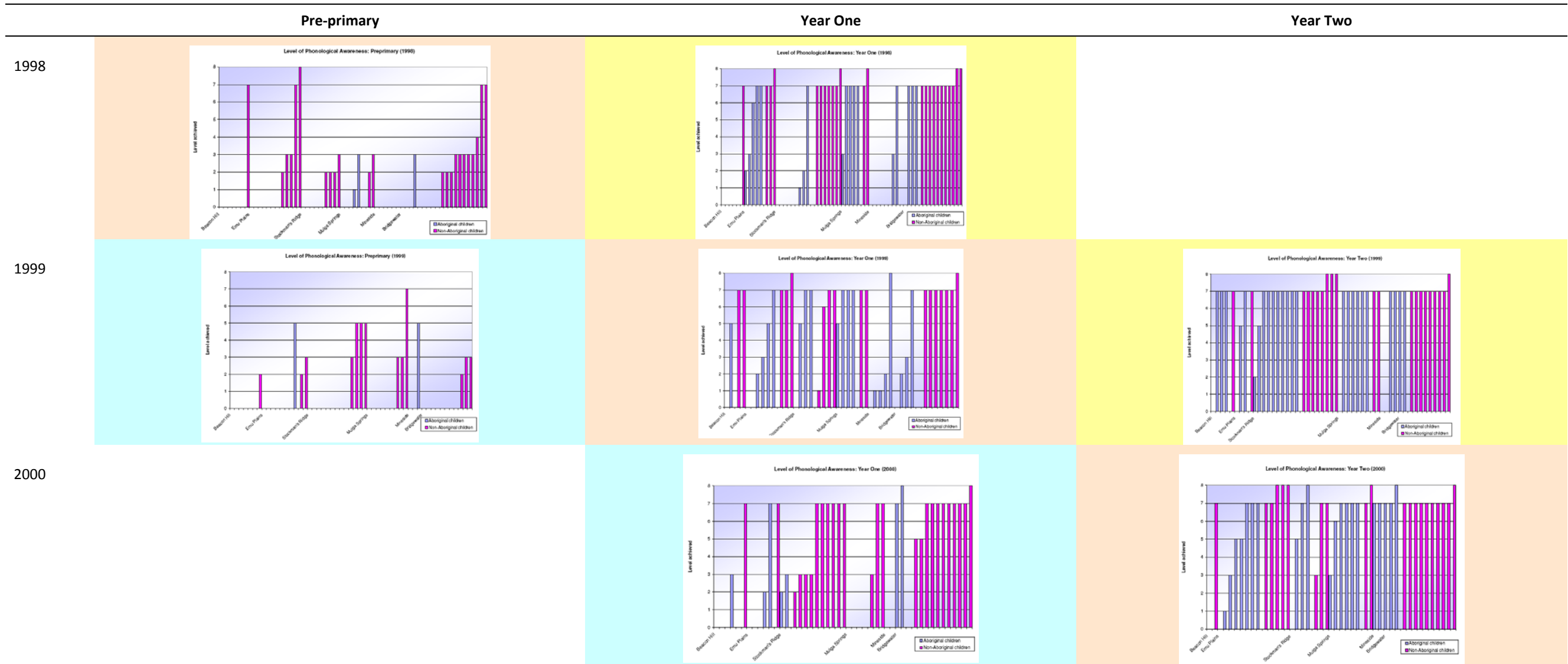
Figure 8.4: Phonological awareness

High Frequency "sight" word knowledge

There are a number of lists of high-frequency words which can be used to assess children's recognition of sight words, amongst them Clay's (1993) Ready to Read word list, the Dolch word list (McKenna & Stahl, 2009) or the Fry Instant word list (McKenna & Stahl, 2009). For this study, the lists were drawn from the UK National Literacy Strategy Framework (Department for Education and Employment, 1998) materials, because these materials provided some guidance relating to what words children might be expected to know at various year levels.

At the pre-primary level, children were presented with the first ten words from the list; at year one, children were given the first 45 words from the list, and at year two, the complete list of 150 words was presented. The first ten words from the list all feature in one of the three alternative forms of Clay's (1993) Ready to Read word list. Because the aim of the task was to assess children's instant recognition of high frequency words, in order to score, children needed to be able to correctly pronounce the word immediately, rather than attempt to sound the word out.

It must be noted that the scales on the charts which follow differ for pre-primary (1-10), year one (1-45) and year two (1-150) levels. This reflects the number of words that were presented to the different year levels, and the charts have been presented this way because if they were all on the same scale, it would be more difficult to read the results for the pre-primary and year one children. The charts therefore, should be viewed as showing the proportion of words that children were able to correctly identify.

The results of this assessment task show that generally, in the pre-primary year, children are likely to know very few, if any, high frequency words on sight. There were, however, in the 1999 pre-primary cohort three non-Aboriginal children who knew between eight and ten high frequency words, and these were all children who came from literacy-rich households. While a few of the non-Aboriginal children from the first cohort were able to recognise between one and three words from the list, a larger number of children were not able to recognise any, and this group included all the Aboriginal children. In the pre-primary cohort for the following year, a similar number of children were able to recognise only one word, but this time that group included two Aboriginal children.

When they were assessed in year one in 1998 and 1999, a number of children, including some Aboriginal children, were able to instantly recognise between 35 to 45 high frequency words. Their scores contrast sharply with a number of children from both

groups who were able to identify fewer than 25 words. In comparison with the cohorts of 1998 and 1999, the year one children in 2000 appeared to be significantly behind, with only a few children able to instantly recognise between 25 and 35 words, a number able to recognise fewer than five words, and some children not able to recognise any words at all.

By year two, there appears to be a marked division between those children who could instantly recognise 100 high frequency words or more, and those who were able to recognise fewer than 50. This marked division is possibly a reflection of the fact that once children are able to read with some degree of fluency, they tend to read more often and more widely, resulting in an exponential increase in the number and variety of words they can recognise instantly. On the other hand, those children with a more limited word bank are likely to read much less and therefore their word bank is unlikely to increase at the same rate.

	Pre-primary	Year One	Year Two
1998			
1999			
2000			
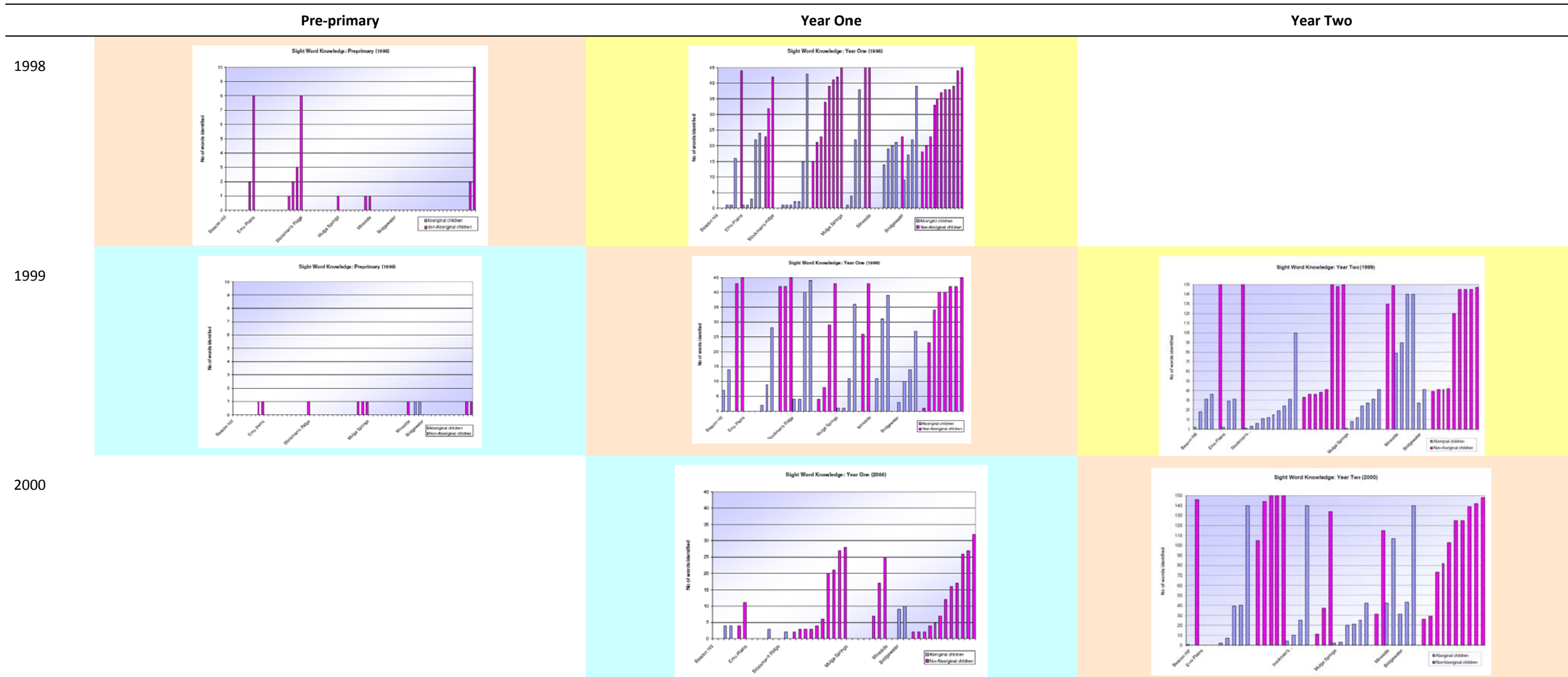
Figure 8.5: Sight word vocabulary

Book Reading Behaviours

Children's book reading behaviours were measured using Sulzby's (1985) hierarchy of emergent reading behaviours, to which she assigned levels. Scores were allocated according to the level of behaviours that were observed in each child. A full description of the behaviours at each level is outlined in the literature review in chapter 2, but a brief description is provided below:

Table 8.2: Sulzby's (1985) levels of book reading behaviours

Level	Behaviours observed
Level 1	labels pictures; pictures are viewed as individual episodes
Level 2	more extended commentary on pictures which uses both nouns and verbs
Level 3	commentary begins to take on structures of written language and child may use a "book reading" tone of voice, but still no attention to print
Level 4	mostly uses pictures but attempts to use some known letters as clues to written words
Level 5	reliance from pictures shifts to print; decodes most words

The data show that in the pre-primary year, most children were either simply labelling the pictures or providing a more extended commentary but with no attention to print. A number of children from both cohorts told a story around the pictures, using some written language structures (e.g., *one day…*) and a book-reading tone of voice. In the 1998 group there were two children who attempted to use their knowledge of letters to decode the print. Predictably, these were children who also had good letter knowledge by this time. By year one, a number of both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal children from the 1998 and the 1999 groups were beginning to read by decoding the print. The data for year one children in 2000, however, shows that far fewer children in this group were reading by decoding, and all of these children were non-Aboriginal. As this phenomenon occurs across schools, it cannot be explained by a particular teacher or teaching approach; it may be simply be a reflection of the relatively small number of children at each school from whom data could be collected. By year two, most children were beginning to read by decoding the print, although it is concerning that there were still a minority of children, mostly Aboriginal children but also including some non-Aboriginal children who were not yet able to do this. In each group, this represents around ten children out of a total group of fifty or so children, which equates to 20 per cent. Although these children were not all the children in each class, they were a representative group of the total. It should have been concerning to both the teachers and the school leaders that around 20 per cent of children in year two were not able to effectively decode print to read.

	Pre-primary	Year One	Year Two
1998			
1999			
2000			

Figure 8.6: Book reading behaviours

Book Levels

Once children were attempting to read conventionally, their progress was measured by recording the level of text difficulty that was at their "instructional" level; that is, a text that they could read with 90 – 94 per cent accuracy. This was ascertained by taking a running record of their oral reading (Clay, 1993). The "Foundations" (Macmillan Education) series of readers was used to measure levels one to 20; children who were reading beyond that level read their home reader or a book from the class library, to which a level was assigned using the Reading Recovery Western Australia booklist (Edith Cowan University, 2003). Children who were not yet reading conventionally were assigned a level of 0.

Because no children in either group of pre-primary classes were reading conventionally, data are not reported for these groups. Data for the year one classes show a small number of children across all schools reading between levels 15 – 20 in 1998 and several more in the same group reading between levels five and ten. In 1999, four year one children were reading at a level between ten and 20, mostly at Bridgewater. The data for year one children in 2000 look rather dismal, with no child reading beyond level five.

The data for year two children in 1999 seems to generally replicate the pattern displayed in the chart for that group in 1998, with children having made some progress in difficulty levels (it should be remembered that although a core of children were members of both groups, but the groups did not consist of exactly the same children). There appears to have been more progress from year one to year two in the 1999 year group, which shows six children reading at or beyond level 20 in year two when the highest level reached in year one was around level 18.

These data show that while there were a number of children who appear to be making steady progress in reading development, there are many who were making much less progress. The year one group in 2000 should have raised particular concerns in all schools. What is interesting about the reading level data for this group is that for all the other measures, while there is some indication that this cohort are performing at slightly lower levels than the others across all the schools, the variation is not as obvious as it is when the levels of reading difficulty are reported.

	Pre-primary	Year One	Year Two
1998			
1999			
2000			

Figure 8.7: Book levels

Writing knowledge

Clay (1993a) attends to three aspects of writing: directional principles, language level, which deals with the linguistic organisation of children's writing; and message quality. Writing samples were either gathered from an observed lesson or they were drawn from children's writing books as samples of writing completed as close as possible to the date of the rest of the data collection. Children's writing samples were analysed and scored according to Clay's (1993, p. 57) levels, outlined below:

Language level:

1. Alphabetical (letters only).
2. Word (any recognisable word).
3. Word group (any two-word phrase).
4. Sentence (any simple sentence).
5. Punctuated story (of two or more sentences).
6. Paragraphed story (two themes).

Message quality:

1. Has a concept of signs (uses letters, invents letters, uses punctuation).
2. Has a concept that a message is conveyed
3. A message is copied.
4. Repetitive use of sentence patterns such as "Here is a…".
5. Attempts to record own ideas.
6. Successful composition.

Directional principles:

1. No evidence of directional knowledge.
2. Part of the directional pattern is known: start top left, *or* move left to right, *or* return down left.
3. Reversal of the directional pattern (right to left and return down right).
4. Correct directional pattern.
5. Correct directional pattern and spaces between words.
6. Extensive text without any difficulties of arrangement and spacing of text.

For each writing sample, the scores from the three aspects were added to produce a total writing score out of a possible 18. Clay (1993a) suggests that for each aspect, a score between 1 and four should be considered not yet satisfactory, where a score of five or six is

probably satisfactory. Therefore, when all aspects are added together, a score of one to 12 may be considered less than satisfactory.

The data for pre-primary children in 1998 show that eight children achieved a total writing score of 12 or more, with other children scoring at all levels in between. There is a general trend for non-Aboriginal children to score slightly higher than Aboriginal children. Pre-primary children's data for the following year show the highest score to be nine, with most children scoring four or less, and some children, including non-Aboriginal children not scoring at all.

Data for year one children show quite a number of children in 1998 achieving a score of 12 or more, although none scores the highest possible score. The year one cohort in 1999 show ten children scoring 12 or higher; a picture not much different from that of the same group in their pre-primary year. Again, it needs to be remembered that although each group contained a core group of children who were the same children, others moved out of the group and new children moved in. However, the large proportion of children in this group who scored less than 12 suggests that a high number of the children were at risk in terms of their writing development. Data for the year one group in 2000 presents a similar picture, with only ten children achieving a score of twelve of more and the majority of them scoring less, and with some children not scoring anything at all.

The data for year two paints a happier picture, with 25 children (approximately half) of the year two cohort in 1999 and 34 (approximately two thirds) children in 2000 achieving a score of 12 or higher, and some children in 2000 achieving the maximum possible of 18. There are still a number of children in both groups, however, mostly Aboriginal children, who could still be considered to be at risk in terms of their writing development.

	Pre-primary	Year One	Year Two
1998			
1999			
2000			

Figure 8.8: Writing knowledge

Conclusions

Two major conclusions can be drawn from the examination of these data. First, all children do appear to make some progress, even though the rate of progress differs significantly. Second, there are some children whose progress is unacceptably slow. There is a general trend for Aboriginal children to less well than their non-Aboriginal peers, and certainly, they appear to enter the formal schooling system with less literacy-related knowledge than non-Aboriginal children. However, a number of Aboriginal children seem slow to start but appear to catch up in year two. In each case, just under half of the children who scored level 12 in writing at year two and who were reading conventionally by year two were Aboriginal children, although in the case of reading, they were generally not reading at the same level of difficulty as their non-Aboriginal peers. There are both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children who are not achieving at these levels, and in this case it was more likely that the Aboriginal children in this group were achieving at very low levels.

The implications here for teaching appear to highlight the importance of early, intentional teaching of literacy concepts and knowledge, including how to decode print, and to signal year two as a time when these concepts need to be consolidated for children who might enter the formal school system with limited school-literacy knowledge. Hill and Crévola (2006) suggest that interventions beyond the second year of schooling are less likely to be successful. This would require not only constant monitoring of student progress to target individual children's learning needs, but also some kind of screening at the end of year one or the beginning of year two to make sure all children are on track.

The final section of this chapter reports on attendance data that were collected from the children over the two and a half years.

Attendance

At the time the data for this study were collected, the pre-school year was not compulsory in Western Australia. All the schools had pre-school programs which ran for four full days per week, providing one non-contact day a week for teachers to plan and prepare. All the schools also ran Kindergarten (4 year old) programs, usually for two full days per week. Due to the small numbers involved, the Kindergarten programs were usually incorporated into the pre-school programs, with all children accommodated in the same room, under the care of the same teacher and participating in similar activities.

Attendance has been identified, both in this study and in the literature, as a major issue for many students. Hancock et al (2013) calculate that students who miss an average of more than one full day each week would lose around two years of school over a ten-year period. Zubrick et al. (2006) suggest that a student who misses more than one half day per week is at educational risk. Hancock's (2013) more recent study indicates that *any* non-attendance will have an impact on student achievement. This study identified a significant proportion of children who fell into the category described by Zubrick et al. (2006), which included non-Indigenous children as well as Indigenous children. However, attendance was generally much worse for Indigenous children. Here, there follows a brief discussion of some of the historical and cultural factors that may impact on students' participation and attendance in formal schooling. At the end of this chapter, following presentation of the data, there is an extended discussion of issues around student attendance, and the issue is further discussed recursively throughout this study.

Irregular attendance by some children was a major issue of concern for all teachers at all schools. Officially, absenteeism was categorised in two ways by the Education Department: authorised (or explained) absence and unauthorised (or unexplained) absence. Authorised absence occurred when a reason was provided for a child's absence, in the form of a note from the child's parent or carer. This means that if a child is absent from school for two weeks because they have gone on holiday with their parents, and the school has received a note, their absence is explained. However, the absence of a child who is ill for a couple of days or because they are attending a family funeral, but who does not supply a note, is classified as unexplained. Clearly, there are some cultural implications around this, as there would be some Aboriginal parents who would not supply a note because they did not have sufficient literacy skills, because they were embarrassed about their literacy skills, or they may not have writing materials readily available. Similarly, absences that occur when children have been suspended from school are classified as authorised, and as Hancock et al (2013) point out, "absence due to suspension is likely to have a different impact on outcomes than absence due to illness or family circumstances" (p.255).

In the main, absenteeism for Aboriginal students appeared to fall into two categories: absenteeism due to transience, when the family were away from the community for a time, and non-attendance even though the family were still in the town. There were a number of reasons why the family might be away from town; these included family funerals and other family obligations, cultural business and football carnivals. In

some cases, children could be away for extended lengths of time; sometimes more than six months. And in some cases, children were enrolled in schools elsewhere when they were away, but they could be difficult to track because they were either enrolled in a different system (Catholic or Independent Community schools) or because they were known by a different name when they were in a different place.

Attendance data were collected over three years for all children who participated in the study. These data are represented in Table 8.3 below, by term, year and by cultural group.

Table 8.3: Mean and range of half-days absent, by term and by cultural group

		Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
1998	Term 1	7 (0 – 58)	4 (0 – 20)
	Term 2	14 (0 – 88)	5 (0 – 42)
	Term 3	15 (0 – 60)	6 (0 – 24)
	Term 4	21 (0 –74)	5 (0 – 24)
1999	Term 1	18 (2 – 46)	6 (0 – 31)
	Term 2	19 (0 – 60)	8 (0 – 51)
	Term 3	17 (0 – 48)	8 (0 – 63)
	Term 4	16 (0 – 80)	5 (0 – 28)
2000	Term 1	14 (0 –38)	5 (0 – 20)
	Term 2	11 (2 – 24)	7 (0 – 20)

Data in table 8.3 have been presented to show the range of half days absent, as well as the mean, for each term and by cultural group. Displaying the range for both groups shows that there are some Aboriginal children with perfect or near perfect attendance. It also shows that there are some non-Aboriginal children with disturbingly low rates of attendance. The mean, however, shows that there is a definite disparity between attendance rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. There appear to be no particular seasonal patterns evident.

Before the advent of computerised systems for recording attendance, it could be extremely difficult to keep track of attendance data. Most schools in the study had a policy of removing children from the roll after they had been consistently absent for a specified period of time, usually two or three weeks. However, these children would almost invariably return to the school: "they might go for six months and then they come back; they might go for a year and then they come back" (Year 2/3 teacher). Although there seemed to be a core group of children at each school who attended reasonably regularly

throughout the year, there would be others who were there one term and gone the next, to be replaced by a different group of children who had previously been elsewhere.

