Teacher understandings of responsibilities for reading instruction in stage one and two English courses of study in Western Australian schools

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Master of Education
by Research

Thesis

Teacher Understandings of Responsibilities For Reading Instruction in
Stage One and Two English Courses of Study
in Western Australian Schools

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of the degree of Master of Education

Supervisor:       Associate Professor Deslea Konza
                 Edith Cowan University

Liana Strutt
Dip Teach B Ed
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

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Dip Teach B Ed
DEDICATION

To my children, Caitlin and James, and my husband, Steve – your love is without condition, as is mine.

And to Pat and Arthur, who knew I began this project, but could not stay to see its end.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my supervisor, Dr Deslea Konza, whose work I admired before I met her, and who has offered honesty and encouragement in equal measure, my deepest thanks.

I would like to thank those teachers who took time out from their busy schedules to fill in my survey, and those teachers who took part in interviews about the valuable work they do in English classrooms. As a teacher and Head of Learning Area, I know the sacrifice of time and I am deeply grateful.

To Professor Mark Hackling for his initial guidance in starting the investigative process, and Dr Danielle Brady for her assistance in setting up the referencing process and, more importantly, her sage advice on how to cope with the workload. My thanks also to Dr Susan Hill for her assistance in learning new software.

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I would also like to thank the team of English teachers I worked with in 2007 – 2009 at Irene McCormack Catholic College in Butler. They provided invaluable advice about the nature of the surveys by being the pilot group for the data collection. And I am deeply grateful to my Principal, Mr Paul Rafter, who provided me with time, support and encouragement as I worked and studied throughout this venture. The opportunities he has afforded me to progress in this profession have not only contributed to this body of work but also to my personal growth.

And to my family – Caitlin and James, who have provided me with no end of cuddles and encouragement in my most tired and vexed moments, and my husband Stephen, who helped me manage my life over the past few years.

Liana Strut

Dip Teach B Ed
ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore secondary teachers’ understandings of their responsibilities towards students who demonstrate poor literacy skills with regard to the Reading Outcome in the Western Australian English Courses of Study. As an experienced secondary English teacher, the researcher was aware that the reading demands of senior secondary classrooms were challenging for some students and that many teachers were unsure of how they should respond to the needs of the students. Since the education reforms which began in Western Australia in the late 1990s and the subsequent introduction of Courses of Study in 2006, a great deal of debate has arisen over the delivery of curriculum that addresses literacy in senior school classes. As reading is considered to be a key action of learning in the senior school context, the introduction of the Courses of Study in Western Australia has forced a review of the role of English teachers in terms of their key responsibilities. Through the methods of a survey and follow-up interview, this investigation has explored what teachers regard as their core responsibility in the classroom with regard to reading. The participants were from Western Australian rural and metropolitan schools across the sectors of Department of Education and Training, Catholic Education Commission schools and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia.

The study showed that teachers are primarily concerned with engaging students in the reading process when they deliver the curriculum. They acknowledge the existence in their classes of students who cannot access the texts set for study, but they do not know how to diagnose specific reading problems, nor how to support their students in what are essentially reading acquisition skills. It is concluded that teachers acknowledge their responsibility to ensure students are able to access the texts used in these classes, but do not have the skills to do this.
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CHAPTER ONE  PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

1.0  INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore secondary teachers’ understandings of their responsibilities towards students who demonstrate poor literacy skills with regard to the Reading Outcome in the Western Australian English Courses of Study. As an experienced secondary English teacher, the researcher was aware that the reading required in senior secondary classrooms was challenging for some students and that many teachers were unsure of how they should respond to this continuing issue. This study therefore, had dual purposes: first to investigate the perceptions teachers had of their responsibilities regarding supporting students who struggled with the reading expectations of the secondary English course; and second, to investigate the extent to which teachers were equipped to provide appropriate support.

1.1  BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This section provides a brief description of the education reforms that occurred in the Western Australian education system which pre-empted the introduction of the English Course of Study syllabus in 2006. This discussion provides the context in which the research was conducted.

1.1.1  Reforms of Western Australian Education 1993 – 2006

The establishment of outcomes in English Courses of Study was the result of education reforms introduced in Western Australia in the early 1990s. These began in 1993 with an inquiry into pre-compulsory early childhood schooling called by MLA Barbara Scott in her maiden speech to the Western Australian Parliament (Scott, 1993). The inquiry addressed changes to entry ages for children in pre-primary programs which brought Western Australia into alignment with other states and territories. This was regarded as a positive step for Western Australian students: pre-primary and early primary students could work through literacy and numeracy programs that were congruent with students in other states and territories1. Further to these reforms, a review of schooling at the post-

1 In the long term, this would assist with the introduction of the Australian Curriculum.
compulsory level, Years 11 and 12, was begun. In 2005, legislation introduced in Western Australia saw the nascent establishment of outcomes-based education (OBE) through the document called the Curriculum Framework (CCWA, 2005). This emanated chiefly from the work of United States educationist William Spady, whose view was that curriculum should be constructed with the ‘end in mind’, that is, with the outcome as the first point of reference, and that resources, activities and assessments should be developed with that goal in mind (Griffin, 1996; Spady, 1993; Willis & Kissane, 1997). Significant changes were occurring in curriculum planning and writing, mainly to do with changes to assessment procedures and structures in programming. With the establishment of the current Curriculum Council in 1997 (Government of Western Australia, 1997), guidelines were offered to teachers about what was to be taught in classrooms with regard to the Curriculum Framework. This document, fully introduced in 1999, marked a change in approach to education from a content-focus to student-centered, point of need teaching. However, with the introduction of different methods of assigning levels rather than grades and percentages, and the establishment of new courses and reporting of achievement in outcomes (CCWA, 2003), the issue of understanding and responding to the diverse literacy needs of students was of major concern among English teachers.

In addition to this, in early 2008, the State government had passed a law requiring students to remain at school until the age of 17 if they did not have alternative full time work or entry into further studies (Government of Western Australia, 2008). This effectively meant the number of students who remained at school increased and teachers encountered more students who were disaffected and unable to access the curriculum and associated texts. Vocational education programs in schools demanded greater attention, as did the literacy skills required to meet the requirements for completion of senior school studies.

As with most reforms, these were not without controversy. At the same time as the introduction of the Curriculum Framework and outcome-based education in Western Australia, literacy standards were the subject of wide discussion and opinion in the Australian media (Brock, 1998; Cambourne, 2006; Millett & Tapper, 2009). The continued claims by print journalists that a number of senior school students could not read or comprehend complex texts on their graduation from school were based on documents derived from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development Program for International Student Assessment (OECD PISA) and WACE examination results (Ferrari, 2006; Hiatt, 2007). Moreover, the debate over the inclusion of critical literacy practice in

---

2 Students aged 15 – 17.
schools, (Donnelly, 2005) resulted in increasingly negative public perception of the outcomes-based approach and the teachers who delivered it. In Western Australia, the blame for the decline was strongly directed at the introduction of outcomes-based education, which, it was claimed, did not use standardized assessments to monitor a student’s progress, but relied on teachers’ subjective opinions to guide the assessment of students. The assertion by Donnelly (2007) was that:

OBE curriculum documents are not syllabuses or work programs as such and, when compared to a syllabus approach, give greater weight to formative, criterion-based assessment, in opposition to summative assessment … unlike a syllabus, where subject knowledge forms a critical part of the curriculum, it is also the case that OBE places greater emphasis on dispositions and attitudes (p. 186).

In short, the belief was that a literacy ‘crisis’ had developed in schools with media reports claiming government initiatives and curriculum writers had done little to prevent it (Devine, 2007). In turn, conservative politicians (Bishop, 2007; Howard, 2007), were calling for a return to the ‘basics’ of education. The message being promoted through the media was that society should expect teachers to assume the major responsibility of ensuring that a school leaver is able to read and write at a functional level so as to be able to make a continuing contribution to the economy through further study and work. It was implied that teachers, through the schools, had not been accountable in their duty to ensure that students were prepared for a literate life beyond school. The issue became the subject of intense debate based on the notion that literacy issues were “value-laden – influenced by what people variously aspire to and hold important … the battles over literacy are so potent politically (that they evoke) visceral reactions” (Snyder, 2008, p. 11). This debate reflected the controversy that was also occurring in other Western countries, particularly in the United States. In 2000, having already passed through their own series of public debates about reading and literacy, US researchers made a salient point in the lead up to the No Child Left Behind initiative (Bush, 2001): “… while teachers have much to say (about literacy) … few claims stand on a solid research base (but) rather as practice informed by practice. This is a dangerous position for a field that is so vulnerable to public opinion and political whim” (Anders, Hoffman, & Duffy, 2000, p. 719).

1.1.2 Western Australian Certificate of Education Requirements – English

In Western Australia, Courses of Study in English were introduced at the beginning of 2006 into senior secondary schools. This occurred after a protracted planning period involving the Curriculum Council of Western Australia, Heads of Learning Area in subject English and a network of English teachers during which the methods of assessment and programming were restructured to allow a greater flexibility for students choosing
different pathways into the workforce, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges, apprenticeships, specific education colleges or universities. English was the first course to be introduced because of its compulsory status for completion of the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). The chief requirements for achieving the WACE continues to be “four units from an English Course which must be completed with a minimum 'C' grade average over two years” (CCWA, 2009c, p. 1). Students, according to their intended pathway and literacy ability, could enter Year 11 at Stage One or Two and remain at that level if they chose. There was no compulsion to progress to a higher English level if such a level was not required for the student's intended pathway. The WACE Manual describes the pathways for each of the course stages as follows:

- university-bound students would study a program of Stage 2 and Stage 3 units over their senior secondary years. In their final year, most of the units would be at Stage 3;
- students who may be headed to TAFE and further education and training or the workforce would typically take a mixture of Stage 1 and 2 units in Year 11 and 12. Some may study all Stage 1 units. (CCWA, 2009c, p. 2)

Figure 1.1 shows how a student may enter at Stage One and remain there throughout senior school. Figure 1.2 shows progress through to Stage Two. For the purposes of this study, teachers of students heading for TAFE and further education and training and the workforce, ostensibly Stage One and Two students, were the focus.

**Figure 1.1** Example of Course of Study progression in English for senior students on a TAFE, further studies or workplace pathway.
The progression over a two year period allows for students to develop literacy skills in 1AENG and 1BENG with the potential for specific skills to be taught in both reading and writing. At 1CENG and 1DENG and 2AENG and 2BENG, however, the focus of teaching moves on to more abstract and thematic ideas with 'self' and 'society' being topics of the courses. Reading practices focus more on the interpretation of themes, characters, values and attitudes in texts rather than on the more sophisticated and challenging texts that were set in the 1CENG and 1DENG courses. (Descriptions of these courses as they appear on the Curriculum Council website appear in Appendix One.)

Due to the range of entry pathways that has been created for students who wish to enter further education, and the increased numbers of students remaining at school in the senior years, there needed to be a broader suite of courses offered in English. With the new Course of Study structure, students were able to repeat a unit and capitalize on the extra time to learn and reinforce literacy strategies and skills if necessary (CCWA, 2003) as shown previously in Figures 1.1 and 1.2.

1.1.3 The Issue of Identifying Student Reading Levels for Course Selection

Students select a level of English based on both their own prior performance and their post-school intentions. This occurs under the guidance of Heads of Learning Area and other school advisers. Up until Year Nine (14 years of age), students are formally assessed

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3 Prior to 2006, previous syllabus offerings in Year 11 did not allow students to repeat courses if they did not fulfil the requirements to pass. Students would be moved to a higher level course (effectively, from Year 11 to Year 12) without an opportunity to correct or improve their skills in reading and writing.
in their literacy ability through their participation in the NAPLAN\(^4\) and WAMSE\(^5\) testing (Department of Education and Training, 2011; NAPLAN, 2009). Results of these tests are sometimes used to guide students through course selections. School administrators have access to this information, but, in the researcher’s wide experience, it is not used by Heads of Learning Area as a specific indicator of reading ability – it is used as a guide for general curriculum development and the setting of broad strategies to improve literacy in the school. Nor is class assessment of reading abilities routinely conducted to support course selection. Past performances in middle school English classes, usually in written tasks, are used as the basis for advising students about which course they should study: anecdotal information and written records from teachers is sometimes provided, but this approach varies from school to school and department to department.

The researcher’s view regarding the lack of routine assessment of student reading ability was confirmed through discussion at consensus moderation and network meetings. Yet discussions at these same meetings often centred on the fact that some students were entering Stage One and Stage Two courses without the required reading skills to successfully complete them. While there had been much discussion over the implementation of the outcomes-based framework on which Courses of Study were originally created, there had been little attention given to the continued teaching of specific literacy skills at the senior school level. As English is the compulsory subject for the completion of the Western Australian Certificate of Education, this issue was a major concern.

Essentially, secondary English teachers do not actively involve themselves in the teaching of reading. The current Courses of Study in English, undertaken in Years 11 and 12, demand that students read a variety of text types which include, but are not limited to, novels, short stories, feature articles and internet publications. It is the expectation that students will do much of this reading unsupervised both inside and outside of the classroom in preparation for task work completed in class. Overall, teachers of English assume that students in these year groups possess sufficient literacy skills to read, process, retain and comprehend information. Further, senior English teachers believe they are unable to include in their programming the teaching of extensive and extended reading skills as well as meet their responsibility to teach the subject content in Stage One English Courses of Study.

\(^4\) National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
\(^5\) Western Australian Monitoring Standards of Education
Teachers know that to complete the curriculum requirements for Courses of Study in
Western Australian secondary senior schools, students needed to possess a level of
literacy that allows reading comprehension at a relatively sophisticated level. The
assumption is that literacy skills are already well established. In the context of senior
secondary school, the English teacher acts as a facilitator of learning and assessor of tasks
to determine the levels of comprehension and critical thinking demonstrated by a student.
The Curriculum Council, in its Revised English Syllabus, includes a definition of reading as
part of its Glossary, which is broad in its description and does not include the imperatives
of reading instruction in terms of decoding and fluency. Instead it assumes that all
students will engage in highly cognitive processes for comprehension and interpretation:

(Reading is) the act of understanding from printed material that draws
on a repertoire of social, cultural and cognitive resources. It is completed
in different ways, for different purposes, in a variety of public and
domestic settings. Reading is therefore a cultural, economic, ideological,
political and psychological act ... the issue of whether readers find a
message, or engage in interpretation to generate a new meaning is
subject to debate in literary circles. (CCWA, 2008, p. 54)

The expectations that are implicit within the Courses of Study are not consistent with the
broad range of student ability that exists in senior school. This leads to challenges for both
teachers and students as the demands of teaching and learning within these parameters
become increasingly difficult. The recognition of these challenges provided the
momentum for this research.