This transience presented a number of difficulties. As has already been indicated, it was often difficult to establish if and where children had attended school when they had been away from the town or community, and this posed a difficulty in obtaining students' academic records. By the time this information was tracked down by the school, or by the time teachers had worked out what stage of development the children were at in order to plan for effective teaching, a considerable amount of time had been lost, or the child might have moved on once more. Sometimes, in the absence of "official" information, assumptions were made which were not always correct. For example, a child who came to one of the schools from a remote community was placed in the year one class, when she had been in the year two class in her home community, and which was the correct class for her chronological age.

This mobility of students combined with the transience of teachers sometimes meant that by the time children returned to their own community, the teacher who was teaching their class when they left had moved on and had been replaced by another teacher. If the child was away for long enough, they might return to find almost the whole staff had been replaced. The new teacher would not know the child and their family and therefore regarded them as "new children", even though the children might have attended the school previously for extended periods. In the final year of this study, the year two teacher at Emu Plains commented to me one morning that she was enrolling a "new" child. The child in question had in fact attended the school on a relatively regular basis for the two years prior to this, and was a participant in this study. She had not attended the school, however, in the twelve or so weeks that the teacher had been at the school. There appeared to be no student records for her at the school, and I wondered what had happened to the assessment data from this study that had been handed back to the teachers in 1998 and 1999.

Although it clearly has a significant impact on students' educational progress, Zubrick et al (2006) assert that the gap in educational attainment cannot solely be attributed to attendance. They compared the outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children with perfect attendance and found that even for these children there was a notable difference in achievement.

Figure 8.9 below provides an easy comparison of attendance patterns for the four children who were the case study participants. Because Jonah only participated in the study for two years, his attendance is shown over eight terms rather than ten. Emma, the only non-Indigenous child, has near perfect attendance apart from one term over the course of two and a half years. Troy's attendance demonstrates that there were substantial periods of time when he was not enrolled at the school and during those times his whereabouts were unknown. Edward's attendance data shows that even though he was enrolled at the school across the whole of the two and a half years, during that time he had a substantial number of absences. Troy and Edward seemed to spend a lot of their time in the classroom just trying to work out what was going on, and Troy in particular was working hard at becoming an invisible student. A lot of the instruction he received seemed to be beyond his level. Jonah's attendance, although not as good as that of Emma, was generally much better than that of the other two boys, and in year two his literacy knowledge was much better than theirs. He had good letter knowledge and a small bank of sight words, and he could read and write simple texts, although he generally was not very motivated to do so. Although Jonah's did not tend to have extended periods away from school, he did spend a lot of his time either in the buddy classroom, or sitting outside the Principal's office, where he received no instruction.
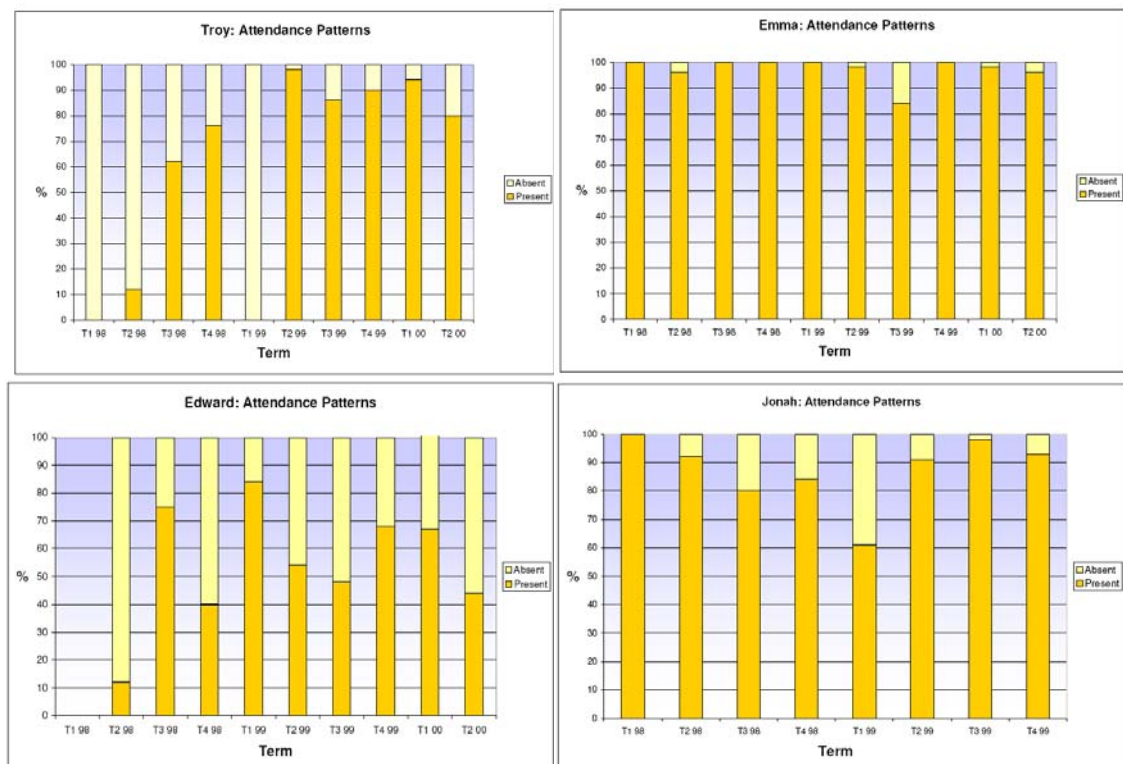
Figure 8.9: Comparison of the attendance of four case study children

It is interesting to observe that in this study, the child who knew the most about reading and writing at the end of year one was an Indigenous child whose parents were educators. Conversely, the child who knew the least by this time was a non-Indigenous child who was living in somewhat dysfunctional family circumstances and who had significant periods of absence from school. Non-attendance is not limited to Indigenous children, although it is more widely observed in that group. Attendance, or perhaps more accurately, non-attendance continues to present a significant issue in relation to progress at school and is one that necessarily demands further attention. This issue will be taken up and discussed further in the following chapter, which attempts to categorise and discuss the range of factors that may be contributing to children's lower literacy outcomes in these locations.

CHAPTER 9:
NEGOTIATING ALIEN TERRITORY

Introduction

Having looked in some detail at events from the perspective of each group of participants, it becomes clear that, in order to be successful, each of these various groups of participants in the study was required to negotiate territory that was in many ways alien to them. In this chapter, we examine these "negotiations" in more detail, in an attempt to identify the practices and dispositions that either supported or hindered this navigation. The point of this chapter is to attempt to distil the complexities of life in these schools for all participants and to demonstrate the degree of attention that was taken up in navigating these complexities. The argument is that while children's, teachers' and school leaders' attention is taken up to this degree, there is often insufficient "cognitive space" left to adequately facilitate children's learning and teachers' professional growth.

The discussion is framed with three assertions; first, that the teacher is central to teaching and learning; second, that attention to effective literacy instruction should be a whole-school issue and third, that the teaching of literacy involves a balanced, or multi-dimensional approach which attends to both the language processes required for effective communication with a range of different audiences, through a variety of texts and in a range of contexts, as well as the skills needed to manipulate the alphabetic code. These assertions are explored prior to the discussion of participants' negotiation of this alien territory; first that of the children, then the teachers and finally that of school leaders.

The Teacher at the Centre of Teaching and Learning

Gambrell, Malloy and Mazzoni (2007) claim that the research clearly points to the teacher as the crucial factor in the classroom: "...study after study points to teacher expertise as the critical variable in effective reading instruction." (p. 15). Pressley, Wharton-McDonald and Hampston (2006, p.241) agree, suggesting that teacher knowledge and experience is a significant factor which contributes to effective teaching: "years of experience resulting in a very detailed understanding about when particular tactics work and when others should be tried" and that only experts have "access to such information, which develops only through years of experience…"

Wharton-McDonald et al. (1997, p.518) conclude that an expert teacher "plans for instruction, but much of what happens in her classroom is in response to student needs".

They suggest that expert teachers implement a balance of instructional practices; that is, they provide direct and explicit instruction together with opportunities to apply this learning in the context of real and purposeful literate activities. Further, they are able to incorporate opportunities for literacy learning into almost everything they do, across all learning areas; with the result that literacy instruction in their classrooms is particularly dense and purposeful. The expert literacy teachers in their study provided plenty of scaffolding when it was necessary and were masterful in knowing when and how to withdraw that support, or when extra support was needed for particular students in the form of mini-lessons or re-teaching of key concepts. They encouraged self-regulation and independence in their students and demonstrated highly refined classroom management skills in relation to a range of teaching elements from student behaviour to classroom resources.

Hattie (2003; 2013) conducted a meta-analysis of over half a million studies to determine the effects of various influences on student achievement and concluded that while the students themselves accounted for 50 per cent of achievement variance, the teacher was the variable with next largest effect size, at about 30 per cent. Student effects include affective factors such as prior achievement, self-concept, creativity, personality and dispositions and physiological factors such as health, gender and lifestyle. Home factors, such as socio-economic status, family structure, and parental involvement in learning account for only between five and ten per cent, and Hattie (2003) suggests these factors are more related to levels of expectation and encouragement. Student factors are those over which the school or teacher has little control. Conversely, teacher factors are entirely within the control of the school and the teacher, and teacher factors which were seen to have the most effect included quality of teaching, teacher-student relationships, high expectations and clarity of instruction.

Rowe (2004, p.1) agrees that the focus on improved student outcomes should attend to teacher quality, commenting that:

> …traditional and prevailing dogmas surrounding the factors affecting students' experiences and outcomes of schooling throughout their primary and secondary years, especially socio-cultural and socio-economic factors, are now understood to be products of methodological and statistical artefact, and amount to little more than "religious" adherence to the moribund ideologies of *biological* and *social determinism*…a good deal of this 'discourse' is not supported by findings from evidence-based research.

The view that teachers have the capacity to make the most difference is one that is further supported by (Darling-Hammond, 2000), who says:

> The effects of quality teaching on educational outcomes are greater than those that arise from students' backgrounds…A reliance on curriculum standards and statewide assessment strategies without paying due attention to teacher quality appears to be insufficient to gain the improvements in student outcomes sought…The quality of teacher education and teaching appear to be more strongly related to student achievement than class sizes, overall spending levels or teacher salaries.

The issue of the impact of teacher education is one which appears to be contested. While Hattie (2013) claims that teacher training programs have a negligible effect size, he does qualify this by suggesting that teacher education that involves some form of microteaching or clinical practice, where pre-service teachers are involved in supervised practice, followed by analysis, discussion, feedback and coaching, indicated high effects. Professional development of in-service teachers also indicated high effects.

In their study of effective teachers of early literacy, Louden et al. (2005) made the point that much of the reported research on teacher efficacy had not taken into account the age of the students; that is, they had not focussed specifically on teachers of young children. They narrowed their review of the research to identify characteristics of effective teachers of early literacy, and classified these characteristics into six categories: participation, knowledge, orchestration, support, differentiation and respect.

In the domain of "differentiation", Louden et al. (2005) identified "challenge" as one of the most significant areas of practice. They described challenge as "recognising possibilities within literacy tasks for extending and promoting higher order thinking…not only interpreting and explaining text but also constructing and problematising knowledge through the deconstruction of text in order to solve problems, gain understanding and discover new meanings" (p. 147). Louden et al. (2005) identified challenge as being the least observed practice, but where it was identified, it was used by the most effective teachers. Features of challenge included teachers' use of higher level questioning, an expectation that children would be able to respond to the challenges and the ability to provide sufficient scaffolds for lower achieving children to successfully meet the challenges. This required teachers to be aware of the diversity of knowledge and understanding that was held by the children in their classrooms.

It could be argued that the distinguishing features demonstrated by these highly effective teachers are characteristic of teachers who, through their experience, have

achieved a degree of automaticity in aspects of their teaching such as the management of behaviour and resources, and as well as a good understanding of their children's individual learning needs, have a bank of knowledge about learning and learners on which they can draw when the need arises.

There can be no doubt that teacher knowledge and experience contributes significantly to student progress. The irony is, then, that the schools in this study were staffed with so few experienced teachers, with the majority in the first five years of teaching service and a significant number of teachers taking up their first teaching post. This situation indicates an imperative to support early career teachers to develop these attributes in the shortest possible time so that their students can reap the benefits.

Effective Early Literacy Instruction is a Whole-School Issue

While Hattie claims that schools (and principals, as part of the school) have less effect than the teacher, there is research to suggest that in terms of literacy learning, school leaders do have a role to play, and this role appears to be critical in developing a shared vision and a whole school approach to expectations about literacy learning. Certainly, school leaders play a part in setting the culture of the school, and consequently support for new teachers' learning.

Pressley, Wharton-McDonald and Hampston (2006) have paid particular attention to schools which were exceptionally effective despite other factors which would normally work against them (eg, low socio-economic status, diverse student population) and suggest that there are some consistent attributes that characterise schools which achieve high standards against the odds:

1. They have strong administrative leadership
2. There are high expectations for all children.
3. They are safe and orderly environments without being rigid.
4. The top priority is student acquisition of basic school skills, with willingness to divert resources from other activities to support development of basic school skills in students.
5. Student progress is carefully monitored.

These five factors identified by Pressley, Wharton-McDonald and Hampston (2006) are congruent with the "five factor model" (Edmonds, cited by Rowe, 2004, p. 4). Although Rowe (2004) provides some critique of what he refers to as the "optimistic account" of school effectiveness research, suggesting it is not especially scientific, he does concede that

"administrative and social organisational features of schools are important factors influencing both teachers and students" (p. 6) in that they influence how teachers go about their work and consequently how students learn.

The Rose Review (2006) identifies the importance of leadership in ensuring continuity and consistency in approaches to reading instruction across the whole school, as well as having someone to take responsibility for ongoing monitoring and the interpretation and management of assessment data. The school leader in this role may not necessarily be the principal, but rather, someone with sufficiently developed understanding of literacy processes and teaching approaches to be able to support the staff responsible for delivery and to facilitate training where necessary.

Reading by Six (Ofsted, 2010) identified the overall quality of school leadership as a contributing factor in schools which were successful in improving student literacy outcomes.   In particular, head teachers and literacy leaders were instrumental in establishing a shared vision, goals and expectations for children's success, supporting the development of teachers' professional learning and the provision of appropriate resources.

Although Hattie (2003) suggests that school factors, which includes principals and school leaders, accounts for only five to ten per cent effect on learning, he suggests that there are at least two types of leadership and further, that instructional leadership, characterised by a clear focus on learning, high expectations and challenging goals have higher effects than any other kind of leadership style.

Balanced Instruction: A multi-dimensional View of Reading as a Framework for Literacy Instruction

While the newspapers and politicians campaign for a focus on the teaching of phonics in early literacy instruction, the major reviews of literacy education (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rowe, 2005), also recommend explicit and systematic phonics instruction, but have additionally emphasised the necessity of embedding this instruction in a broad, varied and rich program of literacy and have advocated for a balance of instruction. When one thinks of *balance*, one thinks of two opposing forces; in this case, a code-based against a more meaning-based approach, so that *balance* occurs somewhere in the middle. In moving from the "searchlights" model (Rose, 2006) to Gough and Tunmer's (1986) model of reading, there is acknowledgement that reading involves two discrete sets of processes; those of word recognition and those involved in language comprehension. These processes can occur separately, but effective reading will only occur as the *product*

of both sets of processes, that is, when both sets of skills are sufficiently well developed. Therefore, instructional attention must be given to both sets of processes. In a (1990) discussion of this view of reading, Hoover and Gough suggest that language comprehension processes, even though they can be complex and involve higher-level thinking processes, are not restricted to reading, but can be effectively carried out by people who cannot read.

Even though they may arrive at school without knowledge of the alphabetic code, some children enter school with good age-appropriate and academically supportive language comprehension processes already in place. They have well-developed and sophisticated vocabularies which include academic (tier 2) (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2008; 2013; Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle & Watts Taffe, 2013) words, knowledge about books and how they work, they have been socialised into the patterns of academic and literate behaviours and have a broad range of life-experiences which match well to the content of the printed materials they encounter. All that is necessary for them to learn in order to read is the other set of skills – the word recognition skills. Other children arrive at school having had a different set of experiences, which serve them very well in their own socio-cultural context but which have not prepared them as well in terms of academic or school language comprehension. They may speak a non-standard variety of English that is not used in books; their vocabularies may not include more academic (tier 2) words; they may have had few experiences with books or print and therefore a more limited understanding of how print works; and their life-experiences so far may not be well matched to the subject matter they will find in books.

Word recognition processes involve skills that Paris (2005) would describe as constrained; once a student can recognise all the possible letter combinations and permutations that make up English orthography, they should be able to pronounce any previously unencountered word when they see it in print, even though they may not understand it. On the other hand, language comprehension processes can continue to develop in scope and sophistication throughout life and are therefore unconstrained. This being the case, there needs to be a focus on developing word recognition skills early and rapidly, so that attention can be turned more fully to the continued development of less constrained and unconstrained skills.

Instructional approaches such as the National Accelerated Literacy Program, and depending on how they are presented, First Steps and the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy provide good support for children to develop the language comprehension processes they need to support reading development, but without a focus on decoding, this is providing

instruction in only one dimension of reading. The use of Gough and Tunmer's (1986) more multi-dimensional view of reading as a framework for thinking about children's literacy knowledge and for providing instruction may be effective in moving thinking about instruction away from the binary "either/or" thinking that seems to still prevail in some corners of Australia and to ensure that children receive high-quality instruction in *all* the skills they need to become effective users of literacy.

The adoption of Gough and Tunmer's (1986) model of reading in the United Kingdom as a framework for beginning reading instruction has been criticised (Purcell-Gates, 2009) as reducing the complex process of reading to only two skills; those of decoding and comprehension. Purcell Gates (2009) claims that this view fails to take into account the socio-cultural factors that are at play in learning to read and that failure to acknowledge this has the potential to further marginalise groups of students who are already at risk of underachievement in the school system.

Stuart, Stainthorp and Snowling (2008; 2009) have countered these arguments, explaining that this view of reading is presented not as two individual skills, but as two *dimensions, or sets* of skills, each complex in their own right. They further point out that this view is offered as a way of thinking about reading for *beginning* readers, who need to master the alphabetic code in order to access the meaning of a written text. Stuart, Stainthorp and Snowling acknowledge the role played by the socio-cultural context in learning to read, and claim that limiting the model to cognitive and linguistic processes does not disregard this role; that the processes outlined in the model are essential sets of skills to be developed whatever the socio-cultural context in which learning takes place. The socio-cultural aspects of reading sit in the language comprehension processes dimension, and as Stuart, Stainthorp and Snowling (2008; 2009) point out, these processes begin long before students enter school and will continue to develop through life as more experiences are encountered. The word recognition processes, on the other hand, are finite or constrained skills (Paris, 2005) which can ideally be taught within a relatively short time and allow teachers to turn their attention more completely to language comprehension processes.

More recently, Griffo, Madda, Pearson and Raphael (2014, p. 38) also suggest that current thought and policy has moved away from a polarised construction of balanced literacy instruction to one that "must be recognized as a complex and multidimensional construct to be applied across many facets of literacy teaching and learning" and that there

are few experts in the field who would question the necessity of teaching foundational skills, including phonics and phonemic awareness.

Gough and Tunmer's (1986) model of reading is offered here not as a way of simplifying the reading process and related skills, but as a framework for helping l ess experienced teachers ensure they attend to the muli-dimensional demands of the reading process. There is a need to ensure that teachers provide instruction that will support both word recognition processes (decoding and development of sight word knowledge) and language comprehension processes, which include acquisition of the vocabulary, grammatical structures, world knowledge and strategic knowledge to access, appreciate and critique a range of text types, and which will continue to develop in scope and complexity as students progress through school.

With these ideas in mind, we now turn to look at the ways in which the children, the teachers and the school leaders navigated the spaces of teaching and learning in the schools.

Children Negotiating the Territory

Communicative competence and the discourse of schooling

When children come to school for the first time, they bring with them the communicative competence (Hymes, cited by Cazden, 1996; 2011) that they have developed in their homes and communities. Cazden (2011) explains Hymes's view of communicative competence as not only knowing the grammar and syntax of a language, but also the pragmatic use, or how a particular language or dialect might be used differently in non-dominant groups.

Unless there is a specific disability, children are able to use language and operate in ways that effectively communicate and manage their needs and requirements in and around their homes and communities. This communicative competence includes such aspects as language (including pronunciation and selection of vocabulary), ways of communicating and behaving around others (pragmatics; verbal, non-verbal), and the scope of the ways in which language is used for communicating (discourses). For some children, the ways in which language and communication is used in their homes and communities may not differ significantly from the ways in which it is used at school, but for many others, the differences can be many and varied.

Teachers who did not have a good understanding of the ways in which children might communicate and behave at home tended to make judgements about children's communicative competence, making a comparison to middle class, mainstream ways of operating. They tended to see these differences as deficit – behaviours or skills to be "fixed up", rather than considering how they could capitalise on the skills and social behaviours the children did bring with them as a starting point from which to provide them with an additional set of behaviours to operate successfully in mainstream culture. Gutiérrez & Rogoff (2003) use the term "repertoires of practice" to refer to historically and culturally situated, but dynamic communication practices and see this approach as building students' repertoires to enable success in a range of socio-cultural situations.