1.1.5 The Responsibilities of the English Teacher

The responsibilities of English teachers may be listed as: choosing texts to use as a basis
for literacy and language study; planning and delivering programs to facilitate teaching
and learning; preparing resources that will allow for the scaffolding of learning from
familiar concepts to the unfamiliar; designing assessments that will act as a fair measure
of student progress; marking work in a manner that is a fair reflection of student progress;
and recording results so as to demonstrate the ongoing progress of learning. Figure 1.3
represents this range of responsibilities.
Figure 1.3  Responsibilities of English teachers in management of English classes.

This is a somewhat simplistic demonstration of the various responsibilities assumed by English teachers. Figure 1.4 demonstrates the added responsibilities a teacher of English may have within a school structure. Generally, teachers who are employed full time, or as Heads of Learning Area, also undertake roles such as homeroom teacher, committee member, pastoral care facilitator and practicum mentor teacher. This list is not exhaustive, but a sample of the many extra roles undertaken in a typical school setting.
Figure 1.4  Responsibilities of English teachers in a typical secondary school setting.

As these two Figures demonstrate, there is great potential for the range of responsibilities to pose significant pressure on teachers as they seek to fulfill all their obligations within the profession. Addressing the needs of senior secondary students who struggle with basic literacy skills adds a significant load to teachers who are focused on the exploration and deep study of texts, rather than on helping their students simply access the text at a decoding level.

1.2  Rationale for the Study

As already stated, English teachers recognized there were some students entering Courses of Study in senior school who did not have the literacy skills to fully complete the reading requirements of the course. Based on personal experience and gathering of evidence as a teacher and Head of Learning Area in English, this researcher observed there were a number of students who struggled with aspects of the reading materials and found it difficult to keep up with their peers. One particular example concerned a Year Eleven
class undertaking 1CENG/1DENG units over two semesters. In a class of 26, only three students managed to read an assigned text in the allocated three weeks. Those who did not complete the reading claimed the text was ‘too hard’ and ‘too long’. The text was chosen for its presumed suitability for the age group and recommended reading level on a suggested text list; however, the majority of the students found it difficult to read the text. Overall, the struggles experienced by these students came to light only through their attempts to complete tasks associated with reading a text when the course was well under way and there was little opportunity to teach specific reading and comprehension skills. These students were required to complete the course without an opportunity to learn or re-learn strategies to help them. As a result, the students achieved grades that did not indicate any real improvement with their literacy throughout the duration of the course.

Similarly, students who did not have the desire or motivation to read, when faced with the volume of print text in these courses, found it difficult to work through the assessment material. In the absence of reading instruction and implementation of remediation strategies in senior school, there was greater opportunity for the negative ‘Matthew Effect’ (Stanovich, 1986, p. 15) to occur. Briefly, this is based on the notion that students who struggle with basic literacy acquisition and have little or no opportunity to read texts that suit their level of comprehension will not improve in their reading and will fall further and further behind their peers. Alternatively, those students who are given texts to read that are within their range of ability, and are engaging, will further develop their reading skills. This will result in continued motivation for further reading and thus entry into an upward cycle of continual reading development. If students perceive that they are succeeding in their reading as a result of the careful choices made by their teachers about the amount of instruction and text genre and type, then the motivation and desire is maintained and the skills are set to improve (Alvermann, 2005).

While there has been much research effort focused on the development of reading in the early years of education, little research has been conducted in Australia on the challenges facing secondary students who struggle with the acquisition of basic literacy. This research is an attempt to add to the Australian research in this important area.

### 1.3 Research Questions

The research questions were developed to explore teachers’ perceptions of their responsibilities towards students who did not possess sufficient literacy skills to access

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6 Class taken in 2008.
7 Raw by Scott Monk
senior Courses of Study in subject English. A secondary purpose was to determine whether or not teachers believed they had the necessary knowledge and understanding to teach entry-level reading skills such as those taught in primary school (Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000). The researcher also sought to establish how teachers were making judgements about student reading levels, and on what specific evidence these judgements were based. For the purposes of this research, 'literacy' refers specifically to reading.

The primary research question was framed as:

1. What do English teachers understand are their responsibilities towards students who demonstrate poor reading skills in Courses of Study?

This was explored through the following secondary questions:

i. How were teachers assessing student reading levels?
ii. What adjustments were English teachers making in their programming to accommodate those students with poor reading skills?
iii. To what extent did teachers understand the nature of the reading process, student reading difficulties and how to address them?

1.4 The Significance of the Study in Terms of the English Courses of Study

The significance of this study has much to do with its timing in relation to the subject. In 2006, the Courses of Study were introduced in response to the Post-Compulsory Education Review instituted by the Western Australian Government in 1997 and published as a report (CCWA, 2003). Certain essential skills were stated as being necessary to succeed in the world beyond school, and the trajectories to enter the working world became much more varied to accommodate the wide range of abilities of students. With the introduction of legislation in Western Australia that prevented students from leaving school before the age of 17 without a job, apprenticeship or further education programme in place, more students were choosing to stay on in senior secondary school. Now that secondary schools have done the work of organising their curricula to accommodate the Courses of Study, the introduction of trial programs of the Australian Curriculum in 2011 will allow for a further examination of schooling in terms of preparing students to participate in not just a national, but a global world economy. The teaching of
reading literacy should be informed by the demands of ever-changing requirements within the economic and technological paradigms of the employment market.

There is a strong need for investigation of the literacy levels of senior students who are currently not able to meet the requirements of the most basic senior English course. This has long-term implications for their academic success and vocational future.

1.5 The Delimitations of the Study

For the purposes of this study, only teachers of Year 11 students completing Stage One and Two Courses of Study were targeted for data collection. Furthermore, the scope of data collection was confined to Western Australia as it is the only state in Australia to provide these specific curriculum offerings. The scope of schools was limited to key representative institutions within the three major education sectors, which are the Department of Education and Training (DET), Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA) and the Association of Independent Schools in Western Australia (AISWA). Schools in the metropolitan and regional areas that had student populations that would allow for a larger number of teachers to be employed in the English departments were approached to take part in the survey. Respondents were given the opportunity to tick a 'Yes' or 'No' box with regard to the interview thus there was limited opportunity to explore the reasons behind many of the survey responses.

1.6 Thesis Organization

Chapter One has provided the background to the development of the English Courses of Study in Western Australia and described the contextual factors that led to this research. Chapter Two presents the Literature Review in which data regarding student literacy levels of Australian students are provided, definitions of literacy and reading are described, along with a discussion of reading in the Course of Study context. In Chapter Three, the research design, methodology, and data collection and analysis procedures are described, as are the limitations of the study. Chapter Four presents the results of the surveys and interviews. Chapter Five provides a discussion of the results and a range of recommendations.
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this study was to look at what teachers understand are their responsibilities in teaching students with poor reading skills in senior school classes. Chapter One presented the background and context to this research. This chapter will present national and international research findings into the literacy skills of adolescents, government policies highlighting the importance of reading skills for future development, perspectives on literacy and reading, responsibilities of the English teacher and the Reading Outcome, and teachers’ understanding of reading development.

2.1 RESEARCH INTO READING IN AUSTRALIA

Large-scale research into reading in Australia has focused mainly on the early years of learning to read and its development throughout primary school (Louden & Rohl, 2006; Louden, Rohl, & Hopkins, 2008; Rowe, 2005). These reports have produced information about how reading develops; typical developmental progressions, guidelines for teachers regarding how both the decoding and comprehension aspects of reading should be taught; indicators of best practice in literacy instruction, and how teachers can support young students who are struggling to develop these skills as quickly as their peers. In Western Australia in particular, numerous reviews and reports have been written that assess the efficacy of literacy programs in the primary and middle school years (CCWA, 2007; Louden, 2006; Louden et al., 2005). There is less Australian research, however, that looks at adolescent literacy and, more specifically, the teaching of reading to students with poor literacy in senior secondary schools. This is despite a climate of public scrutiny by media and political sectors regarding the literacy levels of graduating secondary students, and acknowledgement by teachers of the need for accountability for their classroom practice (Illesca & Doecke, 2008; Rowe, 2005).