There is considerable evidence in the literature and from my own interactions with the caregivers of the children who participated in this study, that Aboriginal parents want their children to become proficient in School English literacy and its associated discourses, and that they see this acquisition as a major function and responsibility of the school. An Aboriginal parent said to me, "I don't want you to teach my child how to be Aboriginal. I can do that. But I want you to teach [him] how to be successful in the white man's world."

The ways in which children are socialised can impact both on their ways of using language for communication and on the ways they operate socially in the learning situation.

Aboriginal English

Without exception, the Aboriginal children in the study spoke some variety of Aboriginal English as their first and only dialect. A number of the teachers did not appear to be fully aware of Aboriginal English, its connection to the identity of the children, its features, or the need to make a distinction between Aboriginal English and Standard English. They spoke about children having "bad grammar", and the need to correct children's "errors" in their speech and their writing. This was demonstrated in the case study of Edward, but it was not limited to his teacher alone. Several teachers made reference to children's "grammatically incorrect" speech and writing, and one year two teacher even made this the focus of her writing instruction.

Mineside was the only school where teachers acknowledged and made explicit the differences between Aboriginal English and Standard English, using the labels, "home talk" and "school talk". At the other schools, the differences were simply not acknowledged, or

as in the cases described above, considered by teachers to be manifestations of children's "poor English" or "poor language skills".

Because the children have not heard all the 44 sounds of Standard English from birth, they find it hard to discriminate between some sounds, for instance, /b//v/, so unless these sounds are specifically taught through phonological awareness training and phonics instruction this made it difficult for them to use the alphabet to match the sounds, if they actually knew the letters. Indeed, the whole idea of using letters to represent sounds seemed to be difficult for some of the children to grasp, most likely because although most teachers included some kind of phonics instruction in their literacy teaching, none of them explicitly taught the children to blend sounds for reading, although some teachers did demonstrate segmenting sounds for spelling. In addition, many children suffered intermittently or consistently from Conductive Hearing Loss, or Otitis Media, which again impacted on their ability to accurately discriminate individual phonemes. Many of the children seemed to prefer to take a visual approach to learning words, and the results of the Environmental Print Test suggested that many of the Aboriginal children were indeed, much more inclined to focus on the visual, rather than the phonological features of words. Whilst this skill initially supported their learning of a small bank of sight words for reading and spelling, it is not an effective approach to developing a large sight word vocabulary, and it certainly does not support decoding unknown words or using invented spelling to produce words in writing. Both of these skills play a large part in developing fluency in reading and writing, as unknown words are encountered frequently in the early years, and it is this constant exposure to these words that finally moves them into a child's bank of known words.

Despite many children, especially, but not limited to Aboriginal children having poor phonological awareness, there was little, if any, explicit attention given to building this knowledge. Phonological awareness instruction was at best incidental and mainly focussed on predicting rhyming words during shared reading activities, or identifying the first phoneme in a word for phonics-related activities.

All the teachers had been taught to use the psycholinguistic, or three cue systems model (Pearson, 1976) as their schema for teaching reading. This model of reading suggests that effective readers draw on three sources of information (cues) – semantic, syntactic and graphophonic– and cross-check these sources one against the others to make meaning from what they are reading. This model of reading presents a number of

difficulties for Aboriginal children, and indeed for any children whose language and cultural experiences are not represented in the texts that they are given to read.

This model of reading is generally interpreted as teaching children to draw on their semantic understandings (knowledge about the world and how it works together with knowledge about stories and how books work) to make predictions about what they will find in the text. The children also draw on knowledge of syntactic structures (grammatical knowledge about the order of words in sentences) and their graphophonic knowledge (alphabetic code), and cross-check each source of information with the others. If this model is used to understand how Aboriginal children, and indeed non-Aboriginal children from non-mainstream cultures, work with each of the cue systems, it becomes apparent where many children may have difficulties in learning to read.

With regard to the semantic cue, many of the children in the study would be unlikely to have had enough experience with story books to give them a sound knowledge base on which to draw. Many children rarely had stories read to them at home, or were familiar with traditional tales from the Western tradition. While a number of the children may have heard stories from their own oral tradition, these stories may not follow the same patterns as stories and fables from the Western tradition, so the children would have been unable to draw on this knowledge to make accurate predictions about what they might have found in the texts they read at school. Additionally, many school texts that are developed for early readers reflect events and contexts that are more associated with white, middle-class cultures. While educational publishers in recent years have made significant improvements in this area, and many publishers do now publish a limited range of early readers and big books that more accurately reflect the lives of children from a range of cultures and geographical locations, most of the books that the schools had in their storerooms or classrooms were quite old and did not even reflect contemporary situations.

Difficulties associated with the syntactic cue were directly related to the children's use of Aboriginal English. Because the children did not have the syntactic structures of Standard English or literary English in their repertoire, they were unable to draw on this cue.

The difficulties associated with the graphophonic cue are self-evident. In many cases children, even in year two, did not recognise all the letters of the alphabet; they were not able to make grapheme-phoneme correspondences, and their phonological awareness was generally poor. These difficulties were most evident in, but certainly not limited to the

Aboriginal cohorts. The school where children made the most progress in this regard was Bridgewater, where most of the children were non-Aboriginal and a high proportion of families connected with the school were upwardly mobile. At Bridgewater, phonics (and with this, phonemic awareness) was taught in a relatively systematic way, although the approach was embedded, or analytic, rather than a synthetic approach. There was also a small group withdrawal program in place to support children who were identified as not making the expected progress, so these children did receive some intensive instruction which was directed towards their identified specific needs.

Behaviours & discourses

Another aspect of interrupted communication in the classroom was that of competing, or mismatched Discourses (Gee, 1990). Different cultural groups have different constructions of childhood and these beliefs shape their ways of child rearing and parenting. These beliefs and ways of operating lead to different sets of expectations about how children will operate and behave. The culture and Discourse of the school, therefore, can be quite different to that of children's home and community. Taken for granted conventions such as sitting quietly in one's chair or on the mat, listening attentively to the teacher without interaction with others, raising one's hand to speak or asking permission to go to the toilet may be effective ways of managing large numbers of young children, but they are located in Anglo- or Euro/Asia-centric notions of childhood which regards the child as innocent, incapable and dependent (Gittins, cited by Sims, O'Connor and Forest, 2003). Children are expected to defer to and be directed by adults. In contrast, Aboriginal society views children as independent beings. Children participate in the world alongside adults (Lawton, cited by Sims, O'Connor and Forest, 2003). Learning occurs through observation of and participation in life events. Children are expected to take on responsibilities and be independent in the context of a supportive environment where adults, or more proficient others, are on hand to provide support when required.

Similarly, public speaking (that is, communicating in a public forum) in the Indigenous context differs in critical ways from public speaking in the Anglo context (Harris, 1990; Walsh, 1997). Public speaking in the Aboriginal context takes the form of a "yarning" genre, where listeners tune in and out of the conversation as something becomes relevant or interesting to them (Malcolm et al, 1999; Walsh, 1997). Participants may make a contribution, but would not be required to seek the speaker's permission before doing so. Direct questioning – a feature of western school interaction – is not a feature of Aboriginal discourse, and when questions are used, the receiver of the question is not obliged to

respond, or may respond some time later, when they have given the matter due thought (Malcolm et al, 1999; Malcolm, Kessaris and Hunter, 2003; Walsh, 1997).

School-related conventions which are largely at odds with these ways of operating are rarely explicitly articulated, or if they are, this may only happen once or twice, at the commencement of the school year. Mostly, children were left to work out the desired behaviours as a result of being reprimanded for displaying behaviours that were appropriate at home, but which were considered unacceptable at school.

For children who were absent from school for long periods, or who moved around from one school to another, the difficulties were greater, as expectations and routines can vary from school to school and from one teacher to another. Children who had long absences from school could return to their original school to find a completely new set of teachers and/or school leaders, and consequently, new routines and expectations in terms of behaviour.

When children are diverting their attention towards working out what they have to do and how they are required to behave in order to conform to the expectations of school, this has the potential to take their attention away from their learning, as all their cognitive energies are directed to simply managing their behaviour to avoid reprimands (or working out what is required to avoid reprimands), rather than focusing on the more academic content.

The work of Hart & Risley (1995; 2003) suggests that these notions do not apply only to children's behaviours, but also to their whole approach to learning. They assert that children's early experiences school them in knowing what is worth attending to and taking notice of. Where children's early experiences align well with school practices, they are likely to have a more tacit understanding of what is worth noticing in the school setting. Where there is misalignment, it is more likely that children will need some explicit direction about what should be attended to and what is worth noticing.

Hart and Risley (1995) also identified that children from lower-income households were up to seven times more likely to experience negative interactions and controlling interactions than were children from higher socio-economic status households. This phenomenon appears to continue into the classroom, as the potentially rich talk that accompanies mat-time activities (interactive book reading, circle-time, language experiences) were continually punctuated by teacher reprimands and behaviour-controlling directions.

The more expert or experienced teachers seemed to have other ways of controlling children's behaviour and maintaining or re-directing their attention. For instance, in the pre-primary classes at Mineside and at Bridgewater, there was little evidence of the continual reprimands that were so much a feature of the classrooms in other schools. The teachers at Mineside seemed to be willing to let minor infractions go and they also seemed to have developed a personal set of boundaries around behaviours which they were able to make clear to the children. Catherine described her behaviour management as a case of "pick your battles"; she accepted a range of behaviours because she understood that to pick up on everything would both alienate the children and disrupt their learning, but there were some behaviours, such as physical fighting or disrespectful behaviour amongst the children, that she was not prepared to accept and she made these boundaries clear and also let the children know when she was displeased.

When different sets of expectations collide, there is potential for communicative trouble, and the classroom becomes the forum for that trouble. The trouble occurred when the children communicated and behaved as they had been socialised to behave, but their styles of communication and behaviour were not what the teachers had learned to expect. The teachers, who had learned through their practicum experiences that classroom control was a sign of good teaching, and whose practicum experiences had mostly occurred in classrooms with predominantly middle class children, allowed their focus on control to get in the way.

Two sets of knowledge may have been helpful here. First, if the teachers had some understanding of the way that Aboriginal children were likely to behave and communicate, they would have been more able to adapt both their expectations and their classroom practices to accommodate this. The past experiences of the pre-primary teachers from Mineside, and the school's focus on supporting Aboriginal children and their families, had provided them with the cultural competence to understand where their children were coming from and to make accommodations in this regard. They were able to pass this knowledge on to Jess, the early career teacher in the year one/two classroom. Catherine obtained this information from two sources; she had enrolled in post graduate studies which included Aboriginal studies, and as a naturally outgoing and curious person, she asked questions of paraprofessionals such as her Indigenous Education Officer and the Aboriginal Police Liaison Officer.

The second understanding that would have helped the teachers was that they needed to make very clear to the children what kinds of behaviours and communication

styles were needed for the children to be successful in the classroom, and to understand that the children would need to be supported in acquiring these practices, at the same time acknowledging and valuing the practices they brought with them from home.

Health

The links between poor health and poor educational outcomes for Indigenous children are well established (Brown, 2001; Collins, 1999; Thomson, Burns &McLoughlin, 2012). The two major health issues which are frequently identified in the literature and were evident in the communities were those of nutrition (Hulme et al., 2014; Magarey, Pettman, Wilson & Mastersson, 2013) and hearing impairment (Burrow, Galloway & Weissofner, 2009; Coates, Morris, Leach & Couzos, 2002; Partington & Galloway, 2005).

Nutrition

Teachers identified nutrition as an issue for many Indigenous children. It was not uncommon for children to arrive at school in the morning carrying 2 litre bottles of Cola or other soft drink, some of which they would have drunk on the way to school, or shared with others along the way. Teachers reported that frequently this was all that these children had for breakfast. Many children did not bring lunch to school.

Schools employed a variety of strategies to address this issue. At Beacon Hill, teachers took full advantage of Fruit and Veg Week to engage the children in a number of activities around fruit and vegetables as healthy food. Children in all classes collected and graphed data about how much fruit and vegetables they had eaten during the week. The Parents and Citizens (P&C) and Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness (ASSPA) Committees provided funds to buy ingredients for the children to participate in cooking classes with fruit and vegetables. At Emu Plains, the ASSPA Committee provided funds to supply lunch for those students who came to school without. At Stockman's Ridge, on more than one occasion, I observed that teachers would find ways to surreptitiously supply (usually from their own funds) canteen lunches for students who frequently came to school without lunch, or without money to buy lunch.

At Mineside Primary School, the support centre on the school grounds ran a breakfast and lunch program, funded through a variety of sources. The centre provided fruit for morning tea and sandwiches for lunch for the whole school. Before morning school, children were able to go to the centre and access cereal, bread and milk so that they could make their own breakfast. They were also required to clean up after themselves when they had finished. The underlying principle of this program was that the children

would gain the skills to provide for themselves. The director of the centre claimed that this had been a successful strategy. She said that since the program had first been initiated, the numbers of participating students had steadily dropped. She claimed that prior to participating in the program children did not eat suitable breakfasts because the ingredients were not available at home. Once the children were used to eating breakfast regularly through the school program, they knew what ingredients were needed and would ask their own parents to supply them so that they could make breakfast at home for themselves and their siblings before they came to school.

Otitis media/conductive hearing loss

A further health difficulty which particularly affects Indigenous children is that of otitis media, a middle ear infection which can become chronic. The occurrence of otitis media is a relatively common occurrence in childhood and is associated with colds and respiratory infections. However, because of the more crowded living conditions experienced by Aboriginal children, and their generally lower levels of health, it tends to occur earlier and with more frequency and to remain untreated for longer in the Aboriginal population than in the non-Aboriginal population, and the effects are consequently more severe and lasting (Thomson, 2003). Between 25-50 per cent Aboriginal children are affected by mild to moderate hearing loss through otitis media (Quinn; Kelly & Weeks cited by Howard, 1994). While this hearing loss can be spasmodic, especially in younger children, continued recurrences can result in permanent damage to the ear drum or auditory canal, resulting in permanent hearing loss (Collins, 1999; Howard, 1994).

Hearing loss, both permanent and temporary, presents difficulties for Aboriginal students in situations where teacher centred talk is part of the pedagogical practice. Loss of hearing also makes it even more difficult for Aboriginal children to hear and reproduce the already unfamiliar phonology which they encounter in Standard Australian English. Being able to hear and reproduce the sounds of English is a crucial prerequisite skill for using the alphabetic code; that is mapping the sounds of English to their alphabetic representations in reading and writing.

Oliver's ear

Oliver attended Stockman's Ridge Primary School, and had been identified as having what his pre-school teacher called a "mild intellectual disability". In his pre-school year, a teaching assistant was employed to work with him, but this facility was withdrawn when he began year one. Oliver attended both pre-school and school regularly, and despite this disability and after a slow start, he seemed to make relatively steady progress once he was

exposed to regular formal instruction. As he became more used to being at school, he appeared to engage readily with school-like tasks, and over time, he became a generally attentive and diligent student. One day when he was in year two, I was conducting some of the assessment tasks with him, he seemed unusually irritable and inattentive and I noticed that his right ear was oozing.

Later, in the staffroom, I was talking with his class teacher and the physical education teacher. I mentioned Oliver's ear. I asked if there was any kind of procedure at the school to ensure that children who needed to were able to get medical attention. The year two teacher replied that there was a protocol, but this was currently not available: "Normally [name of Indigenous Education Officer] takes them down to the nursing post, but she's away in Perth this week, so there's no-one to take them".

I explained to the teachers that the likely cause of Oliver's condition was Chronic Suppurative Otitis Media. Neither teacher had heard the term before. They were both shocked when I explained what it was, and the consequences of leaving the condition untreated. Oliver's teacher confessed that she had thought it was "something to do with bad hygiene", and said that she had noticed the condition to varying degrees in a number of the Indigenous children.

Although teachers at some schools such as Mineside and Gibbs Crossing seemed to be very aware of the issue of otitis media and had protocols in place for children's ears to be checked regularly, other schools appeared not to have the same level of awareness or access to immediate treatment. At some of the schools, it appeared that few teachers had heard the terms "otitis media" or "glue ear", or were aware of the condition and the possible consequences. At Stockman's Ridge and Emu Plains, the Indigenous Education Officers seemed to have a greater awareness than did the teachers. This is understandable, as they would be the people who would likely normally liaise with health professionals about such issues. However, it is crucial that teachers have an awareness and understanding of the condition and who is affected by it so that they can tailor both the content of their instruction and their methods of instruction accordingly. At the time of data collection, the WA Department of Education had just produced a teacher/student resource, Do you hear what I hear?, (Department of Education, Western Australia, 2002) for use in schools to build both teacher and student awareness, and were trialling the resource materials before rolling them and the associated professional development out to schools.

At Mineside, all the staff showed a well-developed awareness and understanding of otitis media and its associated issues. This was not surprising as they had been one of the trial schools for the new resource. The school also had frequent visits from the audiologist and weekly visits from the Aboriginal Health Nurse who was able to carry out minor procedures such as ear baths and immediately refer any children who needed more specialised attention.

All the schools received visits from audiologists at some point, but again, there were varying degrees of awareness amongst teachers of the importance of these visits, and it also seemed that visits varied in frequency amongst schools. In some of the schools, children would miss out on these visits if they were absent from school at the time. Clearly, it is easier to arrange more frequent visits when a school is located in a regional centre.

At Mulga Springs, one of the year two children had recently been identified with a hearing problem and had been supplied with a special hearing aid, which was kept in the classroom for his use. His teacher was very supportive of the use of this equipment and made sure that he wore it at all times, but she did not appear to have any particular knowledge about otitis media or its implications.

One of the recommendations made in the professional development materials (Department of Education, Western Australia, 2002) is that the severity of otitis media can be reduced by the introduction of a program called Breathe, Blow, Cough (BBC). The purpose of this program is to develop in children the habit of clearing their airways to avoid the accumulation of mucus in the ear drum, which is the cause of the condition. As a remote school, the children at Gibbs Crossing carried out this procedure daily, especially during the winter months.

Breathe, blow, cough

After daily fitness, which consisted of running races up and down the oval, the children at Gibbs Crossing re-grouped according to their classes. Catherine called her class over to a corner of the courtyard, where the children stood in a circle around one of the rubbish bins. Catherine had a large box of tissues in her hand. She handed the tissues round, and the children each took a handful, blowing their noses and throwing the tissues in the bin. When they all finished blowing, Catherine directed the children to "pop your ears". Once they had done this, she said, "Okay, now five deep breaths" and demonstrated filling her lungs, breathing in through her nose and out through her mouth. The children copied her. Catherine handed round the tissues again. "Two big coughs, and blow again"

she directed. The children complied. When they were all finished, Catherine got them to "pop" their ears once more.

Although it is now more than ten years since professional development for teachers was introduced, my continuing work with teachers who work with Aboriginal children indicates that there are still teachers, including those who opt to undertake post graduate studies, who do not take the condition into account when thinking about their literacy instruction.

Attendance and Participation in Schooling

Even the most effective teacher is not going to be able to teach children to use school English literacy if the child is not at school. This is clearly a very troublesome issue, and one which has attracted a great deal of attention over the years, at national, state, system and school levels, and it seems, with little effect. There is, however, possibly a lot that can be done at the classroom level. Teachers who build warm and effective relationships with the students in their class can do a lot to encourage their students to be at school. If a child is constantly being reprimanded when they are at school, other activities, away from school, are likely to be far more attractive.

Engagement is more than just being at school. Once children are physically present, they need to be actually in the classroom, giving their attention to what is happening and what is worth learning. This means that children need to be in the classroom, the learning activities need to be sufficiently engaging to hold children's attention, and the children need to be made fully aware of what they should be giving their attention to.

Carer attitudes and involvement

One additional consequence of children's reduced attendance seems to be a common view amongst teachers that Aboriginal people place less value on formal education. Again and again, teachers explained students' non-attendance, late attendance and failure to comply with school practices by telling me that the child and family in question did not value education. Teachers formed these views about particular parents because they did not appear to make the effort to ensure their child arrived at school on time, clean and well-fed, did not personally drop off and collect their children from school, did not attend school assemblies, did not respond to notes home from school; homework tasks (such as home reading) were not completed and school resources, such as home readers, were not returned promptly, if at all.

An alternative view from the literature, however, is that like all parents, Aboriginal parents want the best possible education for their children and have aspirations that extend in many cases beyond the levels that they have achieved for themselves (Collins, 1999; Gray & Beresford, 2001; Gray & Partington, 2012) . There may be a number of other explanations for some parents' perceived indifference to their children's schooling, including their own lower levels of literacy, a perception that they are not welcome or failure to acknowledge their culture, or cultural differences in lifestyle that do not fit in with school timetables and requirements. It is well established that many Aboriginal families suffer multiple aspects of disadvantage, and when parents are trying to manage these issues, doing home reading, attending assemblies and getting children to school on time may be difficult to achieve and therefore not be on top of their "to do" list. Buckskin (2001, p.5) clearly makes the point:

> I have not met any parent or caregiver or community that is not committed to giving their children a better life. We sometimes may be overwhelmed by the challenges facing our children, but we all want education to give our children a better life.

It is a requirement that pre-school children are delivered to and collected from the classroom by a parent or carer. In many cases, preschool children were delivered and collected by their older siblings, a cousin or other member of their extended family. When older children delivered and collected their siblings or cousins to and from pre-school, this was often interpreted by teachers as somehow negligent on the part of the child's parent. Fleer (2004) explains that the care for Aboriginal children extends beyond their parents to the extended family and that a number of family and community members may share the responsibility of the care of a particular child or children. It is common for older siblings and cousins to take responsibility for the younger children, so in collecting younger children from school, they are fulfilling their family responsibilities. Additionally, in Aboriginal families, the child's parents may not be their primary carer. There were many examples of children who were cared for by grandparents or aunts.

What constitutes parent involvement or support for their child's schooling may be interpreted differently by teachers and parents. In a study of Aboriginal parents' involvement in early childhood education, Frecker (2001) identified that teachers and parents had different sets of understandings about what parent involvement looked like. When asked to describe parent involvement in education, teachers nominated activities such as helping out in the classroom, hearing children read, or sharing their Aboriginal culture with the rest of the class, as well as activities that reinforced the school values, such

as providing proper school uniforms and providing "appropriate" foods for lunch and snacks. In comparison, parents identified activities such as attending school sports days, barbecues and social events, as well as providing praise and encouragement for their child's achievements and endeavours. Harslett, Harrison, Godfrey, Partington and Richer (1998) have identified that, as do non-Aboriginal parents, Aboriginal parents participate in their children's education to varying degrees, but they are more likely to do so in more informal ways. Sims, O'Connor and Forrest (2003) observe that when parents do not show support for their children's education in ways which are accepted in mainstream society, they may be perceived as uncaring.

What the Children Learned About Literacy

Some children, who were mostly non-Aboriginal children and the children of professionals, but within this group there were some Aboriginal children, entered school with quite a lot of knowledge about school literacy. These children generally participated fully in school activities, continued to develop literacy knowledge, and by year two were "cruising", not really being challenged by the demands of the literacy curriculum. Another group of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children entered school with limited knowledge about school literacy, and while their progress was slow, they nevertheless did make progress as they moved through school. Yet another group of children, who were almost all Aboriginal children, also entered school with limited knowledge of school literacy and over the course of two or three years made very limited progress. For these children in particular, their limited attendance made progress difficult, but perhaps for both groups of lower achieving children, their difficulties in navigating the socio-cultural aspects of school contributed to their limited achievement of the technical aspects.

Teachers Negotiating the Territory

Physical context and geographic location

Many of the teachers in the study were not only negotiating alien territory in their professional lives, but in their personal lives as well. For most teachers, who had been raised in the city, this was their first ever experience of living in a rural location, and they had arrived in the community with unclear or unrealistic expectations about what rural living entailed, especially in terms of access to amenities such as shops and entertainment. Distances from Perth and comparative remoteness made even everyday living expensive, as transport costs were reflected in the prices of food, petrol and other household goods, which were expensive compared with prices in the metropolitan area and food less fresh.

Usually there would be only one general store or petrol station in the town so teachers had only the choice of paying the price or going without.

In some communities where there was a significant turnaround of staff at the beginning of every school year, the accommodation would have been empty all through the summer break and teachers would arrive at their allocated housing to find appliances not working or parts of the buildings in need of repair or maintenance. On more than once occasion, teachers' houses were broken into during the year and consequently in need of repair or upgraded security. In these cases, it seemed to be very difficult to get anyone to carry out the repairs and maintenance promptly and teachers could wait for months for work to be carried out, usually by someone who had to come from either Perth or the nearest Regional Centre. As a consequence, teachers could spend months living with the inconveniences and usually at the same time having to frequently contact someone in an effort to get repairs carried out more quickly.

For many of the younger teachers, this was their first experience of living away from home. They had to learn to live independently; doing their own cooking, cleaning and laundry, paying bills and managing household finances for the first time. All of the teachers who were doing this for the first time commented about how much they now appreciated what their parents had done for them whilst they were living at home!

The younger teachers also missed their parents when they became sick. Anecdotally, the first year of teaching is when teachers, particularly those who do not have children of their own, fall prey to every germ and bug that goes around, as children are extremely generous when it comes to sharing germs. Young teachers, who have not built up any immunity through continued exposure to children, and who may be under stress and may not be eating and looking after their own health as well as they might, have a tendency to "go under" very quickly. In some cases, because teachers were aware of the logistical difficulties they would give their colleagues if they took sick leave, they struggled on regardless. Other teachers saw it as a good opportunity to have a few days away from the challenges of managing their classroom. In Krystal's case it became almost a weekly occurrence for her to have one or two days of sick leave. There were instances, however, when teachers were truly quite sick and had to struggle on with no-one to look after them and minister to their needs as they had experienced when they still lived at home. At Beacon Hill, the registrar looked after Jenny when she was sick. In return, when she had recovered, Jenny babysat the registrar's children and this was the start of a mutually

beneficial and supportive relationship that heavily influenced Jenny's decision to remain in that location at the end of her first year.

Jenny: Finding support

After graduating with an Early Childhood Teaching qualification and an "Outstanding" mark, Jenny was posted to Beacon Hill and became one of the three teachers at the school, taking responsibility for the Pre-Primary and Year One class, who were joined by the Kindergarten children on two days of the week. Half way through her first year at Beacon Hill, Jenny seemed to have settled into her teaching responsibilities. She appeared confident in the classroom, demonstrated a wide and effective repertoire of teaching practices, and clearly had developed positive relationships with the children and their carers. At this point, however, Jenny was unsure about remaining at Beacon Hill for longer than a year. She cited a number of reasons for this uncertainty. Although she had been prepared to be posted anywhere in the state, she had not had a clear sense of just how small a town might be. Although she valued the support provided by her two teaching colleagues, she still felt professionally and socially isolated, and she found the cost of living in such a small community extremely high. There was only one shop in the town; they stocked a limited range of goods and with no competition, their prices were much higher than in some other, larger centres.

The following year, persuaded by the introduction of the Country Incentives Scheme, Jenny had decided to remain at Beacon Hill, but still wasn't sure that she had made the right decision. Both the other staff members had transferred to other schools, so Jenny had to develop new working relationships with staff members, including a new principal. Because of an increase in enrolments, the school now qualified for a fourth teacher, but by the second term, there had already been three different people in this position. One teacher had lasted a week before packing up and going back to Perth. The current person had been there nine weeks, the longest so far that year. Constantly having to cover for an absent teacher, and supporting a steady stream of new teachers, was proving a strain for all the staff at such a small school.

Later that year, however, Jenny announced her intention to remain for a third year, which, under the Country Incentives Scheme would allow her to apply for permanency. Jenny seemed much more settled. A contributing factor seemed to be that she had by now struck up a relationship with the school Registrar and her family. The Registrar, her husband and children had lived in the town for a number of years and she had taken Jenny under her wing, looking after her when she had become sick earlier in the year. In return,

Jenny had looked after their children when the Registrar and her husband had gone to the city for the weekend.

Jenny's story demonstrates that while professional support is clearly important for early career teachers, personal support networks are equally important. Hoerr (2005) points out that as a result of their new position, beginning teachers are likely to be facing changes that can impact on their personal lives. The younger teachers in this study, away from family and friends for the first time, talked about the challenges of having to manage household bills and fend for themselves in terms of ensuring they ate nutritious meals and had clean laundry, as well as making a life for themselves that extended beyond the classroom. Having someone to step in and care for her when she was sick made a big difference to Jenny. Issues of induction and support clearly have the potential to impact on teachers' efficacy as they make the transition into their new positions, and this is a topic of discussion that will be returned to later.

Relationships in the school and the community

Further unfamiliar territory for new teachers related to what one teacher described as "living in a goldfish bowl"; teachers are very visible in country towns and there is potential for everything they do – in both their professional and their private lives – to be observed, monitored and scrutinised by parents and other members of the community. Teachers who were used to the relative anonymity of city life found this intrusive and restrictive. Living in and becoming part of the community – even in the Regional Centre – was contingent upon building positive relationships with a range of others; children, parents, colleagues – both teaching and non-teaching – and School Leaders.

Cross-cultural relationships presented particular barriers. It was often difficult to get to know the parents or caregivers of the Aboriginal children, because those parents tended not to come near the school. Pre-primary children were most often accompanied to and from school by an older sibling or cousin, and older children mostly made their own way. Some teachers cited this as evidence of parents' disinterest in their children's education. While other teachers attempted to be as invisible as possible in the town, some teachers, such as Catherine, took advantage of opportunities that arose when she encountered children at the shop or in the street with their family members, making a point of stopping to talk and making herself known. Over time, Catherine had built strong relationships in the wider community, and with the children and their families outside school. She often let the children play in her yard, and she talked to the children's parents when she saw them

in the pub. She commented that sometimes this was the most opportune time to strike up a conversation:

> …just even nodding their head when you walk past is worth half an hour's conversation with a white mother in a white school, because you get the same thing; you know they like you because they've stopped and chatted to you, and you know they like you because they've actually acknowledged you. But they just don't, they don't stop and talk, and normally they'll only speak to you when you've had a few drinks, and then they'll just talk for hours and hours!

At Mineside, the teachers took turns to accompany children on the bus run, so that they could keep tabs on where the children were currently living, and so that they could gradually get to know the children's wider families. These teachers also recognised the value of getting to know a child's siblings and cousins if they were attending the same school.

A number of teachers had worked previously with Teacher Assistants, and seemed relatively clear about the role, but few had previously worked with Indigenous Education Officers, and did not have the same clarity about their role. Often, the Indigenous Education Officer would be present in the classroom during the lesson, but would just be observing the lesson and only be called upon when there was an issue with behaviour. In general, it appeared that they were rarely consulted as part of the planning process and it seemed that their wealth of knowledge about the community was not recognised or used to advantage. The younger teachers in particular seemed to have difficulties building relationships with Aboriginal support staff, not recognising or valuing the rich knowledge they held about the community. At Mulga Springs, Aboriginal school staff had their own staff room and rarely came into the main staff room. Apparently, it was at their request that they had their own room, but it did not facilitate relationship building with non-Aboriginal staff.

There appeared to be some variation in the degree to which teachers demonstrated their comfort or discomfort living and working in a community with large numbers of Aboriginal people. Teachers' cultural comfort or discomfort seemed to be related to some degree to their understanding of cultural issues and mores. None of the nineteen teachers involved in the first year of this study had completed compulsory units in Aboriginal education as part of their pre-service training, although many of them had had one or two lectures on Aboriginal education somewhere in their course. Only Catherine had

completed some elective units as part of the Bachelor of Education (conversion) degree which she was completing externally during the second year of the study.

All of the teachers in the study appeared to have some awareness that there were cultural issues connected with teaching Aboriginal children and living in a community with Aboriginal people. However, most of the teachers appeared to have a negative perception of these issues and felt ill-equipped to deal with them. In some cases, a limited cultural understanding appeared to combine with a mindset which attributed all negative behaviours to cultural difference. These perceived cultural differences often manifested themselves in ways which were highly visible and sometimes confronting. For instance, Krystal explained that when she had first arrived in the community, she had been afraid to go out at night because of the fights and drunken behaviour that were a weekly occurrence at some hotels or in the streets.

Anna also appeared to display some discomfort with living in a small mining community. Although it was possible to walk from one end of Stockman's Ridge to the other in about fifteen minutes, Anna drove everywhere. Each day, after school, she called her home to make sure that her children had returned safely. If there was no response, she would immediately go home to find them and then return to school once she had made sure they were home or with someone she trusted.

Vanessa: Sent to Hell

Vanessa had grown up in a country town in the South West and after graduating, was posted to a small rural school in a neighbouring town. During her first year of teaching, she was able to return to live in her family home and commute to school each day. The school was very similar to the one she had attended as a child, and she had felt very comfortable there. This posting was a temporary position where she was filling in for a teacher who had taken maternity leave. This school was not on the list of "difficult to staff" schools, the children were predominantly Anglo Australian, and there were no Aboriginal children enrolled at the school.

The following year, when the substantive teacher returned to her position, Vanessa was offered a position at Mulga Springs, more than 1,000 kilometres from her home town. Vanessa had done everything in her power to try to remain at her current school, including writing to her local Member of Parliament, and had even contemplated taking her story to the TV stations; however eventually she had been forced to come to terms with moving away from home. She described her initial response to her posting at Mulga Springs:

I thought I'd been sent to Hell when I first came here. I did everything I could to get away again – even thought about resigning. There are no Aboriginal people where my parents live and where I taught in my first year; I wasn't prepared for what I found here. I did stupid things like going round constantly checking all the doors and windows, because I was living in a house on my own. My Dad showed me how to take the leads off the car when I left it at night. I don't do that now. I'm still cautious, but I don't go to those lengths. My parents still worry about me though, so I don't tell them about what goes on here. They'll get a shock when they come up here for the show.

Vanessa originally intended to complete just one year at Mulga Springs before taking leave in order to travel and work overseas. However, towards the end of that year, the Education Department of Western Australia announced the introduction of the Country Incentives Scheme. By this time, Vanessa had come to terms with her new position sufficiently to consider staying on to get the benefits of the Scheme. She remained at the school for a further two years. During that time she established a positive relationship with many of the local community and the children in her care, and came to understand what it was necessary for the children in her care to know in order to make progress, and how to help them develop the skills and knowledge they needed.

There are a couple of points to be made here. The first is that not all the confronting behaviour came from Aboriginal people, or Aboriginal children. Although some Aboriginal people did appear to get caught up in the few incidents of drunken or loutish behaviour that occurred from time to time, non-Aboriginal people sometimes displayed this behaviour as well. It has to be said that in all the communities, most people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, seemed to go about their business just as anyone else would. Similarly, in the classroom, the non-compliant behaviour could occur with non-Aboriginal children just as it could occur with Aboriginal children.

There are two main issues associated with this issue of cultural comfort or discomfort; the first is to do with living and working alongside people who are from a different culture, the second is about understanding, valuing and building on the values and knowledge that the children bring with them to school. In order to do the best job they can for the children in the community, teachers must establish relationships and to be effective, these relationships must be based on trust and respect. To give the children the best experience at school, teachers need to understand the ways of socialising and communicating that the children bring with them from home.

Osborne (2003) builds on Ladson-Billings' (1995a; 1995b) definition of culturally responsive education and from his analysis of her work, he identifies nine "signposts" that he recommends for guiding the practice of teachers working with Indigenous children. These signposts include the premise that the socio-political history of Indigenous people generally impacts on what happens in the classroom today, therefore teachers need to be aware of this history; that teachers need to build on children's prior experience in a way that honours and develops their cultural identity but at the same time empowers them by teaching them the knowledge and practices they will need to successfully operate in mainstream society; that culturally relevant pedagogy involves "spelling out the cultural assumptions on which the classroom operates"(p. 19) and further, "involves personal warmth towards, respect for and demandingness of students" (p. 19). A further signpost identifies classroom management practices that are culturally relevant, including the use of group work, avoiding "spotlighting" of particular students and attempting to match the children's home communication styles and structures, particularly in the early years.

Classroom management and pedagogy

The potential for cultural dissonance was more evident at school and in the classroom as many of the Aboriginal children simply did not display the kinds of behaviours that are often taken for granted in Westernised school systems. Instead of sitting on the mat and listening attentively during story reading or modelled writing sessions, some children would get up and walk around the room, play with each other's hair or clothing, or engage in whispered (or louder) conversations with their peers. Children frequently neglected to raise their hand and wait to be called on before speaking. Many of these behaviours might be attributed to the ways in which children operated at home, but the teachers found them unpredictable and did not know how to interpret them or how to respond to them, other than with frequent reprimands.

Perhaps as a result of their limited cultural understanding, teachers would take these behaviours as a challenge to their authority, and consequently responded in ways that made the situation worse rather than better, because they got drawn into a battle which ended in disciplinary action for the child (usually withdrawal from the classroom) over a relatively minor infringement (such as calling out of turn or apparently not attending to instructions). In some cases, this difficulty was compounded by teachers' lack of experience in schools generally. For instance, both Krystal and Anna had difficulties with children's behaviour, and stated that this was the first time in their careers that they had had to deal with behaviour of this kind. Anna went as far as to say that she actually

preferred it when the Aboriginal children did not attend school, because she felt that she was then able to teach the rest of the class more effectively.

Most of the teachers in the study were early career teachers, and for many it was their first posting following graduation. As new teachers, these individuals were still developing their identity as a teacher; they were very keen to be seen as competent teachers, and for new teachers particularly, "competence" is demonstrated to others by being able to control the class. None of the newly graduated teachers had had any pre-service professional experience in rural, difficult to staff or low socio-economic community schools, and often the children's ways of operating and their limited knowledge of school literacy came as a surprise.

As Krystal pointed out, during their pre-service professional practices, these early career teachers had been in classrooms where the rules, routines and procedures had already been established by the classroom teacher. They also had the added "safety net" of having their mentor or supervising teacher to defer to for advice or who was able to step in if and when something became unmanageable. Once they began teaching in their own classrooms, in schools were human resources were already stretched to the limit, early career teachers had to work these issues out for themselves.

The frequency of the reprimands issued to the children had a tendency to interrupt the pace and flow of the classroom interaction, and as a result, impacted negatively on the teaching. Additionally, for the teachers, constantly issuing reprimands was exhausting and, since it drew attention to their classroom control, made them feel that they are not doing an effective job as a teacher. Their idealised picture of themselves as a teacher was therefore compromised. At times such as this, Anna resorted to allowing the children "free play", because it gave her a break from the continual potential for management issues and gave her time to regroup. It is, however, questionable how much the children actually learned during these quite frequent "free play" sessions, because the play that occurred during these times had not been planned and intentionally set up to support the children's learning in any way.

The exhausting quest for control can begin to impact on teachers' sense of efficacy, their job satisfaction and ultimately, their lives beyond work. There were examples when teachers, perhaps unintentionally, ended up taking out their discomfort on the children. The following exchange between two teachers was overheard, spoken deliberately in front of the children:

"I don't want to come to school tomorrow".

"Neither would I, if I had your class".

Most of the teachers interviewed for this study were able to articulate some kind of philosophy which influenced their teaching of literacy. These philosophies varied quite considerably, with some teachers such as Anna and Krystal advocating a strongly constructivist orientation, to Beth and Melissa at Emu Plains, who advocated for a much more teacher-centred approach. Both Krystal and Anna felt that their approaches were not working, but neither teacher seemed to have any sense of how they might adjust their approach to work more in the children's interests. In both cases, it seemed as though their approach was one of trial and error, rather than adjustments to practice that were informed by an evidence base or action learning.

Melissa claimed that her teacher-centred, structured approach was quite strongly influenced by her background in special education; however most of her teaching appeared to use photocopied black line masters and she did not appear to differentiate her teaching according to children's needs. Beth stated that she had begun with a much more constructivist approach to learning, but finding that this did not work, she had decided to use "explicit" teaching where possible.

The terms "explicit instruction", "Direct Instruction" (capital D, capital I) and "direct instruction" (lower-case d and i) often seem to be used interchangeably, especially in the popular media. Goeke (2009) compares the three approaches, explaining that Direct Instruction is an approach that involves teachers teaching to a script and children responding to a specific stimulus such as hand signals, claps or finger clicks. This approach is based on a behaviourist view of learning (Goeke, 2009) which aims to change students' observable behaviours by providing a model of the desired behaviour followed by opportunities for repeated guided practice and immediate feedback until the behaviours become automatic. Programs of work are highly structured, scripted and ritualised. In comparison, direct instruction is a "generic" teaching model which describes approaches to teaching where teacher direction is high and learning is presented in small steps, each of which is learned before moving on. This approach involves demonstration, student practice and corrective feedback. Programs are not scripted.

In contrast to these two approaches, Goeke (2009) explains that explicit instruction is an approach that emphasises both the role of the teacher as instructor and director of the learning as well as the role of the learner in actively constructing the learning. Because

there is a focus on students' individual needs, explicit instruction accommodates and encourages small-group instruction, while at the same time having clear, stated learning goals, a structured framework for instruction and clear demonstrations supports all children's learning. Hattie (2009; 2012) suggests that having clear goals for what both the students and the teacher are setting out to achieve helps make the teaching and the learning "visible". He states that this approach "combines, rather than contrasts, teacher-centred teaching and student-centred learning and knowing" (2009, p. 26).

Although Melissa and Beth had the best of intentions in moving to more teacher-centred approaches, and probably the structure of their lessons had an impact on behaviour as the children were more oriented towards the task, neither of them made clear what the learning actually was, so what the children were doing became little more than "busy work".

Reflective practice

The ability to critically reflect on their own teaching practices has been identified as a significant factor which impacts on the experiences and professional growth of beginning teachers (Down & Wooltorton, 2004; Yarrow et al, 1997). Reflection involves being able to critically examine issues, events and practices with the ultimate aim of transforming one's response or action as a result of a deeper understanding. Down & Wooltorton (2004, p. 37) suggest that "critically reflective practice provides a space for challenging taken-for-granted views about teaching and learning."

Of the four teachers whose experiences are presented in chapter six, Catherine appeared to be the most overtly reflective. Since she had taken over her class, Catherine had tried a number of different approaches to teaching them. She had retained some approaches, rejected many, and modified others. She was able to do this because she constantly reflected on her teaching practice and was able to recognise when something was not working. Further, this reflection allowed her to recognise what it was that did not work and modify where appropriate.

> Before, I was trying and trying to come up with something that would work, and it just wasn't happening at all, and now I think I'm just so comfortable with what I do and I know that what I do works [in my classroom].... I also have the strength in myself to know, okay it's not working, let's just pack it up, do something else and try again tomorrow, or I'll go home to modify it and try again tomorrow.

Catherine's reflection was further supported by her post-graduate studies and the professional reading she did as part of this learning. Her professional reading was a source of increased knowledge and understanding, as well as a source for new ideas and approaches to try out in her classroom.