2.2 TEACHERS’ UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE LITERACY NEEDS OF SECONDARY STUDENTS

Despite the limited Australian research into reading in the secondary school, there is a considerable volume of international research that has explored the issue of adolescent reading. During the 1990s in the United Kingdom, the National Literacy Strategy was launched in schools under the spotlight of media and political pressure (Goodwyn & Findlay, 2003; Office For Standards in Education, 1999). At the same time, studies
undertaken by Allen and Bruton (1997) investigated the ways in which teachers were instructing secondary students in the area of reading. These studies explored teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge about reading instruction at the senior secondary level, and identified the need for a greater understanding of how to differentiate the curriculum to meet a variety of needs. Similarly, for the past several decades in the United States, large reviews of research were commissioned to investigate reading development at all levels of schooling (EKSNICh, 2011; IRA, 2011). Deshler (Deshler, 2005; Deshler & Tollefson, 2006) has made important contributions to our understanding of the experience of the secondary school reader who struggles with all aspects of reading. The Florida Center (sic) on Reading Research has produced a large review of best intervention practices for the struggling secondary reader (Scammacca et al., 2007) as has Slavin and his colleagues (Slavin, Davis, & Madden, 2009).  

Although there has been limited research into secondary literacy conducted in Australia, there has been ongoing concern regarding standards of literacy among senior students and the perception that student literacy skills are in continuous decline. This has been widely reported in the local and national media with a number of reasons put forward. One has been the introduction of outcomes-based education (which was the design base for the initial introduction of Courses of Study as discussed in Chapter One); another is that teachers are not fully equipped to teach ‘the basics’ of English, a view put forward by both media commentators and researchers (Devine, 2007; Donnelly, 2005; Ferrari, Hiatt, 2007).

2.3 Teachers’ Understanding of Language and Literacy Processes

Because of the widespread concern regarding teachers’ knowledge of the structure of the English language, of the process of reading development, and of how to teach literacy, there has been significant research interest in these areas. Sallinger et al (2010) and Louden and Rohl (2006) found that newly graduating teachers expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to teach literacy, particularly to diverse groups. Burke et al (2008) found similar results after surveying practising teachers. Moats (1999, 2009b) has been campaigning for more than a decade to improve the knowledge of both pre-service and practising teachers, to establish core standards for new teachers with regard to their ability to teach literacy and to promote high quality professional development for teachers. Her research indicated that many practising teachers lack a basic understanding

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8 Slavin’s research addresses middle and upper primary which is classified in the US as ‘adolescent’ because by these years reading should be well established.
of many concepts that relate directly to teaching beginning and struggling readers, a view supported by Lyon and Weiser (2009), Joshi et al (2009) and Walsh, Glaser and Wilcox (2006).

Most of the studies mentioned in the last paragraph related to primary teachers, whom one would expect would feel confident and prepared to teach young children how to read. Little research relating to the confidence and abilities of Australian secondary school teachers could be located. The work of Love (2009) who found that similar difficulties existed with secondary teachers, was an exception. It is fair to assume that secondary teachers are no more confident and knowledgeable than primary teachers, and probably less so.

2.4 SURVEYS OF ADOLESCENT LITERACY

As this thesis examined teachers and the teaching of the Reading Outcome to students in senior schools, two significant surveys that explored the reading abilities of students in this age group are discussed. They are:

- The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Program for International Student Assessment (OECD PISA 2006– to be known henceforth as PISA,) for 15 year olds; and

- The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey of Australians\(^9\) (ALLSS, 2006 ) for 15 – 19 year olds.

2.4.1 The OECD PISA Results

In 2000, PISA reported on the reading abilities of students in the 15 year old age group\(^{10}\). More than five thousand Australian students from 231 schools participated in this survey. In the series of tests in which students “are placed at different levels of proficiency according the difficult of task that they can complete” (OECD, 2006, p. 46), performance at below Level One is the lowest on the scale with Level Five the highest. Overall, Australian students performed well; however, they were overtaken by Finnish students on the combined reading scale (Academic Research Library, 2002; Mendelovits, Searle, & Lumley, 2009).

\(^{10}\) Mathematics and Science capabilities were assessed in a minor capacity in 2000.

While the 2006 PISA survey results showed that 80% of all international students who undertook the PISA tests were able to complete reading tasks at Level Two, which required “locating straightforward information, making low-level inferences of various types, working out what a well-defined part of a text means and using some outside knowledge to understand it” (OECD, 2006, p. 46), Australian students did not perform as well as the Australian cohort did in 2000, particularly at Level Five which required the “management of information that is difficult in unfamiliar texts” and the demonstration of “detailed understanding of such texts and inferring which information in the text is relevant to the task” (Academic Research Library, 2002, p. 64). In 2000, the average score was 528 with Australia second only to Finland in reading literacy and “18 per cent of Australia’s students achieved the highest reading proficiency level (Level 5), compared with the OECD average of ten per cent” (Lokan, Greenwood, & Cresswell, 2001, p. ix). In the 2006 testing, however, Australia was listed seventh out of nine top OECD countries:

...among the countries with above-average performance levels only Australia has seen a statistically significant decline in their students’ reading performance, by 15 score points, which is attributable to a decline at the higher end of the performance spectrum. (OECD, 2006, p. 2).

In the most recent assessments carried out in 2009, Australia’s reading literacy score was 515 and “almost twice the strength of the average decline seen internationally” (Leech, 2011, p. 19). Overall, the figures strongly suggest that there had been a significant decline in reading performance among Australian students.

2.4.2 The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Surveys of Australians

The 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey of Australians (ALLSS) revealed that overall literacy levels in Australia had improved over the previous decade. The figures, however, demonstrated that in the age group which concerns this study – 15 to 19 year olds – there was a noted decrease in prose and document literacy skills (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). In the prose literacy section, there was an increase in the number of respondents operating at the lower levels of 1 and 2 (see Figure 1) and a decrease in the percentages of those operating at the higher levels of 3 and 4/5 (see Figure

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11 The other countries being Korea, Finland, Hong Kong-China, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, Liechtenstein and Poland.
12 The 2006 collection was drawn from a random sample of 8988 private dwellings throughout non-remote areas of Australia (Shore & Searle, 2008).
13 Prose literacy: the ability to understand and use information from various kinds of narrative texts, including texts from newspapers, magazines and brochures (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).
14 Document literacy: the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and charts (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).
In the document literacy section, there was a decrease in the percentages of respondents operating at the higher levels of 3 and 4/5. Based on levels which indicate ability, with Level 1 being the lowest and Level 5 the highest, the comparative figures are shown in Figure 2.1:

![Figure 2.1](image)

**Figure 2.1** Percentages of respondents aged 15 - 19 years old who achieved Level 1 through to 4/5 in surveys issued by the ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006) in 1996 and 2006

These data illustrate that prose and document literacy skills among 15 – 19 year olds declined in the ten years between these Australian Bureau of Statistics surveys, with fewer students achieving in the higher bands. This presented a challenge to English teachers working with complex curriculum programs, which had to be followed, but which may not have been accessible to students who had poor basic literacy skills. While basic literacy skills are usually mastered in the early and middle primary years, these data suggest that many students are not achieving the levels required for success in senior school study.