Catherine also recognised the importance of directing instruction at the precise level of the children's development. She had spent many hours, particularly in the first days of working with the class, looking carefully at what the children were able to do and thinking about how she could help them to make progress:

> …four hours, every afternoon after school, going through my classroom, looking at my kids, looking at my kids' work, thinking about what should, let's start with something they can all do and all get, and probably six months of sleepless nights, like waking up at two in the morning and thinking, why don't I try it this way, and writing stuff down.

By the latter half of her second year at the school, Catherine had developed a file for each child in which she collected assessment data. She had carried out several of the assessment tasks from Clay's (1993) Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement; concepts about print, letter identification and running records. This systematic approach to assessment informed her reflection and consequently, her approaches to teaching.

Jenna also reflected on her practice and this was evidenced in the various resources she had developed to aid her teaching; the feedback sheet for children to complete at the end of the week, the menus for fruit time and the big book that she was using in the shared reading time. She had adapted common teaching practices and resources in order to inform her teaching, to apply to the specific context in which she was teaching and to reflect her philosophies and personal theories related to language and literacy development. Jenna's reflective practice, however, appeared to have achieved a degree of "unconscious competence" (Dubin, 1974) in that it occurred tacitly as part of her daily practice, rather than outside of it.

In contrast, neither Anna nor Krystal appeared to reflect deeply on their practice. Mostly, they located difficulties with the children rather than with their teaching practice. Anna was concerned that if she modified her practice, she would be disadvantaging the children who were more advanced. Krystal appeared to focus on specific strategies, either for teaching or for behaviour management. She was able to identify that what she was doing was not working, but did not see it as part of normal practice to modify her approaches to take into account the specific needs of the children in her class, nor did she

appear to have any other source for alternate practice: "Those strategies just don't work. And then you've got to try to come up with things of your own…"

The following submission to the review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory (Collins, 1999, p. 82) appears to sum up very well the range of responses demonstrated by teachers in the case study schools:

> On arrival at a new school teachers use teaching strategies and approaches to schooling that have worked for them in the past in the new context. The majority find these strategies and approaches are not effective with Indigenous students… Many of these teachers suffer a crisis of confidence after only a short time in the bush. Some of these reflect on their practice, seek support, undertake study and professional reading and as a result develop further strategies and approaches which are more appropriate and stay on to be highly effective teachers. Some give up and leave after a short time. Some stay on and take the line of least resistance, that is, do 'busy work' – colouring in, circling all the a's in a text, cutting out pictures from magazines, filling in worksheets. This keeps students entertained but not learning much.

Responding to children's needs

One of the most overwhelming issues for early career teachers was the range of abilities they found themselves catering for in any one classroom. Generally, teachers would teach to the middle of the range and provide extension activities (either worksheets, or increased expectations in terms of quantity) for those children who were clearly more advanced, or a modified task for those children who would not be able to manage the set task. Apart from at Gibbs Crossing, where Catherine conducted the Observation Survey (Clay, 1993a) with every child, and at Mineside, where a school-wide approach to data collection was in the process of implementation, there was little evidence of teachers collecting fine-grained data to monitor children's progress and to use this for the purpose of developing teaching that was specifically targeted to children's individual developmental needs. Indeed, when they were provided with such data, teachers in some of the schools did not make use of it, and six months later, no-one at the school even knew what had happened to it. At Gibbs Crossing, Catherine used the data she collected to group her children into small groups for literacy instruction, and at Mineside, assessment data and attendance data were used to identify children to participate in an intervention program along the lines of Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993b).

To maximise learning for each individual child, teaching needs to be directed to their specific point of need. In the case studies, we saw Troy being asked to complete a task that, according to the assessment tasks, was beyond him, and we also saw Emma, in year

two, receiving instruction that was below her level of need as indicated by the assessments. Given the diversity of instructional needs in such schools, it is important that teachers' instruction is led by assessment and evaluation of what the children can do and what they need to learn next. Ongoing and frequent assessment and evaluation of learning needs to be the driver for instruction.

A whole school approach to collecting, storing and interpreting assessment data would assist new and early career teachers to incorporate these procedures into their practice and with translating the information so that it informed lesson planning. Having a whole school approach to data collection takes away some of the uncertainty of choosing the right assessments at the right time and incorporates the practice into the culture of the school so that it just becomes part of what teachers at the school do as a matter of course. A whole school approach to interpretation means that interpretations are not carried out alone, but are the result of collective knowledge across the teaching staff. Additionally, if Indigenous Education Officers are included in the practice as well, they are able to add a cultural dimension to this shared knowledge and practice.

Bowers & Flinders (1990, p.xi) define responsive teaching as being "aware of and capable of responding in educationally constructive ways to the ways in which cultural patterns influence the behavioural and mental ecology of the classroom". In this study, the term is being used to describe a teacher's ability to be flexible and adaptive, most often in response to the needs of the children, but sometimes in response to the constraints or conditions imposed by the school.

Catherine explained that in order to get the best out of the children, she had developed the practice of monitoring their mood and adjusting the curriculum to suit their needs and capabilities on a day-to-day basis.

> Sometimes, though, the kids are just tired, you just think, it's no good getting mad about it, it's not their fault their parents were fighting all night. So you change things, you think, we'll do art today and we'll do say, social studies tomorrow. You know, when they actually can concentrate more.

In a school like Gibbs Crossing, the need to be flexible and adaptive was probably more evident, as events that occurred in the community had a greater impact on the school. In all communities, events such as the local football carnival, a large funeral or traditional cultural matters could result in the absence from school of many of the Aboriginal students and some of the Aboriginal staff over a number of days or even weeks.

It was not unknown for class numbers to dwindle to just one or two children at times. In contrast, a story that was often told by some of the long-term Indigenous staff at Gibbs Crossing recalled a day when the Minister for Education of the time came to visit the school. This visit coincided with an influx of people into the community from other areas for cultural reasons, and as a result of this, a sudden increase in enrolments at the school. Suddenly, class sizes increased to the extent that there were not enough desks or chairs for all the children, and teachers were running around, trying to find spare chairs wherever they could, so that all children could have a seat for the Minister's visit!

Induction, mentoring and support

The four teachers whose experiences are recorded in chapter six had a variety of experiences relating to induction and support which largely reflected the experiences of the whole group of case study teachers. Of the four, only Catherine attended an official induction course provided for new teachers by the Central Office. She stated that the most useful thing about attending this induction was that she got to meet her Principal. She felt she had been prepared to some extent for working in a remote location because at the time she received the news of her posting, a personal friend had just returned from a location near Gibbs Crossing, where he had been working for the mining industry. He had been able to give her practical knowledge and advice to prepare her for the remoteness of the location and some of the cultural issues that might arise. Other friends repeated negative stories that they had heard about the place, and tried to persuade her not to go:

> They just told me all these horror stories that they had heard. And that actually helped me, because it was nowhere near as bad as everyone had told me it was going to be. And I was just like, I'm going, no matter what. And when I got up there it was just great, whereas the others had been told, well it's not so bad, you'll really like it, so they were expecting a lot better than they got!

Because most of the other teachers at Gibbs Crossing were also young and inexperienced, Catherine felt they had not been able to support her much professionally "They're all struggling with their own issues", but she had found her Principal to be very supportive:

> Not so much in terms of teaching strategies, because some of his ways of doing things, I wouldn't use. I would think, I'll take a little bit of that but I'll use it in another way. But he was really good in terms of building up my confidence, and telling me that yes, I could do it. And when things went well, he would always acknowledge it and share it. So, really supportive in that way.

Catherine also thought her previous life-experiences had provided her with a lot of support. She had grown up in a large extended family in a cosmopolitan neighbourhood, and had had school friends who were Aboriginal. She had also had some experience working with people who were intellectually disabled. Through these experiences, she had learned to accept and value difference.

Krystal had not attended the induction for new teachers because she received her posting after the school year had begun, and after the induction course had been held. She felt ill-prepared and unsupported, both personally and professionally. She had been amazed to discover unsealed roads and only two general stores in the town. This was the first time she had lived away from home, so she had had to get used to paying bills, managing a household budget and providing all her own meals. Her accommodation was sparsely furnished and various items were in need of repair.

At the same time that she was making these adjustments to her personal life, Krystal was also coming to grips with the realities of being responsible for a classroom of her own. She was clearly experiencing difficulties managing the behaviour of some of her charges, and expressed uncertainly about the content of her lessons. In the pre-primary centre, which was across the playground from the main school and where the routine of recess and lunch breaks followed a different timetable, it was not easy for Krystal to access support from her colleagues, or join in professional conversation, if there was any to be had. The Deputy Principal had taught Krystal's class for the first three weeks of the year, and was responsible for supporting the junior primary section of the school. She had reviewed Krystal's teaching program and offered some advice, but new to her own position and overloaded with work herself, she had been unable to offer more support. When Krystal had asked for help with the behaviour of one of the children, she had set up a meeting between Krystal and the School Psychologist.

Because they had been recruited by the school, rather than through the Education Department's central teacher placement system, neither Anna nor Jenna received any formal induction on taking up their positions. Jenna was in the fortunate position of having taught previously in similar locations, even though this had been a number of years ago. Like Catherine, she had been pleasantly surprised when she had moved to the town, as the size of the town and the resources available to her had exceeded her expectations. Jenna had also recently been employed in the related field of day-care, which meant that a lot of the routine management of the classroom was second nature to her. Initially, she had been concerned about her ability to provide appropriate programs for the pre-primary age

group, until she realised that she had been doing just that in the day-care centre, albeit less formally.

Jenna had, in effect, organised her own orientation to the school and the classroom by spending two weeks in the classroom while the previous teacher had still been there. This meant that she had been able to get to know the children, the support staff, some of the parents, and the routines that were in place for the children, so that when she took over the position, she had already to some extent found her feet.

Anna's induction to the teaching profession and orientation to the school was also an informal one, as she had been employed by the school to do occasional relief the previous year. She had completed her pre-service training on a positive note, achieving an "outstanding" assessment for her final practicum. In her own classroom at Stockman's Ridge, however, Anna experienced considerable management difficulties which impacted on the quality of instruction she was able to provide for all the children in her class.

Anna's principal recognised her need for support and in the second year of the study, assigned the role of mentor to the ELAN (English Language And Numeracy) Teacher. However, this caused some tensions. The ELAN Teacher had graduated at the same time as Anna, and had also been recruited at the same time, through much the same process. In her second year at the school this teacher had been offered the position of ELAN Teacher when the previous incumbent had transferred to another school. Anna felt that this teacher's elevated status was the result of preferential treatment, and refused to acknowledge that the ELAN Teacher may have had something to offer her in terms of support. Their relationship, a result of status, rather than collegiality, was not an easy or productive one. The ELAN Teacher's approach to literacy teaching, while clearly influenced by the more constructivist philosophy that underpins the "First Steps" (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994) materials, was more direct and explicit than that of Anna. Anna often felt that she was being directed to teach in ways that did not fit with her philosophy of teaching. She believed that teaching in more direct ways would disadvantage the more able children in her class.

It can be seen from the experiences of these teachers that the induction processes were haphazard, to say the least. Since this time, and in response to the recommendations in various reports into teacher education and transition into the teacher workforce (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 2002; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007; Ramsey, 2000) there

have been significant improvements at the system level in the quality and availability of induction and support for early career teachers.

The Western Australian Graduate Teacher Induction Program (GTIP) has been in operation since 2006 and is available to new graduate teachers employed in the state school system. The Institute for Professional Learning provides four learning modules, which new teachers are expected to complete, one per semester over the first two years of their employment ("Graduate Teacher Induction Program", n.d.). The modules cover generic skills such as professional standards, facilitating student learning, assessment and reporting, which are aligned to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Professional Standards for Teachers. In addition, graduates must select one of two options for transition support. The first, and preferred option is an in-class coaching program, which provides between ten and twenty hours of in-class coaching with an Institute Advocate (an experienced teacher trained in coaching). The Advocate observes teaching and provides constructive feedback, and facilitates practitioner reflection. Where the in-class coaching program is not an option, graduate teachers must receive 180 working days in-school support from an experienced teacher in their school. The mentor must provide formal feedback to the graduate teacher. Participation in either mentoring program is a requirement for full registration with the Teacher Registration Board Western Australia (TRBWA). Newly graduate teachers are further entitled to a slightly reduced teaching load during their first year to allow for extra planning time and professional learning.

While these initiatives are a huge step forward in terms of providing support for new teachers, there is some evidence that the ways in which they play out vary considerably from school to school (Johnson et al., forthcoming) and that in rural and remote schools particularly, the requirements are less likely to be interpreted in the ways that were originally intended (Sullivan & Johnson, 2012; Sullivan & Morrison, 2014). As Ball, Maguire, Brown & Hoskins (2011) point out, policies are created by one group of people, to be interpreted and enacted by other groups, who may have different needs, so the interpretation will always be shaped by local needs and contexts.

For most of the teachers in the study, their knowledge about teaching literacy to small children appeared to sit mostly within the technical sphere; that is, they understood that the children needed to know letter/sound correspondence and to be able to comprehend the events that featured in narrative texts and the information presented in non-fiction texts. They attended in some small way to the need for children to

communicate with others both orally and in writing, and they were able to draw on the range of teaching strategies that they had learned in their pre-service training. A small number of teachers were able to incorporate the socio-cultural aspects of children's lives and the classroom into their teaching as they considered the skills and knowledge that children were bringing with them into the classroom and how this would impact on their learning. These teachers – Catherine, Jenna and the three teachers at Mineside – had developed at least some aspects of their teaching to a degree of unconscious competence that allowed them to consider the specific strengths and needs of their learners and to adjust their approaches accordingly. Of these teachers, only Catherine and the two experienced teachers at Mineside overtly appeared to see themselves as agents for change which, as described by Tierney (2009) encompasses the socio-political dimension of teaching. These three teachers in particular talked about education, and specifically literacy, as the key to increasing the life opportunities of the children they taught. At Mineside, this ideology was part of the over-riding ethos of the school and was built into the school culture.

School Leaders Negotiating the Territory

In addition to a high turnover in teaching staff at most schools, there was also a surprisingly high turnover in school leaders. Only two of the schools in the study had the same principal for the duration of the study, and in one of those schools, there were a number of successive temporary appointments to the position of deputy principal; only in the final year of the study was there a substantive appointment. A number of times there was no-one in this position as the school waited for an appointment to be made, and the principal carried out all the tasks that would normally be shared between the school leader and their deputy. When an appointee finally did arrive, it then fell to the principal to support the newly appointed (and usually temporary) deputy leader in their new position. Unsurprisingly, in this situation, the principal worked long hours and whilst very supportive of all her staff, she generally found it difficult to provide the extensive support that was needed by many of the new teachers, who made up the majority of the staff and mostly had recently graduated, or who had previously been teaching overseas, in very different contexts.

Learning to be leaders

At Emu Plains there were constant changes as school leaders were appointed and shuffled around, often several times in one year. This had significant effects on the

continuity of teaching practices and programs, and on policy development and implementation, and this was exacerbated when there was an almost complete turnaround of teaching staff at the beginning of each year. New school leaders would see this turnaround of teaching staff as an opportunity to start afresh; to develop new policies, practices and programs, and would take up their new positions with drive and enthusiasm, but it seemed that this energy soon waned as they began to be overwhelmed by the demands of the job.

School leadership in small rural primary schools or district high schools is generally seen as an apprenticeship for eventual school leadership in larger or metropolitan schools. Consequently, most of the people coming into these positions were new to the school leadership role. The challenges that were faced by school leaders may be related to the ways in which they are recruited to the position. They can be categorised in various ways.

Some school leaders (mostly principals) were new to the school, new to community and new to the role. Their challenges included getting to know new colleagues, new children, and new community members, at the same time as all that is involved with relocating themselves, their personal effects and possibly a partner and/or children to a new location. Additionally, to be effective in their role, they would need to learn as much as they could about the community from which the school's students were drawn, as well as developing all the skills and undertaking the duties required by a school leader.

When new school leaders were recruited from the existing school staff, they may be used to the locations in which they find themselves, and therefore have some good advice to offer their early career teachers; however, they were new to the leadership role and could find this overwhelming, to the extent that this compromised their capacity to support their teachers to the best of their ability. In some cases, school leaders were taking on this new role in the same school as they were once one of the staff, so, depending on the culture of the school, this shift in status was seen by former colleagues as going over to the "other side". Roles and relationships with colleagues had to be re-negotiated as the new school leaders now became the medium between the teachers at the chalkface and what was happening at the system-level in terms of policy and curriculum implementation. As they took on this role, they had to construct for themselves a new identity as a school leader.

In some cases, new school leaders were recruited from the staff of a "nearby" school. This could be a school that was some 100-200 kilometres away, but generally, the

context would be similar, the staff member may have had some contact with the school and staff previously, as schools tended to meet together and work in "clusters" for professional development and "bigger picture" policy development, and the new school leader could possibly have had some previous contact with members of the Indigenous community, as some family groups tended to be spread out across quite a large area and would travel between the towns to visit their relatives.

It seems that to an extent, the issue of high teacher turnover in difficult-to-staff schools is somewhat self-perpetuating. When school leaders and other staff necessarily take on other duties to compensate for the absence of other staff-members, this leaves them without the resources to support colleagues. The discontinuities created for children when they are taught by a passing parade of teachers who do not stay long enough to build a rapport have the effect of causing disenfranchisement amongst the children, and this is demonstrated through repeated absence from school, inappropriate behaviour and slow academic progress. A high teacher turnover at a school may be interpreted by the local community as a rejection of their lifestyle and values, or a lack of commitment to their children's education on behalf of the teachers (Watson, 1992). As a consequence of these perceptions, they may not go out of their way to make new teachers feel welcome in the community.

There is considerable evidence to suggest a negative relationship between high teacher turnover and student achievement (Watson, 1992; Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 2000; Hatton, Watson, Squires & Soliman, 1991). Watson & Hatton (1995) suggest that when schools are difficult to staff, quality of education will be compromised for a number of reasons. First, employers cannot afford to be discriminating about the suitability of staff for their particular location. Second, class sizes may need to be increased because there are not enough teachers to go round. A third reason is that teachers may be required to teach outside their area of specialisation or competence. Hatton et al (1991) also suggest that some staff, such as school leaders, may be diverted from other important duties in order to give their attention to matters which arise as a consequence of high teacher turnover. A fourth reason identified by Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (2000) is that of the impact of teacher transience on teachers' professional learning. A submission from the Queensland Independent Education Union (p. 31) told the report that "teachers are learners who thrive in a stable environment". When teachers move from school to school after a short time only, they have less opportunity to modify their teaching programs and pedagogical approaches

according to what they have learned about the learning context and the learning needs of the children.

Beginning teachers' already difficult lives were made more difficult when classes were reconfigured or timetables changed to compensate for the loss of a teacher. When Anna resigned from her position at Stockman's Ridge, in the middle of a term and no replacement could be found, the classes in the primary school had to be re-organised to accommodate the loss of a teacher. This re-organisation affected every class in the primary school. As one teacher at Stockman's Ridge explained, "Just as I begin to learn the rules, someone comes along and changes them". Teacher shortages, teacher absences and a shortage of relief teachers at Emu Plains meant that both deputy principals were required to spend much of their administrative time teaching classes rather than attending to matters of school development or staff support.

A highly mobile student population and a high degree of transience amongst teachers and school leaders combine to provide little continuity in the provision of education for children in difficult-to-staff, rural schools. A student can go away for a time to attend a funeral, or other cultural business, only to return to find a new teacher, different routines and pedagogical approaches. Policies and programs to support teachers and students are in a continual state of conceptualisation and development.

For teachers, too, there are discontinuities, as they are shuffled round from one year level to another to accommodate changing numbers of student enrolments or absent teachers, making it difficult to build strong relationships and develop a deep understanding of the learning needs of the children they teach. As new school leaders come and go, they are required to constantly adapt and re-adapt to changes in school organisation, policy and curriculum, providing an unstable environment for their own continued learning.

The transience of school leaders meant that at some schools, such as Emu Plains, school policies were in a constant state of preparation. At Emu Plains, the new principal and her team were drawing up a "four year plan", even though she had stated that she would only be there for the next two years. Her proposal that this plan would be continued with any fidelity in her absence seemed to be somewhat naive, especially given the constant turnover in staff, and the fact that the school had actually "lost" a number of resources and student assessment data from the previous year.

Building school culture

School leaders play a critical role in supporting the success of beginning teachers (Peters & Le Cornu, 2006a; 2006b; Watkins, 2005; Wood, 2005). They do this by providing practical and emotional support in a school culture that promotes on-going professional learning (Peters & Le Cornu, 2006a). These supports can include strategies such as release time for planning and preparation, opportunities to observe other, more experienced teachers, providing feedback to beginning teachers, and supporting teachers through difficulties such as dealing with challenging behaviours from students or with difficult parents. Watkins (2005) suggests that supports can be provided through strong mentoring, building collegial groups and facilitating action research into classroom practice.

School leaders in remote and rural schools are faced with particular challenges. First, because rural schools are generally small, they are likely to have teaching duties as well as administrative roles (Wildy & Clarke, 2005). Second, although they may teachers with a high degree of competence, it is likely that they will be new to their leadership roles (Wildy & Clarke, 2005). A further challenge, as is demonstrated by this study, is that most of their teaching staff are likely to be early career teachers, with a high proportion of new graduates.

All the issues of complexity that apply to teachers in rural situations apply similarly to school leaders in the same contexts. These issues include professional isolation (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Clarke & Stevens, 2006), access to appropriate professional development (Clarke & Wildy, 2004), dealing with a lack of infrastructure such as banks, transport, and community agencies, the public scrutiny associated with living and working in very small communities (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Wildy & Clarke, 2005), and the difficulties of engaging and retaining both teaching and non-teaching staff (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Watkins, 2005). A further issue identified by Collins (1999) is that of negotiating the sometimes competing concerns of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and in the current study, between different cultural groups in the community. This latter issue does not appear in the literature around school leadership in rural schools; however, it can only serve as an added dimension to the complexity of work faced by school leaders in such communities.