With Federal Government policy mandating that all students have access to literacy learning throughout their school lives, there is the imperative that literacy learning be continued at all stages of a student’s educational career, including secondary school (DEST, 2005; Department of Employment, 1998; MCEETYA, 2008).

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15 For the purposes of showing the statistics, the ABS combined levels 4 and 5 into one reading.
2.5 Government Policies Highlighting the Importance of Reading Skills

As reforms were occurring in the Western Australian education sector, government departments were producing position statements which emphasized the importance of literacy education as a key indicator of student success beyond the world of school, and thus flagging that literacy was featuring significantly on the political landscape. The Council of Australian Governments through the National Reform Agenda (2006) highlighted literacy as a key focus for the development of Australian infrastructures through:

The education and training element ... to equip more people with the skills needed to increase workforce participation and productivity. Four areas have been targeted: early childhood development; literacy and numeracy; transitions from school to further education or work; and adult learning. (Australian Productivity Commission, 2006, p. xxx)

At the same time, the Western Australian government commissioned a Literacy and Numeracy Review as part of a ten year plan to improve the levels of literacy with a view to long-term workforce development. The review stated:

Strong literacy and numeracy skills developed in early childhood and the primary years of schooling are fundamental requirements for learning and are essential for work and life opportunities beyond school. Low levels of literacy and numeracy impact negatively on educational attainment and employment prospects and result in economic costs that are borne by the whole community. (Council of Australian Governments, 2007)

The potential impact of literacy levels on broader economic and social development is also evident in the international studies. The preamble to the OECD report states that:

consequences of low foundation skills (or language, literacy and numeracy skills) span the economic, health and social well-being of individuals, families and communities. Communities as well as individuals with foundation skill needs are thus likely to realise significant economic and social benefits in addressing these challenges. (OECD, 2008, p. 11)

Literacy and language competence continues to be used as a method to assess the extent of “human capital” in the industrial and corporate workforce (Lo Bianco, 1999); however, this is just one aspect of developing educational policy reform that feeds into decisions about what is deemed appropriate curriculum content. Lo Bianco goes on to state that:
Comparative tables of educational performance (often represented by measures of tested or assumed literacy levels) exert significant influence on domestic debates about the distribution and allocation of resources within national education budgets. (Lo Bianco, 1999, p. 5)

The National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (Rowe, 2005) investigated literacy learning in Australian schools from management and teaching perspectives. This report reflected the belief that the purpose of education was to develop:

skilled and knowledgeable young people (as) Australia’s most valuable resource for the future. (Rowe, 2005, p. 7)

The report also stated that:

...teachers are the most valuable resource available to schools. Equipping young people to engage productively in the knowledge economy and in society more broadly is fundamental to both individual and national prosperity, and depends primarily on:

the ability to speak, read and write effectively; and the provision of quality teaching and learning by teachers who have acquired, during their pre-service teacher education, and in-service professional learning, evidence-based teaching practices that are shown to be effective in meeting the developmental and learning needs of each child. (Rowe, 2005, p. 7)

Another recommendation of the report was the need for continued funding and support for professional learning of teachers to encourage exemplary reading practices among teachers in secondary schools. The report was released at the same time as the preparations for English Courses of Study which were to be introduced in Western Australian in 2006.

The release of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008), a national ministerial document, outlined the need for a common understanding of what was required to ensure growth in population and infrastructures. It acknowledged that educational goals are changing in accordance with global trends:

Literacy and numeracy and knowledge of key disciplines remain the cornerstone of schooling for young Australians. Schooling should also support the development of skills in areas such as social interaction, cross-disciplinary thinking and the use of digital media, which are essential in all 21st century occupations. (Ministerial Council for Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 5)

The outline published in Our Youth, Our Future refers to the requirement that:

(s)tudents read, view, listen to, speak, design and write a range of print, electronic and visual texts required in their personal and public lives and

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16 My italics
17 A report on the post-compulsory education review proposals.
post-school destinations. Using their analytical and creative skills and knowledge of the conventions of the English language and the ways in which meaning is made, they develop an understanding of the relationship between culture, values, identity and texts. (CCWA, 2003, p. 16)

Thus a range of reports and reviews relevant to the Australian context have highlighted the importance of literacy skills across a number of domains, from broad economic and vocational perspectives, to personal, family and community outcomes. The impact of new forms of digital literacies and the resource implications arising from the need to upskill teachers to ensure that they can respond to new ways of learning and thinking have also been made clear.

2.6 PERSPECTIVES ON LITERACY AND LEARNING

In this section, perspectives on literacy (with a particular focus on reading) and learning will be explored with the view to explaining the range of complex influences that affect the secondary teacher of English. Differing pedagogies and teacher approaches to literacy education have an impact on student outcomes, and in particular on outcomes for students who struggle with the basic literacy demands of secondary English courses. This section also includes an application of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development to explore the social aspects of teaching literacy in the secondary school.

2.6.1 Definitions of Literacy

The definitions of prose and document literacy have already been included as part of the discussion of the decline in literacy skills in the age group of Stage One students. To refine these definitions further, literacy is regarded as a "psychological ability ... (which allows for) cracking the 'alphabetic code' and ... acquiring word formation, phonics, grammar and comprehension skills ... decoding (for reading) and encoding (for writing) serve as building blocks (so that) people can get on with the business of learning" (Snyder, 2008, p. 1). Literacy, however, does not just confine itself to reading and writing; it also encompasses the recognition of visual, media-related and technological codes that require a broader range of learning skills for interpretation (Vincent, 2003; Welsh, 2010). Literacy can no longer be viewed as just a "universal or unitary concept" (McCurry & Lonsdale, 2004, p. 14). Literacy skills are connected to further educational, social and psychological success and are also regarded as being central to success in the workplace, which is ultimately where students will progress after they complete their training and education either at secondary or tertiary level (Comber, 1998; Lo Bianco, 1999; Moje, et al., 2000; Rivalland, 1999; Rowe, 2005; Van Kraayenoord, 2007).
Therefore, literacy means more than just being able to read and write adequately to fulfill the requirements of everyday living (Howie, 2011): it serves the purpose of navigating the demands of schooling. An analysis of a Year Twelve Australian student’s individual study program has demonstrated that:

...literacy often varies considerably from subject to subject, from class to class, from day to day. To recognize that any segment of a teaching-learning relationship is framed by shifting set of linguistic and para-linguistic factors is to understand that literacy is not a quantifiable capacity or a determinate level of language competence. Rather, it is a mixture of knowledge, skills, attitudes, habits and performance. (Reid, 2001, p. 12)

In the document *Beyond The Middle*, Luke et al. (2003) offer an expanded definition of literacy that includes the range of skills required by the student who has moved out of the middle school into senior school:

In sum, the questions raised in this growing literature on ‘new times’ and adolescents raise a series of key issues for the teaching of literacy in the middle years of schooling regarding the importance of identity issues, the significant tensions between mainstream and nonmainstream culture in literacy development, and the use by youth of popular culture and new technologies to pursue and build alternative and, in some instances, unprecedented pathways to both print literacy, spoken language competence, and the new multi-literacies of online and virtual texts. (p. 18)

Thus, teachers of secondary English must come to terms with multiple views of literacy and with preparing their students to use differing forms of literacy in a range of contexts, none of which is possible if students are not equipped with the most basic and foundational skill of reading.

### 2.6.2 Definitions of Reading

Reading is considered to be the foundational literacy skill – it requires mastery of the alphabetic principle (letter-sound relationships), rapid word recognition, wide vocabulary knowledge, and a range of strategies to engage deeply with text meaning (Clay, 1991; Leipzig, 2001; Moats, 2009a; Pang, Muaka, Bernhardt, & Kamil, 2003). Reading is a prerequisite for writing and engagement in the range of multi-literacies required by the effective learner in the 21st century. Most children proceed through processes of development that are “phonological (hearing), orthographic (writing), semantic (meaning) and syntactic (structural)” (Wolf, 2008). Reading occurs at one level as a transaction between reader and author and is “the activity of engaging with those verbal marks” (Pope, 1998, pp. 255 - 256). The function of reading always has a specific purpose “to satisfy or obtain material needs … to explore the environment, to ask questions and seek knowledge … or enter a new world” (Kucer, 2005, p. 121).
The Four Resources model created by Luke and Freebody (1999, p. 2) offers an understanding of what a reader processes when encountering a text. Within this model, the reader undertakes multiple practices that are described in four component parts. Essentially, the reader will:

i. **break the code of texts**: recognising and using the fundamental features and architecture of written texts including: alphabet, sounds in words, spelling, conventions and patterns of sentence structure and text;

ii. **participate in the meanings of text**: understanding and composing meaningful written, visual and spoken texts from within the meaning systems of particular cultures, institutions, families, communities, nation-states and so forth;

iii. **use texts functionally**: traversing the social relations around texts; knowing about and acting on the different cultural and social functions that various texts perform both inside and outside school and knowing that these functions shape the way texts are structured, their tone, their degree of formality and their sequence of components;

iv. **critically analyse and transform texts**: understanding and acting on the knowledge that texts are not neutral, that they represent particular views and silence other points of view.

This model explains the complexity of the reading task, its multiple components and therefore the multiple ways in which the process can break down. It thus allows us to understand why some students find the tasks presented to them in senior secondary classes so challenging.

Research carried out in the United Kingdom specifies what literate children should be able to achieve in the ‘aspect’ of reading:

Literate children should read (and write) with confidence, fluency and understanding, be interested in books, read with enjoyment and evaluate and justify their preferences ... be able to orchestrate a full range of reading cues (phonetic, graphic, syntactic, contextual) to monitor and self-correct their own reading ... understand the sound and spelling system and use this to read ... correctly. (Medwell, Wray, Poulson, & Fox, 1998, p. 1.2)

In agreement with national and international research, reading, at the senior school level in the Western Australian Course of Study, is described as occurring when:

Students read a wide range of texts with purpose, understanding and critical awareness. In achieving this outcome, students interpret the conventions of written texts with increasing understanding and critical awareness; demonstrate increasing critical awareness of the ways language varies according to context and how language affects the way students view themselves and their world; and select with increasing effectiveness from a repertoire of processes and strategies when reading by reflecting on their understanding of the way language works. (CCWA, 2009a, p. 2)

While the Reading Outcome focuses on the students, it is the teachers who support this activity by guiding students through the process of reading in an environment where
scaffolding from existing knowledge to a higher level of new knowledge occurs. This development of higher order thinking and deeper exploration of text meaning does not occur in a vacuum – it is dependent upon the skills of the student to be able to read and the capacity of the teacher to facilitate a deeper understanding of text through interaction and discussion. This relationship reflects Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development which is discussed in the following section.

2.6.3 A View of Learning: The Application of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development

The application of Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is included to explain a possible pedagogical approach to teaching the Reading Outcome to senior secondary students. This theory explains the depth of responsibilities teachers have when they introduce and analyze printed texts with students in the senior secondary classroom, and how they interact with students in the process. As teaching essentially requires social interaction “the zone must be viewed as not solely relative to the child, nor to the teacher, but of the child immersed in a cooperative activity within a specific social environment” (Doolittle, 1995, p. 1). The definition of the Zone of Proximal Development as developed by Vygotsky is:

(T)he distance between the actual developmental level as determined by problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more knowledgeable others. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

This is further explained in Figure 2.2 which portrays the difference between what a learner can achieve independently and what can be achieved with the scaffolding and support of a teacher.
A translation of his work in *Thought and Language*, edited by Kozulin (1986) shows that Vygotsky explored the idea that:

> the conception of word meaning as a unit of both generalizing thought and social interchange is of incalculable value for the study of thought and language. It permits true causal-genetic analysis, systematic study of the relations between the growth of the child’s thinking ability and his social development. (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 9)

This supports the description of the Reading Outcome described in the glossary of the English Course syllabus which states that reading is “the act of understanding from printed material that draws on a repertoire of social, cultural and cognitive resources” (CCWA, 2009b). Vygotsky asserted that teaching and learning are essentially social activities and require meaningful interaction involving whole activities and the potential for change within the construct of the learning environment (Doolittle, 1995; Moll, 1990). This relates to changes in the “power differential” that exists between teacher and student in terms of their skill level and the impact this can have on the dynamics of the relationship between teacher and students (Konza, 2006a, p. 153). The concept of the ZDP can be recognized by students themselves who may need to examine their own roles as readers, the processes they will undertake, and the support they will need to complete a

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18 My bold-face added for emphasis
task in a Stage One Course of Study. Teachers encourage students to focus on their own reading skills, styles and interests through interaction and discussion thus promoting engagement in text (Lenski, 2008). They may begin reading an unfamiliar text, and with the assistance of a teacher through social interactions in the form of plenary discussion, group work or individual discourse, develop a familiarity with the elements of language, context and author’s purpose and apply this understanding not only to their existing task, but also to books that may be read in the future either as part of the course or for personal enjoyment.

2.7 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ENGLISH TEACHER AND THE READING OUTCOME

Statements developed by the Australian Association for Teachers of English and the Australian Literacy Teachers Association (ALEA) offer a framework for understanding what is required of the English teacher in Australian schools. The Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (STELLA) outline the common understandings and expectations of teachers of English and literacy as they approach students in their classrooms. A series of statements that fall under the heading of ‘professional knowledge, practice and engagement.’ (AATE, 2009b, p. 2) reflects that English teachers:

- "believe that English encompasses the study of literature and a range of other textual forms
- are committed to critical thinking, which is at the centre of Western European intellectual tradition
- promote understandings of literary heritage, cultural engagement and how ideas shape identity
- acknowledge and value diversity
- support the promotion of values such as a ‘fair go’, acceptance and understanding
- help students explore significant representations of the world through literature and other types of texts.” (AATE, 2009a, p. 1)

The politicization of literacy issues during the late 1990s and into the 2000s with the release of the reports In Teachers Hands (Louden et al, 2005) and Teaching Reading (DEST, 2005) was described as having a profound effect on public perceptions of English teachers and their effectiveness in teaching literacy skills (Whitehead & Wilkinson, 2008). The debate was further fueled by national testing figures of literacy levels in Years 3, 7 and 9 (NAPLAN, 2009) and international and national reports about reading skills of 15 year olds (OECD, 2006). These results generally indicated that literacy levels were falling and spotlighted the role of the teacher as being the main factor related to the success or failure of students as they learn to read rather than other influences, such as the family histories of students:
Literacy success is constructed as dependent primarily on teacher understandings and technologies, rather than as a result of mediated social interaction between adult and learner, both of whom have histories and subjectivities in which literacy is already implicated. (Whitehead & Wilkinson, 2008, p. 21)

At the time of the reforms in Western Australian education, there was a belief that teachers were largely responsible for the successes or failings of students in their care when undertaking the subject of English. This has been discussed in Chapter One. Teachers who were trained as secondary English teachers, however, have little or no knowledge of reading development and little understanding of how to engage in basic literacy instruction in the classroom in Australian and British schools(Fenwick, 2010; Harper & Rennie, 2009; Lewis & Wray, 1999). The definitions of reading discussed in 2.6.2, particularly that provided by Luke and Freebody (1999), revealed that the reading process is extremely complex. In Moats' words:

Contrary to the popular theory that learning to read is natural and easy, learning to read is a complex linguistic achievement. For many children, it requires effort and incremental skill development. Moreover, teaching reading requires considerable knowledge and skill, acquired over several years through focused study and supervised practice. Consider what the classroom demands of the teacher. Children’s interest in reading must be stimulated through regular exposure to interesting books and through discussions in which students respond to many kinds of texts. For best results, the teacher must instruct most students directly, systematically, and explicitly to decipher words in print, all the while keeping in mind the ultimate purpose of reading, which is to learn, enjoy, and understand. (1999, p. 13)

Teachers who do not understand the full range of capabilities required to decode and draw meaning from text will not be able to support those students who struggle with any part of the reading process.