Principals in small rural schools are most likely to be female, single and under thirty (Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Wildy & Clarke, 2005). In Lester's (2003) study of teaching principals in rural schools in Queensland, as many as 34per cent were in the first five years of their teaching careers, and 6per cent of these had been teaching for two years or less. Wildy & Clarke (2005) argue that, given the multi-faceted nature of principals' work in

small, rural schools; new principals do not have the skills to effectively attend to all these facets at once.

In 2003, the Leadership Centre of Western Australia released a discussion paper (Wren & Watterson, 2003) which examined the induction processes for newly appointed school leaders. In the executive summary (p.1), the paper states, "Induction of school leaders to their new role cannot be left to chance. The rate and frequency of change and the complexity of leading and managing schools necessitate that school leaders are prepared for the roles to which they have been appointed". The paper also reports that the responsibility for the process of induction is currently shared between a number of organisations; the Leadership Centre, the Department of Education and Training, district offices and professional organisations.

The discussion paper reports that responses to a review carried out in 1999 indicated that newly appointed leaders felt that their induction was "inadequate or insufficient" (p. 2). Ewen (2002), who investigated the induction processes for level three principals in Western Australia, found preparation, training and support for such appointees to be inadequate, and further, suggested that these issues should be addressed with some urgency in order to facilitate the success of small rural schools and to ensure that principals stayed longer than the minimum requirement.

Wren and Watterson's (2003) discussion paper found that where the process of induction for new school leaders was devolved to the district level, there was considerable variation in the type and quality of induction. Further, they reported (p. 7) that "several districts" did not have a "planned induction process" for newly appointed principals, and few offered "induction to school leaders other than principals". This is a matter for concern, given that in the current study, the deputy principals, where they were appointed, almost always took responsibility for mentoring new teachers. Wren and Watterson (2003) suggest that new appointees felt most inadequately prepared in the areas of human resource management, finances, and risk management.

Lester (2001; 2003) makes a distinction between leadership and management, and defines these two constructs in the following ways: "Leadership is in essence the process of building and maintaining a sense of vision for the school, whereas in contrast, management is the co-ordination, support and monitoring of organisational activities." (2003, p. 90). She further claims that principals, especially those in small, rural schools, experience tension between these two processes, which can compete for time and attention. When time is

limited, management tasks take priority because they are necessary to the immediate and day-to-day operation of the school. Lester (2001; 2003) suggests that there is a tendency for day-to-day administrative tasks and low-level clerical activities to dominate school leaders' attention, leaving no time for them to attend to the "bigger picture" of school leadership; curriculum development and improved teaching and learning. Responses to problems tend to be band-aid solutions, fixing up the problem in the short term rather than preventing it in the first place.

Given these difficulties and complexities, it is hardly surprising that a high proportion of school leaders in small rural communities tend to move on to other, more desirable positions as soon as they are able (Lester, 2003). In the current study, the average stay for a principal was two years. These fleeting appearances in the community provide a destabilising effect (Wildy & Clarke, 2005).

Rosenholz (1991) has argued that the culture of the school largely influences the ways in which teachers construct themselves as part of the school community, and in turn as

> teachers' attitudes, cognitions and behaviour have less to do with the individual biographies teachers bring with them to the workplace than with the social organization of the workplace itself – social organizations that are not characteristics of teachers but that teachers have helped to shape; social organizations that have consequences for teachers' perceptions and behaviours. (p.4)

Further, Rosenholtz nominates teacher uncertainty and threats to self –esteem as recurring themes in teaching. Teacher uncertainty occurs when there is an absence of "technical culture, the processes designed to accomplish an organization's goals" (p.4). A consequence of teacher uncertainty is the threat to self-esteem. Where teacher self-esteem may be threatened, the natural line of defence is to avoid situations which may challenge the adequacy of teacher performance, and erode self-esteem.

Peters & Le Cornu (2006a) suggest that the culture of the school plays an important part in the success or otherwise of newly qualified teachers. For beginning teachers to thrive, they need to be working in an environment that actively promotes on-going learning and allows them to take risks. The rest of the school community has a part to play by establishing and building support networks through mentoring, teamwork and buddy systems.

A school community which sets and strives to achieve shared goals and ideals builds teacher certainty and provides a supportive environment for change and experimentation. However, it is not enough to simply set goals. The precise nature of these goals must be negotiated and defined to mean the same to all participants, since each participant may have a different construct of what is to be achieved. As Rosenholtz (1991, p. 17) observes, "…schools, after all, are nothing more than collections of independent teachers, each marching to the step of a different pedagogical drum."

Rosenholtz (1991) holds the view that collaboration is also an important element for effective professional development, and further observes that each encourages the other. Her study found that in schools where frequent professional development took place ("learning-enriched schools"), learning to teach was seen as an infinite, on-going process, there was more open-mindedness and acceptance of new ideas, and frequent sharing of resources and ideas between teachers. On the other hand, in schools where little professional development took place, (which Rosenholtz calls "learning-impoverished schools") an average estimate of the time it took to learn to teach was 2.3 years. In these schools, teachers felt that once they were familiar with the curriculum and textbooks, and had established control over their students, they had learned their craft.

As Rosenholtz points out, the isolation of the teacher in the classroom can present a barrier to adopting new methods of teaching: "Their opportunities for learning are circumscribed by their own ability to discern problems, develop alternative solutions, choose among them, and assess the outcome." (1991, p. 73). Without a shared pool of ideas, teachers are more likely to return to tried and tested methods when problems are encountered.

At Emu Plains, where there were three school leaders (when they were all there), the school leaders did not associate with the staff. They were physically separated as well, as the administration block was away from the staff room.

Professional development opportunities

Staff at all schools spoke of the difficulties in accessing appropriate professional development. The two schools in the Regional Centre were able to draw on a wider range of opportunities for professional development because of their close proximity to the District Office, and because of the availability of a limited range of tertiary courses. However, teachers' willingness to take up these opportunities seemed to have more to do with the culture of the school than the proximity of provision.

The two experienced teachers from Mineside were pursuing further qualifications, studying through distance education and attending University courses that were available locally. Both teachers travelled to Perth during their summer break to learn about Reading Recovery. The principal was enrolled in a doctoral program. On-going learning was very much part of the culture at the school. The principal and teachers regularly presented at both local and national conferences. When a rural education professional association held their national conference in the regional centre, all the staff attended the conference. It is worth noting that although other teachers expressed interest in completing professional portfolios, the only ones to actually do so were the two experienced teachers at Mineside. Opportunities for professional development at this school were also extended to Indigenous paraprofessional staff, who reported that they were offered more professional development than they felt able to take up.

Fullan (1991) asserts that staff development and school development cannot be separated from each other; that the collaboration of teachers and the support provided by a school development plan contribute to teachers' willingness to accept and implement new ideas and approaches.

Stallings, cited by Fullan (1991, p. 320) identifies conditions for professional development under which teachers are more likely to accept and effectively implement new ideas.

The cornerstones of the model, according to Stallings, are:

- Learn by doing – try, evaluate, modify, try again
- Link prior knowledge to new information
- Learn by reflecting and solving problems
- Learn in a supportive environment – share problems and successes.

It seems that there are three levels of conditions that appear to be critical in the implementation of any professional development (Hunter, 1997). First, at the administrative level, change is incorporated into the school's development plan. This demands a whole-school commitment to achieving shared goals, together with a clear, shared understanding of what these goals are. At the second level, teacher relationships and the culture of the school play a part in the implementation of new ideas. Finally, there is the part played by the teacher as an individual.

Amongst most of the participants in the study, there appeared to be a perception that professional development is something that occurs outside the classroom. Freiman-

Nemser (2001) suggests that teacher learning occurs across a continuum, and that the nature of this learning changes as teachers become more experienced. The first phase on the continuum is teacher preparation, which occurs prior to teachers' initial appointment in the profession. The second phase, which is the one we are concerned with here, is the Induction phase, which spans approximately the first three years of teaching. According to Freiman-Nemser (2001), the central tasks of this induction phase include the development of local knowledge of the students, the curriculum and the school context; adapting and modifying resources, teaching procedures and expectations to suit the local context and establishing workable routines, respectful and productive relationships, developing a professional identity and learning "in and from practice" (p. 11). Teachers do this by observing, analysing and interpreting their own and others' practice, and in order to do this successfully, they need to be willing to take risks, seek evidence and be open to different interpretations. Further, they need the support of their novice and more experienced colleagues to talk about and analyse their own and their students' work, to consider and reframe problems, and to consider alternative explanations and actions. There is clear potential here for professional development to take place within teachers' own classrooms and those of their colleagues, while at the same time working towards improving educational outcomes for the children they teach.

This chapter has identified a number of factors at every level that have the potential to impact on children's, teachers' and school leaders' capacity to successfully navigate the landscape of literacy learning in rural schools. All of these factors have the potential to individually and cumulatively contribute to the lower achievement of literacy for unacceptably high numbers of children in such schools. The next chapter draws on this information to consider some possible solutions and presents some recommendations for action on a range of levels.

CHAPTER 10:
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It's Not Rocket Science, there are no Magic Bullets, and One Size does not Fit All

The preceding chapters in this study have attempted to provide a rich description of life in rural and remote-rural schools in Western Australia from the point of view of the various participants, and to unravel the complex web of factors that contribute to the trends towards lower levels of literacy achievement in such schools. This apparent complexity makes it difficult to distil a manageable number of recommendations and suggest possible solutions. Despite the time that has elapsed since the collection of the quantitative data for this study , the indications from the national literacy testing program (NAPLAN) are that few gains have been made in the area improving literacy outcomes for students in regional, rural and remote schools in Western Australia. Despite successive governments' stated aims to close the gap in educational outcomes and school attendance rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, concerns about the discrepancy in literacy and other outcomes (O'Keefe, Olney and Angus, 2012) and the impact of reduced attendance on such outcomes (Hancock, Shepherd, Lawrence and Zubrick, 2013) continue to be reported.

Given the trends of the last twenty years, it is likely that rural and remote-rural schools will continue to be staffed by young or inexperienced teachers and school leaders who are new to their leadership positions. It is also likely that the clientele served by these schools will continue to include children from diverse socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds, who enter school with limited knowledge and proficiency in the pre-literate skills and discourses that are valued, and often taken for granted in the school system. We therefore need to consider what supports can be put in place at the various levels to ensure that the students at these schools receive high quality literacy instruction and to ensure that their teachers are able to adequately meet this challenge. From the previous discussion, five over-riding issues emerge that appear to demand attention. The issues are those of effective teaching, differentiated teaching, teachers' cultural competence, teacher and principal turnover, and student attendance.

Effective teaching

An approach to teaching and learning that is strongly based on constructivist principles may not always be the most effective approach for the majority of the children who have not been socialised into the practices of school. As Hart and Risely (1995) have observed, such children's experiences may not have supported them to develop an awareness of what is worth noticing in order to learn school-related concepts, therefore this needs to be made very clear to them at every opportunity so that they can develop the skills they will need to participate in school, particularly as they move on to high school and tertiary education.

All teachers in the study employed the usual range of teaching activities that one would expect to find in early childhood classrooms: modelled and shared reading with big books, modelled and some shared writing, and attention to letter/sound correspondence. However, no teachers shared with the children what the point of the activity was, what they expected the children to learn from the activity or even that "this is what good readers/writers do." Teachers merely performed the activities in front of the children, sometimes engaging them with questions, rather than making the learning "visible" (Hattie, 2009; 2012). In their (2005) study, Louden at al. observed that "It is the teaching practices employed in the implementation of the activity, rather than the activity itself, that distinguishes between the more effective and the less effective teacher" (p.180).

Newly qualified teachers are not expected to have the same degree of competence as more experienced teachers, and this is reflected in the professional standards for teachers (AITSL, n.d.). There is an imperative then, to provide them with the support they need to become effective teachers in the shortest possible time. Like the children they teach, the best support is that which is directed towards their individual points of need at the time that they need it. To this end, having a mentor or coach to provide feedback, offer opportunities for reflective discussion and in some instances provide demonstrations would be the best model of support.

Although the official mentoring processes have improved significantly since the time that data were collected for this study, and current policy provides for mentoring and support for newly appointed teachers there is evidence to suggest that the mentoring experience for new teachers is not always as supportive as it should be, particularly in rural and remote schools where there are few experienced teachers and many school leaders who are also relatively inexperienced (Johnson et al., forthcoming; Sullivan & Johnson, 2012; Sullivan & Morrison, 2014). Given the degree of complexity in rural and remote

contexts, consideration needs to be given to how mentoring and support systems can be improved for teachers in these settings, and further, how the quality of these supports can be monitored. This suggests a need for further inquiry to identify effective, sustainable and manageable ways of mentoring early career teachers who are posted to remote and remote-rural locations.

Consideration should be given to the ways in which early career teachers can be supported in their classrooms to develop both their instructional skills and their management skills so that they can attend more fully to children's learning. In the absence of immediate access to experienced teachers who can offer supports, a range of alternative supports might be made available; for instance, on-line learning communities, video recording of lessons for feedback, an on-line mentor for ongoing support, or extra release time/travel time to a larger centre for intensive professional learning.

Differentiated teaching

One of the capabilities that distinguishes an effective teacher is the ability to provide instruction that is responsive to the children's needs, both at the level of the whole class and for individuals. Grouping children for instruction is a good start, and this involves both being aware of individual children's developing knowledge and having a good understanding of the processes involved in reading and writing so that the instruction can be targeted to the needs of the individual. However, being able to respond to children's instructional needs and scaffold their learning in the whole group situation is also important. A knowledgeable teacher will be able to monitor what the children are taking from the lesson as the lesson proceeds and adjust their instruction as they go, by adjusting explanations and demonstrations, returning to a point for clarification or directing questions that are accurately pitched towards promoting children's thinking. This demands both clarity about what is being taught and a good understanding of the processes and skills that are the focus of the teaching. Perhaps as a result of the focus that is directed towards behaviour management during pre-service practical experiences, the teachers in this study tended to direct a great deal of their attention towards monitoring children's behaviour, rather than their learning. Re-directing children's attention to the learning and a more gently persistent approach to behaviour management (for example, starting each day with a reminder of the desired behaviours) would possibly be more effective for both teachers and students and at the same time allow teachers to pay closer attention to what the children were learning. The more experienced teachers tended to ignore behaviours such as playing with others' hair or shoelaces and allow children more movement – for

instance allowing them to leave the mat area and then rejoin the group – as long as this was not disruptive to the rest of the class.

The assessment data, collected over three years, quite clearly shows two significant aspects of the children's learning that need to be taken into consideration: first, the variation in children's literacy knowledge and understanding across any particular classroom, and second, the variation in the rate of progress made by children at the same year level. In order to target children at their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1987) differentiated teaching is required in all classrooms. Some teachers had designed Individual Education Plans for individual students who were at the critically low end of the achievement spectrum and one or two teachers had managed to group their children into three different ability groups: high, middle and low achievers. This is a start, but in almost all classrooms there was such an extreme degree of variation between what children knew and their individual teaching needs, that this approach to targeting instruction did not really go far enough.

Mostly, due to classroom management reasons, small group work was supported by the use of worksheets, rather than tailored instruction. While there were demonstrations of how to complete the worksheets, there was no checking for real understanding or demonstration of skills through small group microteaching, and there was very little evidence of guided practice. It is questionable what the children, at least those who were in need of the most support, would be learning in the small group situations. After initial demonstrations and once they were returned to their seats, few of these children made any attempt to actually complete the worksheets, unless they were individually supported by an adult.

Differentiated teaching is most effective when it is informed by regular, on-going assessment and collection of data. Therefore, there is a requirement for teachers to be knowledgeable about how to monitor and assess their students as part of their daily teaching routines. They need to know how to record and analyse these data in ways that can be made accessible to others, and they should be able to accurately interpret the assessments so that they can make informed teaching decisions that will effectively support each of their students on a day-by-day basis at their individual level of need. Given the frequent changes in personnel in such schools, workable procedures for collection, storage, access and interpretation of assessment and monitoring data to inform teaching has to receive sufficient attention to ensure this is readily available at the whole-school, or perhaps, given the transience of many students, the whole-district level.

It is recommended that teachers, in particular those who are newly qualified, be supported to draw on available assessment and monitoring data to inform their teaching, so that they can be sure their efforts are being directed where they are most needed. Consideration should be given to whole-school approaches to ongoing assessment for learning, and to the management, storage and accessibility of assessment data. Early career teachers may need support from more experienced teachers to interpret assessment data and use this to plan their teaching. In the absence of experienced teachers in the school, this support may initially need to be provided on-line.

Cultural competence

Since the data were collected for this study, more attention has been given in pre-service courses to developing teachers' cultural competence in educational settings. Although this is clearly a positive move, the focus of pre-service courses tends to be somewhat generic in preparing teachers to go anywhere in the state. This does not always prepare teachers satisfactorily for the range of contexts in which they may find themselves, or give them the local and community knowledge they need to be entirely effective. As well as this generic cultural learning, it would assist new teachers, and possibly school-community relationships in general if they were to be given some orientation to the local community in terms of their expectations and relationships with the school, and it would possibly be most effective if the community were to work with the school at the local level to provide this.

In addition to cultural competence training provided at the pre-service and/or system level, newly appointed teachers need to be provided with local orientations to their new community, so that important resources and contacts are identified and community expectations are made clear.

A recent (Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kollpenuk & Robinson, 2012) study of pre-service teacher preparation for teaching Indigenous students found that even though most teacher education courses have compulsory or elective units for Indigenous education, only 30 per cent of non-Indigenous teachers graduating from these courses between 2009 and 2011 had actually completed any units in Indigenous education. Moreover, the study observed that the focus of most of the available units was on Aboriginal history and culture, rather than approaches to pedagogy. It should be noted, however, that these data were gathered through focus group interviews from only 21 teachers, none of whom were from Western Australia.

Teacher and school leader turnover

The high turnover of teachers and school leaders in some schools had the potential to significantly disrupt students' learning and in addition, alienate the local community. At the classroom level, a change of teacher often meant a change in teaching philosophy or approach, a change in routines and a change in expectations as well as the disruption of teacher-student relationships. Even small changes had the capacity to add to children's confusion, especially in the absence of clear, explicit learning intentions and expectations. Additionally, constantly having a teaching staff that is almost exclusively made up of newly graduated teachers requiring a high degree of support imposes extra pressures on school leaders who are already managing complex situations.

Effective leadership has been identified as an important factor in managing and maintaining improved literacy outcomes (Dempster et al., 2012; Konza, n.d.; Lowe, 2006; Ofsted, 2010). At the school level, frequent changes in school leadership meant that school policies were constantly being reconstructed and reinterpreted. As well as negotiating and maintaining effective relationships with the community, school leaders are important players in establishing a shared vision for the school community, providing a supportive culture in which teachers and students can learn, and setting expectations for students, parents and teachers. Constantly shifting expectations and haphazard attempts to improve attendance, behaviour and literacy outcomes are likely to have little, if any impact. School-based initiatives to address these issues need to have a clear focus and be relentless, therefore quality and consistency in school leadership is key.

Incentives such as the *Country Incentives Package* appeared to be successful in that this initiative persuaded at least two of the teachers to stay on at their schools when initially they had intended to move on at the end of one year. Currently, there are a few similar incentives available, such as the rural teacher scholarship, which offers a final year scholarship to pre-service teachers intending to take up a position in designated rural school. However, these are mostly allocated to particular areas of teacher shortage such as secondary maths and science. There is potential for similar incentive schemes to be extended to make a three year commitment a more attractive proposition to both teachers and school principals. Possibilities to explore might include scholarships that would pay university fees for post graduate study.

Consideration needs to be given to the development of a range of incentives that will encourage teachers and school leaders to commit to longer-term positions in difficult to staff rural and remote locations.

Attendance

The issue of attendance is a critical one; children cannot be taught if they are not in school in the first place. When they miss school for extended periods of time, children's learning has the potential to regress, because they do not have opportunities to practise what they have just learnt. However, the issue is much more complex than it appears on the surface. First, for many Indigenous families, some degree of mobility is connected to their cultural obligations, their lifestyle and their identity. This has to be acknowledged and to some extent accommodated by education systems. This does not absolve parents from ensuring that their children attend school, but school systems could work together to explore ways to be more flexible in supporting children to move more seamlessly from school to school without significant interruptions to their learning.

Second, children need to want to come to school. When a child is constantly reprimanded for behaving in ways which seem natural and normal to them; when they feel they are constantly singled out for reprimand; when they are given tasks to do that have not been adequately explained or that are beyond their ability to do without support; when teachers make it clear that they do not enjoy teaching them, it is hardly surprising that options other than going to school are a lot more attractive. If their parents also had similar negative experiences at school, they are unlikely to be particularly active in ensuring children's attendance, especially when that attendance requires some degree of extra effort on their part. Further, when parents see their child making little progress at school from one year to the next, it would be hard to persuade them about the necessity of making sure their child attends school every day.