Teachers also need to understand the range of life experiences that their students have had, and the impact these may have had on their literacy development. Comber and Reid suggest that “students in many classrooms are increasingly diverse in terms of linguistic and cultural heritage, life experiences and histories, relative poverty and wealth” (2006, p. 337). It is this diversity that shapes the experiences a student may have when it comes to literacy development. The teacher has the responsibility to be aware of these influences if there is to be a positive impact on a student and his or her learning. With such diverse and complex needs, the students require significant attention from teachers to assist in their literacy learning in light of these significant demands, even when the programs of curriculum can be potentially restrictive in their approach to reading instruction. Thus one of the aims of this study was to assess the level of understanding teachers have of the reading process and how this is applied to their roles in the classroom.
2.8 Understanding Reading in Senior School English Courses of Study

For students to fulfill the Reading Outcome in Courses of Study, the teaching of reading ties in with the imperatives of being able to identify “purpose, context and audience” as stated in the Reading Outcome descriptor (CCWA, 2008, p. 2). In the current context of English classes, reading is more than the recitation of texts and the autonomous and silent act of taking in information for learning, retelling or entertainment: reading for learning is not done in isolation but is instead part of an interwoven series of activities that requires thinking at a “fairly sophisticated level” (Winograd, 2001, p. 91). Students, as part of the tasks to be completed for assessment, need to take part in panel discussions, debates, write reviews for class publications or create feature articles (Munro, 2006; Quin, Rayner, Solosy, & Cody, 2005). Freebody, Luke and Gilbert (1991, p. 437) proffered the idea that reading at this year level “can be construed as the products of education and ideology, rather than as manifestations of common private or personal psychological or literary competencies”.

The issue of adolescent reading was explored more than ten years ago in a report for the Scottish Council for Research in Education (1995). The researchers noted that, with regard to the complexities of reading literacy among adolescents:

> Reading skills develop and change as the individual meets new situations and demands, throughout life. Another major issue is that of reading context and purpose. It is quite well established that, for example, the particular reading demands of the geography curriculum cannot be met in English lessons; they must be taught in the geography class. Teaching reading, therefore, must surely involve supporting the development of these skills in each new context, and making explicit those strategies which will allow a range of kinds of writing. (Allan & Bruton, 1997)

The researchers in that study asked questions that have validity in the context of Western Australian schools. The most pressing question was based on the necessity of teaching reading in secondary school years and how knowledgeable and responsible teachers were in delivering reading instruction. The importance of understanding the adolescent reader is a crucial part of secondary teacher preparation (Moje, et al., 2000).

2.9 The Challenge for Teachers of Secondary English

Students who enter senior secondary school have had varied literacy learning experiences (Westwood, 2008). In the early years of reading instruction, reading is taught as a necessary skill in order for children to have success in other learning areas (Allan & Bruton, 1997; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001; Peim, 1993; Stanovich, 1986). From student to student, literacy learning does not necessarily follow a set program or path (Rivalland,
Generally, throughout the primary school years (until Year 7\textsuperscript{19} in WA), specific reading strategies are largely still taught to students. In Years 8 to 9, the focus generally shifts to writing strategies with specific reading practices no longer explicitly taught as part of the curriculum. In senior secondary school, curriculum focuses mainly on reading a chosen text and writing a variety of response tasks to show what students learned about the text.

Reading instruction is regarded as “one of the most contested curricula areas” (Hattie, 2009, p. 129). The focus of debate has largely been about the teaching of reading using either phonics or the whole language approach. A phonics approach to learning to read relies on the notion that the English language has, to some extent, consistent letter-sound relationships which are the ‘building blocks’ of an alphabetic language and so should be taught explicitly and systematically as part of a beginning reading program (Faber, 2005; Konza, 2006b; Westwood, 2008). As described in Konza (2003) a continuum of reading instruction can be mapped from pre-school age when children are emerging as conversant and interactive human beings. During this stage, children engage in talk with their parents and begin to play with words and sounds. It is during this period that the young child begins to “tune into” the precise sounds of the English language. This is an important preliminary period, as without the ability to perceive the separate sounds contained within words, the child will be unable to relate written symbols, the letters, to those sounds, and so learn the ‘code’ upon which the written form of the English language is based. The ‘early alphabetic stage’ usually occurs during the first two years of schooling, and is crucial to helping children understand that words consist of sounds, which are represented by letters of the alphabet. This stage then proceeds to the ‘advanced alphabetic age’ as the more complex letter-sound relationships are learned. Common letter strings are recognized at this point which then leads to the ‘orthographic stage’ during which an increasingly large number of words are read at a more rapid rate because they are automatically recognized without decoding; this occurs generally around the age of eight to nine years. This is generally the stage at which ‘learning to read’ transforms into ‘reading to learn’ – the reader has automatized enough of the decoding skills, and has built up a big enough sight vocabulary that all cognitive ‘space’ is available for comprehension. Of course, children are also developing comprehension skills as they proceed through these stages, but until the prerequisite ‘beginning to read’ skills have become automatic, comprehension will always be compromised to some extent by the fact that some cognitive attention must be focused on the decoding and word recognition.

\textsuperscript{19} The first year of the middle school context in Western Australia
aspects of the process. According to this model, the ‘mature or critical reader’ who is the reader at the centre of this study, is able to decode:

with speed and fluency (and) wide reading can occur from a broad range of increasingly complex material. Readers can access many different text types and understand more and more clearly the different purposes of reading and the many different forms text can take (Konza, 2003, p. 20).

The whole language approach may be summarized as the “experience of language” (Roskos, Tobors, & Lenhart, 2004). This reading approach occurs without explicit instruction in phonics, or phonemic awareness. It is believed that reading “is a process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models and a process of trial and error, without a process of formal teaching ... learning is a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching, through not necessarily from someone officially designated a teacher” (Gee, 2006, p. 259). Where necessary, phonic instruction is embedded in meaningful reading.

Within a whole language model of reading development, the importance of background knowledge and understanding of context is also emphasized, as is the need for cognitive transactions to occur. Kucer puts forward the notion that for meaning to be acquired through a literate action, there needs to be some prior knowledge of the topic, issue or information for assimilation:

There are instances when the information to be generated through print will not easily fit into the language user’s available cognitive structures. The reader may lack knowledge to make sense of the information presented; ... for the information to be understood, a restructuring or accommodation of what is known is required (Kucer, 2005, p. 121).

Despite the many years of debate about precisely how the reading process takes place, it is now widely acknowledged that reading is a combination of these approaches, a view put forward by Rumelhart (1985) in his interactive approach’ and expanded by Stanovich (1980) in his interactive compensatory approach. Readers use both bottom-up and top-down skills operating within working memory to decode the letters, to draw on background knowledge and to understand the broader meaning.