Even with the best teachers and the best instruction, it is impossible to teach children if they are not in school. It seems clear that student attendance is an issue where improvements will take time. Much of the literature around this issue provides explanations, rather than solutions. However, there are examples of initiatives that have been successful at the local level (see, for example, Bourke, Rigby & Burden, 2000; Sarra, 2003). At the national level, this issue needs to be given the same public attention as issues such as the effects of alcohol and smoking, or road safety. It also seems clear that not only do there need to be initiatives to address this issue at national and state levels as well as at the system level, but also that every school needs to develop their own initiatives, and that these must be developed in consultation with the local community and implemented with community support, and while they should be long-term and consistent, they also need to

be sufficiently flexible to accommodate change as required. To achieve this, school leaders will need to work with and build positive relationships with community members.

Priority needs to be given at all levels (national, state and local) to promoting to all parents the importance of their child's attendance at school and to developing respectful and workable solutions to the issue of children's attendance. At the local level, these initiatives need to be developed in consultation with the local community.

It's not rocket science

Reading and writing in English are complex skills, but they are not rocket science. Although there is still much to learn, there is now a substantial body of literature, "scientific" and otherwise, that largely concurs about what children need to be able to do in order to read and write effectively. In order to be able to read and write, children need to be able to manipulate the alphabetic code, and this mastery needs to become automatic and fluent by about year two, in order to make available the cognitive space needed to understand and produce the reading and writing needed for learning across all curriculum areas. It is clear that for many children, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, that this is not happening as it should. It is also clear from studies such as the Clackmannanshire project (Johnston & Watson, 2005a; 2005b) and the Yorke and Mid-North literacy project (Konza, n.d.) that this is not an impossible goal.

It is crucial that children are constantly monitored and provided with phonological awareness training, from the moment they enter the school system. Phonological awareness can be developed at numerous times during the day in kindergarten, pre-primary and year one through play-based activities. It is also important that children's ear-health is maintained as well as possible, and therefore it would be beneficial for teachers in these contexts to be provided with training in this area, rather than leaving it to intermittent visits from health professionals, or worse, to chance. From the pre-primary year, children should be taught to orally blend and segment words through play-based activities and where possible using concrete materials, with the aim of introducing phoneme/grapheme correspondences before the end of the pre-primary year, and having children secure in phonics knowledge by the end of year two. A sequential, synthetic approach to teaching phonics using a program such as Letters and Sounds (Department for Education and Skills, 2007) would support this learning and also provide a framework for new teachers to work to.

Equally, attention needs to be given to developing children's repertoires of knowledge and skills that will support language comprehension processes, including building vocabulary knowledge, their understanding and use of literate discourses and building experiences that will support comprehension. The results of a study by Oakhill, Cain and Bryant (2010, p.463) suggest that "although word reading and comprehension skill are correlated, distinctly different abilities account for variance in these subskills", and that development of these two components of reading may occur along different trajectories. Subskills that were identified as contributing to comprehension were text integration, knowledge about story structure, metacognitive monitoring and working memory. Oakhill et al. (2010) also identified vocabulary as a contributing subskill, but made the point that it was the "richness of the child's semantic representations" (p. 463) which made the difference. In other words, for vocabulary to contribute to comprehension, children did not just have to know the words, but have a deep understanding of their meaning.

It is clear from the results of this study that the majority of children who participated did not achieve these goals, and the children who did achieve them did so largely because of the congruence between the unspoken expectations of the school and the ways in which they had been socialised at home. Although there was attention to phonics instruction in every school, this was often haphazard and some cases, ill-conceived. All children participated in shared and modelled reading and writing events; however a lot of the interaction that occurred around these events, when it was not being interrupted by the perceived necessity to control children's behaviour, involved children trying to guess the answer that the teacher wanted to hear, rather than discussing the writers' intentions and readers' possible interpretations of texts.

It is important, therefore that children experience a literacy program that scaffolds their access and understanding of high quality texts, including Australian and Indigenous Australian literature, poetry, classic literature and a range of non-fiction texts. Instruction should be provided to develop children's repertoire of oral language practices, their vocabulary knowledge and teach them strategies for comprehension of such texts.There are no "magic bullets"

Perhaps as a consequence of an increased focus on accountability and public scrutiny, it seems that school leaders, teachers and members of the community are looking for the "magic bullet", and there are plenty of people in the land of educational publishing who are ready and willing to respond – generally at a sizeable price. Examples of materials

that have been popular in Western Australia over the last ten or so years are materials from *Diana Rigg*, *THRASS, Letterland, Jolly Phonics,* and *Fitzroy Readers*. Some of these resources are supported by teacher professional development, but this comes at a cost, and there is a possibility that, given a limited budget, a school may spend money on the materials but forgo the professional development; after all, a teacher can read the instruction manual.

It is important to understand that resources do not do the teaching – they support it, and to some extent, different resources reflect a particular philosophy about teaching. There needs to be recognition that it is the teacher who makes the difference (Darling-Hammond, 2000; 2007; Hattie, 2003; 2009; 2012; Rowe, 2004), so it stands to reason that effort should be given to developing the capacity of human resources (that is, teacher knowledge), rather than spending huge amounts of money on physical resources that seem to disappear from schools anyway. Hattie (2012) suggests that too often, it is the resources which drive teachers' planning – when planning should be driven by the needs of the students. It must be remembered that it is not the resources or even the approach, but the way in which it is implemented that will make the difference – and this relies on teacher knowledge.

In order to make a difference in such contexts, teaching needs to be explicit, systematic, consistent and relentless and it needs to be recognised that this is hard work, particularly for early career teachers who at this stage of their professional lives may have to give their conscious attention to everything that they do and every decision that they make.

One size does not fit all

A possible reason for the limited success of a number of initiatives in the past may be a lack of consideration for specific contexts and individual needs. School communities are made up of people; with differing dispositions, personalities, resources and needs. These all change from time to time as the various participants come and go, grow and change. When this is taken into consideration, it seems ludicrous that an initiative that has worked in one particular community, context or moment in time can automatically be transferred to another with the same expectations of success. The "What Works" (http://www.whatworks.edu.au/) materials and web site have a repository of case studies and ideas which could serve as a starting point for schools, teachers and parents to

consider together what practices might be effective in their particular community or context.

Recommendations: How are they to be achieved?

There is general consensus that teacher quality has the capacity to impact student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hattie, 2003; 2009; 2012; Rowe, 2004). The remote and rural school contexts to which many newly qualified teachers are posted typically serve communities which are socially and culturally diverse. It cannot and should not be expected that newly qualified teachers would be able to demonstrate the degree of effectiveness as an experienced teacher, and this is reflected in the (AITSL) teacher standards. Successful completion of a teacher preparation qualification and teacher registration suggests that the majority of newly qualified teachers are capable, given time and experience, of developing into highly effective teachers, but when they are placed in complex and challenging locations with limited or no support, this capacity has the potential to be seriously compromised. The provision of supports that will assist these teachers to develop their teaching competence in the shortest possible time needs to be given serious attention if we are to improve literacy outcomes in such schools.

Some of the recommendations outlined above would be relatively easy to achieve; others may take more time, effort and problem solving in order to achieve a workable solution. The issue of student attendance, for instance, remains a vexed and ongoing problem which extends beyond the school system. While teachers ultimately have the power to make school a positive experience for students, both in terms of their learning and the relationships they develop with their students, for school attendance to improve overall, there clearly needs to be joint initiatives that involve negotiations and shared goals from both the school and the community. The relationships that the school will develop with the community to facilitate both shared goals for attendance and community-school relations generally is to a great extent dependent on the school leadership.

Additionally, school leaders are largely responsible for ensuring that newly appointed teachers receive their full entitlements in terms of induction, mentoring and support, and for local interpretation of the policies that have been developed to provide teachers with that support. Tying as much as possible of this staff development to full teacher registration may appear to be an imposition, but it does mean that school leaders are bound to make sure their early career teachers have to participate in the graduate teacher modules, together with some form of mentoring program. What is more difficult, however,

is ensuring that new teachers receive high quality mentoring, especially if they are located some geographical distance from their mentor.

Given the complexity of the remote and rural context, early career teachers appointed to such schools could be provided with extra and ongoing professional development in practices that would support them with the delivery of their literacy teaching; this could include training in the principles and implementation of assessment for learning, explicit teaching and further development of their understanding of processes for, reading, writing and spoken communication in Standard Australian English. This professional development could involve something like a week spent in a difficult to staff metropolitan or regional school, observing expert teachers and undertaking small group teaching under supervision, with provision for feedback. An experience such as this could then be followed up with action learning in their own classroom and participating in an on-line professional learning community with a mentor and other early career teachers in similar contexts.

Such a program of professional development would clearly involve some costs, and may even require altered staffing formulae in remote and rural schools to provide teachers with release time to carry out professional learning. However, building the capacity of teachers seems to be a worthwhile investment, especially if this results in a more successful experience for both teachers and children.

There are other supports that would be easier to put in place. Whole-school approaches to literacy instruction, data collection and management would ensure consistency for both children and teachers. It has already been suggested that children who are from diverse cultural backgrounds can spend a lot of their time trying to work out the rules and routines of the classroom. This is taking their cognitive attention away from learning. When children move between schools, or when they have a series of different teachers, each with their own approach to teaching and varying sets of expectations in terms of what children will do and achieve, for some children this will be difficult to manage. In order to maximise children's attention to the very important task of learning, it makes sense to have the least possible diversity in instructional routines, classroom rules and expectations of behaviour. This may mean that schools prescribe general instructional routines across classes and that these remain similar, or only small adjustments are made as children progress through the year levels. It may even be worth taking the time early in the school year to teach the children some of the routines before any actual learning is attempted.

The implementation of the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy (Department of Education, Western Australia, n.d.) was implemented to address the issue of consistency in literacy teaching across schools by introducing the routine of a literacy block. This is a good start but is in need of some modification. First, there needs to be a much more systematic and explicit approach to phonological awareness and phonics instruction, and second, there needs to be more attention to higher-level thinking, developing children's oral language repertoires, vocabulary and literate discourses. Using Gough and Tunmer's (1986) multi-dimensional model of reading as a framework for thinking about instruction may be a way to ensure that sufficient attention is given to processes which would support both word recognition and language comprehension and move teachers' thinking away from the either/or thinking that seems to be so prevalent in the popular media and even in some schools. There are readily and cheaply available some high quality materials to support the teaching of phonological awareness and decoding, for instance, *Letters and Sounds* (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). As well as providing a sequence for teaching phonological awareness skills, and introducing phoneme/grapheme correspondences, this resource provides an overview of the generic teaching sequence (review, introduce new learning, practice, apply) and gives suggestions for engaging and play-based practice activities that children can carry out, first with teacher support and then independently.

A comprehensive approach to teaching literacy

In the section that follows, a conceptual framework is offered that might support newly appointed and aspiring principals to consider how they might frame a whole-school approach to teaching beginning and early literacy skills. This conceptual framework could also assist early career teachers to think more strategically about how they teach and assess young children's literacy.

There can be no doubt that reading is a complex process. Effective reading involves the simultaneous and strategic articulation of a range of skills and knowledge that combine to successfully create meaning for the reader. The deep orthographic code that is used to represent the English language presents a level of complexity that can be difficult to master. The ultimate goal of reading anything is to extract meaning, so mastery of the code is not enough on its own. Comprehension depends on understanding words and ideas as well as sentence structures and the ways in which texts are organised, connecting new ideas to what is already known and ultimately, understanding the author's intent. Therefore the reading of any text does not occur in a vacuum, but is to some extent

dependent on the socio-cultural and socio-political context in which the reading takes place.

Writing is even more complex. The mastery of the mechanics of writing involves not only production of the code (rather than reception) but also the fine motor skills involved in manipulating the pen, pencil or keyboard. Rather than interpreting meaning, the writer has to consider how meaning will be interpreted by their audience and consciously make decisions about word choices and the grammatical conventions of the English language to be able to successfully manipulate this.

Research into the processes of reading and writing has generated many models. Alvermann, Unrau and Ruddell (2013) explain models as metaphors to explain and represent a particular view or theory about a particular process. They are constructed and shaped by a particular view of what is important in the process and further influenced by broader views of the time about what is worth paying attention to. Therefore, any one model or theory is a construct; a way of seeing a process through a particular viewpoint. As much as the politicians and others would like to strive for it, there can be no absolute truth about the process of reading, only interpretations of it: "…our limited capacity to observe, measure, collect information and describe processes precisely limits the accuracy of a reading model" (Alvermann, Unrau and Ruddell, 2013, p.691). Further, different epistemological orientations generate waves of theory which produce theoretical models that reflect what is seen to be important by a particular group of people at a particular moment in history. This has resulted in a range of models which are grounded in cognitive theory, socio-cultural theory, socio-political and critical theory, or neurological theory, depending on what a particular theorist wishes to make the focus of study. In addition, Cassidy, Valadez and Garrett (2010) have suggested that many models are reductionist and that often they fail to accurately render the complexity of the process in question.

Nevertheless, models do serve a useful purpose in providing a framework for reference and making visible important aspects of what is a complex process. McKenna and Dougherty Stahl (2015, p. 2) claim that all reading assessment (and by implication, reading instruction) is based on some kind of model, and that a model serves as a "roadmap" to help the reading teacher navigate the territory of instruction. They further suggest that a teacher's model can range from being haphazard to explicitly formulated. The challenge here is to provide early career teachers with a conceptual model of reading instruction which can capture to some extent the complexity of the reading process but also provide clarity about what needs to be attended to in reading instruction, and at the

same time allow for extension as teachers continue to develop and deepen their understanding. The following paragraphs briefly explore some of the models of reading that have typically been used to help teachers to understand the reading process and inform their literacy instruction.

A model of reading that has come to be identified as the "three cueing system" (Adams, 1998) is a popular framework for thinking about reading instruction and is presented with some modification in the various iterations of the First Steps Reading Resource Books (Annandale et. al., 2008; Education Department of Western Australia, 1997). This model can trace its origins back to the work of Pearson (1976) and before that to Goodman (1965). This view of the reading process heavily informed the work of Marie Clay (1972; 1979; 1985) and is still evident in the approach taken by Reading Recovery teachers.   When the National Literacy Strategy was developed in the UK, this model informed the development of their "searchlights model" (Rose, 2006).   The premise of this model is that young children's early reading attempts are informed by three sources of linguistic information: their (semantic) knowledge of what the words mean (and by association, other sources of information such as accompanying pictures or their background knowledge about a topic); their (syntactic) knowledge of how words are ordered in sentences and their (graphophonic) knowledge about how words are spelt or how sounds are represented by letters. Effective readers draw on these sources of information and cross-check one source against the others to confirm that they are making meaning from what they read. In skilled reading, this process happens quickly and automatically but when one source is misused or misread, meaning is interrupted and the reader must use "fix up strategies" such as re-reading and self-correcting to return to meaningful reading.

Although this model has clearly stood the test of time, Adams (1998) suggests that the ideas conveyed by this model have deviated over time from the original intention. The original intention, she claims, was that the semantic and syntactic cues would be used to confirm the veracity of information from the graphophonic cue. However, it seems that over time, the semantic cue in particular may have been over-emphasised as the primary source of information with confirmation coming from the syntactic and graphophonic cues. Adams (1998, p. 89) says: "If the intended message of the three-cueing system was originally that teachers should take care not to overemphasize phonics to the neglect of comprehension, its received message has broadly become that teachers should minimize attention to phonics lest it compete with comprehension."

This model may be less helpful when children's linguistic resources are not shared with those in the texts that they engage with. For many of the children in this study, the syntactic patterns of their oral language were not those found in literate texts, and frequently their life experiences and funds of knowledge were not represented in the texts with which they engaged with at school. The implication is that this left them with limited information that they could draw on from the cues, particularly if they were encouraged to draw first on the semantic and syntactic cues when their grapho-phonic knowledge was not secure. In New Zealand, Reading Recovery has been found to be less successful for children from diverse cultural groups such as Māori and Pasifika (Tunmer et al, 2013), who like many of the children in this study would typically use syntactic patterns and draw on semantic understandings that are different from those presented in typical school texts. An evaluation of Reading Recovery conducted by Center et al (1995) similarly concluded that the approach taken by Reading Recovery was likely to be less effective for children with under-developed metalinguistic knowledge.

Following the publication of the Rose Review (Rose, 2006), the National Literacy strategy in the UK moved away from the use of the "searchlights" model and have adopted Gough and Tunmer's (1986) model of reading as their preferred conceptual framework for the teaching of early reading. This view of reading suggests that reading is the *product* of two distinct sets of processes; word recognition processes and language comprehension skills. Both sets of skills are necessary but neither set of processes on its own is sufficient to support effective reading.

The adoption of Gough and Tunmer's (1986) model of reading in the United Kingdom as a framework for beginning reading instruction has been criticised (Purcell-Gates, 2009) as reducing the complex process of reading to only two skills; those of decoding and comprehension. Purcell Gates (2009) claims that this view fails to take into account the socio-cultural factors that are at play in learning to read and that failure to acknowledge this has the potential to further marginalise groups of students who are already at risk of underachievement in the school system.

Stuart, Stainthorp and Snowling (2008; 2009) have countered these arguments, explaining that this view of reading is presented not as two individual skills, but as two *dimensions, or sets* of skills, each complex in their own right. They further point out that this view is offered as a way of thinking about reading for *beginning* readers, who need to master the alphabetic code in order to access the meaning of a written text. Stuart, Stainthorp and Snowling (2008; 2009) acknowledge the role played by the socio-cultural

context in learning to read, and claim that limiting the model to cognitive and linguistic processes does not disregard this role; that the processes outlined in the model are essential sets of skills to be developed whatever the socio-cultural context in which learning takes place. The socio-cultural aspects of reading sit in the language comprehension processes dimension, and as Stuart, Stainthorp and Snowling (2008; 2009) point out, these processes begin long before students enter school and will continue to develop through life as more experiences are encountered. The word recognition processes, on the other hand, are finite or constrained skills (Paris, 2005) which can ideally be taught within a relatively short time and allow teachers to turn their attention more completely to language comprehension processes.

Scarborough (2001) uses the metaphor of a rope to describe reading acquisition. Like Gough and Tunmer, she identifies word recognition and language comprehension as two major sets of processes, or strands of the rope, but each of these major strands consists of a number of component strands, or sub-skills. The word recognition strand is made up from minor strands of phonological awareness, decoding skills and sight word recognition, which become increasingly intertwined and automatic as proficiency develops. The language comprehension strand comprises sub-strands of background knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of language structures, verbal reasoning such as inference and meta-knowledge about literacy, and the integration of these becomes increasingly strategic. Similarly, as proficiency develops, the two major strands become more integrated and more closely woven together to facilitate skilled reading.

Over the last half of the twentieth century, a number of large-scale studies have been conducted in an attempt to identify the most effective means of teaching beginning reading (Adams, 1990; Chall,1967; 1996). As we moved into the twenty-first century, this issue was re-visited through large scale inquiries in the United States (National Reading Panel, 2000), Australia (Rowe, 2005) and Britain (Rose, 2006). There has been some on-going criticism (Cassidy, Valadez and Garrett, 2010) that because only studies of experimental or quasi-experimental design were included in the corpus of studies that were reviewed by the National Reading Panel, this precluded other worthwhile research studies from the meta-analysis. However, what is most compelling about all these studies is the on-going consistency of the conclusions; that reading instruction needs to incorporate both code-based and meaning-based instruction. The report of the National Reading Panel (2000) drew attention to five specific areas for instruction: phoneme awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension and oral reading fluency.

Konza (2010) has added the element of oral language to these areas for instruction, reasoning that oral language competence provides the foundation for learning to read, and drawing on the work of the National Early Literacy Panel (2008), which identified oral language as one of a number of "precursor literacy skills" which had medium to large predictive relationships with later measures of literacy development" (p. 3). Oral language development was not identified as significant in the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000) because the panel only looked at studies that related to children above the age of five years. The National Early Literacy Panel sought to redress this by examining studies which were conducted with children aged from birth to five years.

For students who have not yet been exposed to the language of schooling and story books, but who are competent users of the variety of language used in their homes and communities, attention to oral language as they enter school provides opportunities to build bridges between their home language and the language of school to provide a foundation for the development of other important literacy skills. The figure below attempts to demonstrate the relationship between the various skills with the aim of demonstrating how each contributes to skilled reading. While it is acknowledged that this framework once again reduces what is a complex set of skills to a simple framework, it is argued that it is constructed this way to provide some clarity to teachers about what needs to be attended to in reading instruction.
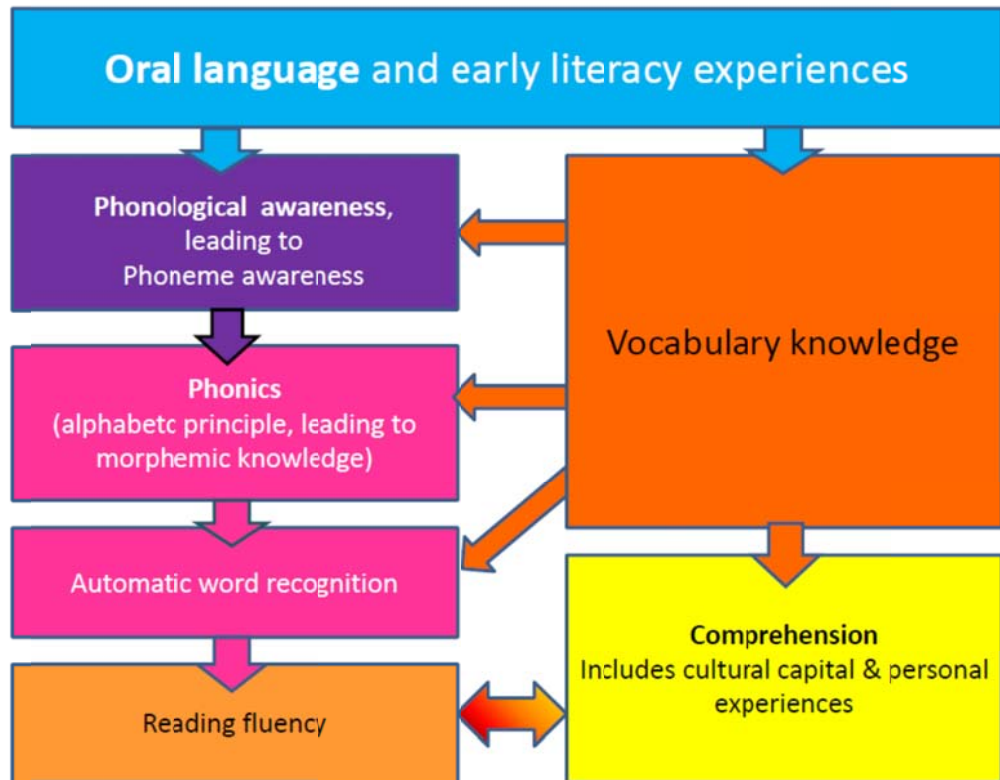
Figure 10.1 The relationship between early literacy skills and knowledge.

Oral language is the major competence that young children bring with them when they first enter the school system. At this point, most children have developed the ability to effectively communicate with those around them in their homes and their communities. However, for children who use a different variety of oral language in their community to the more academic variety used in school, their oral language competence will not continue to serve them sufficiently well as they move through the school system, and their oral language repertoire therefore needs to be extended to include more literary language patterns and academic vocabulary that will support their interaction with school texts, as well as the types of interactions that will support their learning (Edwards-Groves, Anstey and Bull, 2014).

Additionally, most children will bring to school with them some kind of early experiences with print. These experiences can range from daily interaction with a range of print types, including frequent and sustained interactions with quality children's literature and opportunities for mark-making on paper and other media, to interactions that are perhaps limited to environmental print such as shop and street signs and other community-based shared texts. There may not be writing implements available in the home, limiting children's opportunities for experimental mark-making. Frequent early experiences with a

range of print materials develop children's understandings about how print works, together with their meta-language for talking about print and print-related concepts. Once again, the children whose early experiences with print are broader and most closely match with the ways in which print is used in school, will be advantaged when they enter the formal school system, so attention needs to be given to making sure that all young children have access to these kinds of experiences as they enter the school system, and it should not be assumed that they bring these experiences with them.

The elements of vocabulary and phonological awareness are related to children's continuing oral language development. Young children's vocabulary development begins as part of their oral language development, but as they get older it develops also as a result of their encounters with new words in written texts (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013), which until they are themselves proficient readers, are mediated by adult-led interactions with such texts. Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2008; 2013) developed a three-tier classification of words: tier one words are words that occur in everyday conversation and are therefore almost universally known and used, tier two words are high frequency but more sophisticated words, therefore they have high utility but tend to be associated with more literate or academic language, and tier three words are words are technical or highly subject-specific, therefore are low-frequency. There are also varying degrees of what it means to "know" a word (Dale, O'Rourke and Baumann, cited by Frey and Fisher, 2009, p. 7), ranging from a general sense of the meaning derived from context, to a deep understanding of the word as it may be used in multiple contexts and a knowledge of its etymological roots that supports understanding when the word is encountered in unfamiliar contexts. When children encounter words frequently and in multiple contexts, their understanding of the word is likely to be deeper.

Children who have an interest in words are more likely to be playful with language attend to other aspects of words, such as their sound and structure. Phonological awareness is a hierarchy of skills which attends to the sound structure of words, as opposed to meaning, and begins with being able to identify individual words, compare long words with short words, identify rhyme and alliteration in words, through to being able to isolate, blend, segment and ultimately manipulate the smallest individual sounds, or phonemes in words (Badenhop, 1992; Gillon, 2004; Goswami & Bryant, 1990). This highest level of phonemic awareness is a necessary precursor skill to phonics (and therefore to both decoding and encoding words), as without it, children would be unable to isolate the individual sounds of English in order to match them and represent them with the

alphabetic code. Once the alphabetic principle is well established, phonics knowledge leads to students being familiar with increasingly more complex orthographic patterns, including affixes and other morphemes, which allows them to start recognising familiar letter strings and chunks of words and to use these for decoding, rather than relying on the translation of individual phoneme-grapheme correspondences. As students become more proficient with this skill, their repertoire of automatically recognised words increases, as does their ability to rapidly decode previously unencountered words. Vocabulary knowledge also supports this skill, because if an unknown printed word is in a child's spoken vocabulary and there are some irregularities in the spelling, the child can make the match with relative ease, whereas if they have never heard the word before, they have nothing on which to "hook" their attempts at decoding.

Fluent reading is the result of a number of factors all working smoothly together (Rasinski & Samuels, 2011; Torgesen, & Hudson 2006). Fluent oral reading is demonstrated by well-paced, smooth and prosodic reading. Hudson, Lane and Pullen (2005) suggest that accuracy and automaticity in decoding, along with prosodic reading, all contribute to reading fluency. Fluent reading is important for comprehension because when less cognitive attention has to be given to decoding the words, the more it can be directed towards understanding and monitoring the meaning of what is being read. As a consequence, there seems to be a reciprocal relationship between comprehension and fluency, as prosodic reading logically relies on at least some understanding and monitoring of meaning.

Comprehension can be viewed as the ultimate goal of all reading activity, as there is no point in reading if what is read is not understood, and the ultimate aim would be to have readers understand texts not only at the literal level, but to be able to also read between the lines, in order to identify and effectively critique the sub-text of what is being read. This has the potential to be a particularly important competency for people who belong to marginalised groups. To comprehend effectively, readers need to be able to integrate what they already know to new information, so comprehension is often dependent on the reader's cultural capital and personal experiences. Once again, when these are limited, or are not a good match with the ideas in the texts that are being read, there is a need to extend the readers' repertoires of background knowledge and experience so that effective comprehension can be supported (Ellery and Rosenboom, 2011; Wilhelm, 2002).

The links between a well-developed vocabulary and effective comprehension have been well established (reference), as is, clearly, the necessity to be able to decode the words in the first place. However, comprehension instruction should not be left until other skills are already established, but can be developed initially through oral language activities.

While this framework for thinking about the reading process does not cover every possible aspect, it does cover those that are critical and therefore attention to this framework should provide clarity and focus for early career teachers to think about their literacy instruction, all the while with the intention that the framework can be built upon and extended as teachers' knowledge, understanding and proficiency develops.

The main understandings to be drawn from the use of this framework and the discussion around it are:

- Reading (and writing) cannot take place without mastery of the written code, and this would be best taught as early and quickly as possible to develop automaticity and allow the focus to be turned to other elements;

- Reading involves language comprehension processes as well as decoding processes, and these two sets of processes can be taught simultaneously;

- For some children whose socio-cultural experiences prior to school are a close match with those of the school and school reading books, language comprehension processes are well established when they arrive at school;

- For children whose prior to school socio-cultural experiences are not a close match, these processes will need to be explicitly taught.

There are two further points to note here; the first is that this study and discussion relates to *beginning* readers – that is, children who are in the process of acquiring the skills needed to become school-literate, and the second is that the socio-cultural context in which this acquisition is taking place is the school. The focus of the discussion therefore is on the foundation skills that children will need in order to successfully navigate the school system as they get older. While it is acknowledged that the children brought with them to school a wealth of knowledge that gave them social and cultural capital in their communities, much of this was not useful in the school system. Parents were very clear that they saw the role of the school as being able to provide (much more effectively than

they could themselves) their children with the capital they would need to be successful through school and in the wider (predominantly Anglo) community. Having established that all of these elements need attention in early years' classrooms, we now turn our attention to how this might be effectively managed by early career teachers in remote-rural contexts, taking into account the conditions that typically characterise such locations.

In a discussion of effective reading instruction, Rupley, Blair and Nichols (2009) suggest that most learning outcomes in reading instruction can be classified as either skills or cognitive strategies. Skills can be described as specific, automatically occurring routines that involve lower-level cognitive processing which occurs almost without attention, whereas strategies are less specific in nature, involve higher level cognitive processing and demand intentional and deliberate procedures (Afflerbach, Pearson and Paris, 2008; Rupley, Blair and Nichols, 2009). While Afflerbach, Pearson and Paris (2008) suggest that processes that will ultimately become skills may initially demand strategic action, and that as learners become more skilled there is movement from effortful and deliberate to automatic and fluent processing, they also acknowledge that even as skills become automatic and fluent, strategic processing will also continue to define accomplished reading. Paris's (2005) notion of constrained and unconstrained skills is useful here, as the constrained skills, by their very nature, are those that can be developed to a degree of fluency and automaticity relatively quickly, whereas the unconstrained skills continue to develop over the course of a lifetime and will continue to demand ongoing strategic action.

Rupley, Blair and Nichols (2009) suggest that skill instruction and cognitive strategy instruction require qualitatively different approaches. While both types of learning require modelling and explicit explanation, followed by guided practice and opportunities to apply the learning in a variety of contexts, they suggest that skills can be initially taught in isolation and then transferred to authentic reading situations, whereas cognitive strategies require more discussion and modelling of thought processes, and therefore require extended opportunities for guided practice and application. Word recognition processes tend to draw mostly on constrained skills that could be defined in Rupley, Blair and Nichols' (2009) terms as skills and the aim is to rapidly develop automaticity in these skills. Language comprehension skills, on the other hand, are less constrained and tend to involve cognitive strategies which will continue to develop with increasing complexity. Consequentially, each set of processes may require slightly differing pedagogical approaches.

Teaching word recognition processes

Teaching word recognition processes involves teaching of both phonological and phonics skills. Teaching phonological awareness can begin in Kindergarten and continue through the pre-primary year, using play-based activities and taking advantage of multiple, short opportunities throughout the day in a variety of contexts, for instance reading rhyming books, playing skipping games, noticing names or labels of objects which rhyme or start with the same sound. Teaching can draw on a combination of incidental and intentional opportunities and should lead to working at the phoneme level as children are introduced to phonics. The Rose Review (2006) suggests that children should begin phonics work by around age five. However, this recommendation is predicated on children having by this time experienced many opportunities to engage in listening and many other activities that would build oral language competence and phonological awareness. In Western Australia, the Kindergarten year is offered, but is currently not compulsory. It is therefore suggested that in locations where school attendance is poor or where children have not participated in a Kindergarten program, phonics instruction might be delayed until around the middle of the pre-primary year, and that instruction in phonological awareness, but more particularly phonemic awareness should be continued alongside instruction in phonics. Although the notion that there is a reciprocal relationship between phonics instruction and the development of phonemic awareness (Ehri, 2007; Ehri and Nunes, 2002) has prompted the suggestion that instruction in phonemic awareness may not be a necessary prerequisite for phonics instruction, it is, however, recommended that attention be given to this area of reading instruction due to the exceptionally high incidence of otitis media and because many of the children in remote-rural locations speak a variety of English which may not use all the phonemes of Standard Australian English.

Once phonics instruction begins, there seems to be conclusive support for an approach which is explicit and systematic (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rowe, 2005; Rose; 2006; Ofsted, 2010). The findings of the Clackmananshire studies (Johnston and Watson, 2005) suggest that this approach is beneficial for all students, regardless of gender or socio-economic disadvantage, that it has an impact on reading comprehension as well as decoding skills and that the impact remains evident as many as five years later. While there has been some criticism of a synthetic approach to phonics instruction, most of the criticisms appear to have centred on the perceived decontextualized nature of this approach (Wyse and Styles, 2007; Wyse and Goswami, 2008) and the apparent assumption

that other important aspects of reading instruction, such as the teaching of comprehension skills, would not be attended to.

The *Letters and Sounds* (Department for Education and Skills, 2007) materials developed in the UK in response to the (2006) Rose Review provide an easily accessible, comprehensive and currently free set of guidelines for practitioners which covers instruction in phonological awareness and phonics. The materials are divided into six phases, with phase one devoted to the development of phonological skills and phases two to six outlining a scope and sequence for teaching phonics and high frequency words, increasing in complexity through the phases. The aim is to have students at mastery level by the end of their second year of formal schooling, thus allowing attention to be more heavily focussed on developing the less constrained aspects of reading.

Being freely available and easily accessible makes these materials ideal for early career teachers to use, as they offer high quality support and using them reflectively would also support teachers to continue develop their own understanding related to teaching the skills necessary to build fluent and automatic word recognition. One approach might be to have a common time for phonics instruction in each school and to make each teacher responsible for teaching one or two phases, so that the particular teacher becomes highly proficient in teaching the concepts that are developed thorough that phase. Students would then be allocated to the class that was teaching at their phase of development, rather than having class teachers trying to individually manage instruction at a range of levels. This approach would ensure that students would be receiving targeted instruction and would also accommodate to some extent children who might have extended absences from school. Frequent assessment, monitoring and record-keeping would also be a key feature of this whole-school approach.

Teaching language comprehension processes

Teaching word recognition processes is to attend to only one strand of literacy skills; language comprehension processes also need to be given equal and ongoing attention. Because the children need to develop a familiarity with literate and academic language patterns and to build their background knowledge to support understanding, it is recommended that the approach to be taken should make use of high quality children's literature to facilitate and develop these skills, which include less constrained skills and cognitive strategies such as vocabulary development and increasingly complex strategies for comprehension. Rupley, Blair and Nichols (2009) suggest that although modelling,

explicit instruction, guided practice and application in a variety of contexts is still desirable for developing student proficiency, the role of the teacher in this case would be more that of facilitator and the style of teaching might be less structured in nature. Modelling and demonstrations would involve sharing the reasoning, thought and decision-making processes made by effective readers as they navigate authentic texts.

The use of a well-selected corpus of children's literature, together with interesting and engaging informational texts, would provide a context for allowing children to practice and apply their developing word recognition skills with authentic texts as well as provide them with opportunities to investigate and learn tier two and tier three vocabulary (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2008; 2013) and to become familiar with the patterns of literate and academic language used in such texts. Children's literature should include a range of selections, including the "classics" of Australian children's literature, poetry, traditional tales from both Indigenous and Anglo-Australian traditions and where possible, contemporary literature which closely reflects the children's way of life. Non-fiction selections could include topics which are familiar to the students as well as topics which would extend their experiences beyond those that might be available locally.

To support early career teachers in selecting appropriate literature and in determining what skills and strategies to teach, and how to teach them, it may be supportive to new teachers to develop some materials that would support their teaching of literate discourses using Australian children's literature and a range of informational texts, providing suggestions for associated language experience, oral language and vocabulary teaching activities, storytelling and teaching a range of comprehension strategies. While these resources would not be prescriptive, having them as a resource to support lesson planning might provide initial scaffolding for teachers in their first months of employment, as well as providing frameworks for continuing lessons.

Suggestions for continued research

During the course of this study, there has been growing recognition of the need to support new teachers and consequently internships, mentoring and coaching have become part of the landscape for many early career teachers as they make their transition into the workplace. However, there is continuing contemporary research which suggests that in some cases the implementation of such supports may be haphazard, that there is considerable variation in the quality of such supports, (The Hay Group, 2014; Johnson et.

al., 2015; Sullivan and Morrison, 2014) and that this may be the case particularly for teachers in rural and remote locations (Sullivan and Johnson, 2012). Although there is a substantial body of knowledge about the kind of induction and support that should be provided for new teachers (The Hay Group, 2014), there is less information that tells the story of what is actually happening as new teachers make their transition into the workforce. Additionally, while early career teachers may receive coaching and participate in on-going professional learning during their first years of their appointment, the focus is on general classroom practice, rather than a specific focus on literacy instruction. Ongoing research is needed to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of various programs, methods of implementation and the degree to which each is effective in its specific context, so that the most useful programs can be applied to any given situation. There is an imperative to find solutions that are both practical and effective, especially in remote or rural locations that are difficult to access and monitor and which may also have quite localised and specific needs. While professional learning and coaching from a distance may be on offer, the capacity for take-up may be more limited as teachers find it difficult to get away, where there is no teaching relief or there are few, if any, experienced colleagues to go to for support. Additionally, it would be useful to explore how on-going and specialised support for literacy instruction could be built in to such programs where that support is identified as a need.

In terms of supporting quality early literacy education, the Yorke and Mid-North literacy project (Konza, n.d.) appears to have produced some promising initial results. It would be useful to draw on this project and perhaps initiate such professional learning supports in similar schools in Western Australia to see if the results are replicated and further, to see what effects this approach might have in the longer term.

There is currently a small percentage of teachers who opt to continue with post graduate studies (for example, Graduate Certificate or Masters studies) in literacy education immediately following their graduation. Typically, these teachers take up casual or short-term part-time work as they continue their studies, frequently in difficult to staff schools or in low socio-economic areas. As a result of this combination of teaching and study, they are able to implement new learning in their classrooms as they go and as their study typically involves action learning, they are provided with opportunities to reflect on their practice and to discuss their reflections with other students who are more experienced teachers. It would be useful to follow through with this group of early career teachers to find out the degree to which their post graduate studies might support their

development as increasingly effective teachers. Post-graduate qualifications, linked with ongoing professional learning, might prove to be a highly worthwhile support for early career teachers who find themselves working in a range of challenging contexts, and might provide extra opportunities for coaching, mentoring and support.

Stronge, Ward and Grant (2011, p. 351) cite the former U.S. Secretary of Education, who said:

> *The most critical investment we can make is in well-qualified, caring and committed teachers* [italics added]. Without good teachers to implement them, no educational reforms will succeed at helping all students learn to their full potential.

Given that our own Western Australian early career teachers to a great extent are working with children with the greatest learning needs in literacy, it would be a worthwhile investment to support them to become the best teachers they can be in the shortest time possible.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1:
Information Letter for Parents

August, 1998

Dear Parents,

I am a researcher from Edith Cowan University. The purpose of this letter is to introduce myself and to inform you about a research project I am carrying out over the next two and a half years. The project has been approved by the Education Department of Western Australia.

The aim of the study is to find out more about the development of young children's literacy in the first years of school, and to identify the teaching practices which best support literacy learning in school.

As part of this study, I will be describing the progress in literacy of a number of students who will be in year one and year two in 1999. In term three this year, I will be spending some time in your child's classroom, assisting your child's teacher. In term four, I would like to spend approximately 30 minutes working with your child on various games and activities connected with literacy. It is expected that your child will be familiar with these activities and will enjoy the experience.

The results of the research will be written up in a report and in my doctoral thesis. Confidentiality of information will be respected at all times. Schools, teachers, children and parents involved in the study will not be identified in the thesis or in any other publication. If at any time you feel you would prefer to withdraw your child from the study, you have the right to do so.

Any questions relating to the study may be directed to Janet Hunter, School of Education and Social Inquiry, Edith Cowan University, on 08 9273 8420. Please feel free to talk to me at any time while I am visiting the school. I would welcome the opportunity to get to know you. If you would like to speak to someone else about the study, you may contact Associate Professor William Louden, Associate Dean of Research & Development, Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences, Edith Cowan University, on 08 9370 6333.

If you are willing to allow your child to participate in the study, please complete the permission form below and return it to the school. Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Janet Hunter
School of Education and Social Inquiry

Appendix 2:
Consent Form for Parents

Janet Hunter
School of Education & Social Inquiry.

Literacy in the Early Years of Education

Agreement to participate

I (parent/caregiver) have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to allow my child to participate in this study, realising that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

I agree that the research information gathered in this study may be published, provided my child is not identifiable.

_____

Parent/Caregiver   Date

_____

Researcher   Date

_____

Child's name

Appendix 3:
Information Letter for Teachers

August, 1998

Dear Colleague,

I am a researcher from Edith Cowan University. The purpose of this letter is to inform you about a research project I am carrying out over the next two years. The project has been approved by the Education Department of Western Australia.

The aim of the study is to find out more about the development of young children's literacy in the first years of school, and to identify the teaching practices which best support young children's literacy learning in a variety of school contexts. The study will involve the following:

- Observing the classroom interaction during literacy learning events. The classroom interaction will be tape-recorded for later analysis. This will involve the use of a microphone in the classroom. The microphone, which looks like a small plate, will be placed on the floor and is quite unobtrusive.
- Informal discussions with you about the lessons observed, about your teaching experiences in general and the planning, teaching and assessment of literacy in particular. These discussions will usually be tape-recorded.
- Working with individual children in your class for approximately 30 minutes each child, to carry out a range of literacy tasks. Diagnostic information from these tasks will be returned to you to inform your teaching.

The results of the research will be written up in a report and in my doctoral thesis. Confidentiality of information will be respected at all times. Schools, teachers, children and parents involved in the study will not be identified in the thesis or in any other publication. If at any time you feel you would prefer to withdraw from the study, you have the right to do so.

Any questions relating to the study may be directed to Janet Hunter, School of Education and Social Inquiry, Edith Cowan University, on 08 9273 8420. If you would like to speak to someone else about the study, you may contact Associate Professor William Louden, Associate Dean of Research & Development, Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences, Edith Cowan University, on 08 9370 6333.

If you are willing to participate in the study, please complete the consent form below. I look forward to working with you.

Yours sincerely,

Janet Hunter
School of Education and Social Inquiry

Appendix 4:
Consent Form for Teachers

Janet Hunter
School of Education & Social Inquiry.

Literacy in the Early Years of Education

Agreement to participate

I (participant) have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study, realising that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

I agree that the research information gathered in this study may be published, provided I am not identifiable.

_____

Teacher   Date

_____

Researcher   Date