Hattie (2009) defines what is necessary for successful teaching of reading in the primary school context, which leads ultimately into senior secondary school:

There needs to be planned, deliberate, explicit, and active programs to teach specific skills. Successful reading requires the development of decoding skills, the development of vocabulary and comprehension, and the learning of specific strategies and processes. It is clear that some programs, particularly those
based on skills and strategies, are successful, whereas others without such emphases have very minimal effects. Continuing to develop one’s proficiency in reading depends on acquiring these skills as well as learning to derive meaning and often enjoyment from the skills of reading” (Hattie, 2009, pp. 129 - 130)

One challenge for secondary teacher relates to the fact that students enter secondary school having been taught in a variety of different ways. Some will have missed out on the level of explicit instruction required to develop basic skills to the point of automaticity, and thus will struggle with the decoding aspect of reading. Others will be able to decode the words, but will not have been taught how to deeply engage with the text, or to use different reading styles for different purposes when reading, or to monitor their understanding as they read. They may not have a repertoire of strategies to use to gain meaning form the text. With the variety of approaches that a student may have followed in learning to read, there are complexities for the English teacher when it comes to identifying student reading literacy levels and programming Courses of Study to suit the needs of the student. In short, some students enter Courses of Study with a thorough grounding in all the elements required to read at a highly sophisticated level: others do not.

2.10 UNDERSTANDING THE DEMANDS ON STUDENTS IN SENIOR SCHOOL

By the time students reach senior secondary or post-compulsory years of education, it is generally assumed that students should have established personal strategies to deal with the volume and content of the texts they are given to read in English classes. Year 11 and 12 students undertaking Stage One and Two Courses of Study should be able to read with comprehension; write with a reasonable ability using the basic text types; speak to a degree that they are clearly understood; and, listen actively and be able to process information they have heard. As the definitions of literacy demonstrate, these do not fully describe all the processes that a student undertakes in order to read and learn. In English, writing, speaking and listening are activities that consolidate the learning process and have become set outcomes in the Courses of Study; however, it is reading that offers an orientation toward learning in other subject areas and is therefore the first point of action in the learning process (Scottish Council for Research in Education, 1993; Webster, Beveridge, & Reed, 1996). While reading narrative text for interpretation and meaning, students who are skilled readers employ strategies to gain an understanding of a text (Schraw, 2000; Yun Dai & Wang, 2007). In the description of the Reading Outcome (2008), focus is placed on the “act of understanding from printed material” and the description supports the idea that students possess differing levels of understanding according to the ‘social, cultural and cognitive’ aspects of their experiences when applied to the reading
process. In the English syllabus, the Rationale provides directions about the objective of the course which assumes a high level of reading ability:

Students learn that in using language they are actively engaged in social processes and the reproduction and/or re-working of social and cultural conventions. They learn about the relationship between language and power and come to understand that well-developed language skills provide them with access to sources of power through knowledge. (CCWA, 2010, p. 3)

While this is the aim, it is not the experience of many students struggling with the basic demands of accessing texts at the most basic level.

2.11 UNDERSTANDING THE DEMANDS OF LITERACY IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

If reading and comprehension are a measure of potential success for students and their inclusion in the future workforce and their contributions to the economy in the 21st century, the responsibility of the English teacher in secondary school comes into sharp focus. The role of the English teacher in maintaining objectives in improving the reading skills of students remains firm with the growth of an ever increasing set of demands on students preparing to enter further studies and the workforce, which is now set in a global and technology-based context (DEEWR, 2011; Leu Jr, 2002; Snyder, 1997; Van Dijck, 2004). The Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework (2004) states that literacy relating to students accessing information using the ever-changing technologies now present in our schools requires literacy skills that allows students to:

- recognize a need for information, determine the extent of information needed, access information efficiently, critically evaluate information and its sources, classify, store, manipulate and redraft information collected or generated, incorporate selected information into their knowledge base, use information effectively to learn (and) create new knowledge, solve problems and make decisions. (Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy, 2004)

There is much evidence to suggest that the digital age is having an impact on how students interact with text and how they perceive their own literacy abilities. The effects of the growing complexities and demands of technology on reading practices in senior secondary students are still under investigation. Understanding how students who struggle with reading use texts is a chief responsibility of the teacher. The teacher is required to be adept with the literacy of information technology and how it impacts on the student who struggles with reading. This comment was put forward in a submission to The Senate Inquiry Into Academic Standards of School Education:

Adolescent students who need support in developing their literacy skills have very different needs than early years
students. They may struggle with reading linguistic texts but may be very competent readers of visual and digital texts. Many adolescents are also able to decode words but need additional support to develop their comprehension skills when reading longer complex print materials ... (they need to) develop inferential and critical comprehension skills, as they are able to read competently at the literal level. (Phlip, 2007)

The ubiquitous nature of the internet and digital entertainments mean that students will continue to seek these methods of examining social structures and gathering information, or being entertained – the immediacy of these tools and their changeability in terms of content means that conventional texts such as novels are becoming if not completely redundant, at least less preferred by students as tools of learning within the classroom (Birkerts, 1994; Birkets, 2010; Snowball, 2010). While reading remains a key action of learning, the understanding of how it is undertaken is constantly being modified:

The growth of the networked society, and the spread of Information and Communication Technologies, has brought about significant changes to traditional forms of literacy. Older, print-based forms now take their place alongside a mix of newer multi-modal forms ... for young people to be fully literate in the twenty first century, they need to have clear understandings about the ways in which these forms of literacy combine to persuade, present a point of view, argue a case or win the viewer’s sympathies. (Beavis, Bradford, O’Mara, & Walsh, 2008)

Teachers are therefore required to look at different ways of using these particular resources in their teaching (Prensky, 2006): for those teachers who undertook their initial teacher training prior to the advent of the computer age – the 1980s - “all instances of encoded information and communication were bounded ... (with) borders (and) margins” (Lankshear & Snyder, 2000, p. 38). Teachers are still, however, required to maintain students’ interests in reading books, magazines and other print texts because these are currently the most equitable and available resources provided across Western Australian schools and sectors.

The provision of computers to schools by the Federal Government (DEEWR, 2009) was connected to the idea that it would improve teaching and learning practice (DEEWR, 2011). Reading efficiently and critically in tasks that use technology is now understood to be a crucial life-skill, especially for those students who intend to move on to professions that will require communications and knowledge to be accessed through computer technologies. The use of the internet for finding information and to communicate on a global level impacts on the way students read – what was once an activity that worked with text written using conventions that were “linear and hierarchical” has now transformed into “web-like textual systems that are more flexible than traditional
resources ... (w)here text is linear, hypertext can be lateral as well” (Burbules, 1997, pp. 106 - 107). Because of the pace of change that occurs within the technological sphere, the literature shows that teachers need to keep abreast of how technologies can be effectively used in the English classroom:

This simple observation has profound consequences for literacy and literacy and literacy education. The continuously changing technologies of literacy mean that we must help children learn how to learn new technologies of literacy. In fact, the ability to learn continuously changing technologies for literacy may be a more critical target than learning any particular technology of literacy. (Leu Jr, 2002, p. 314)

In a New Zealand study of cross-curriculum literacy practices, however, it was found that teachers found it difficult to shift their views about how to teach from a content-based program structure to a knowledge-based structure:

... a singular content focus is no longer sufficient; teachers need to focus on the means by which knowledge is created (e.g. how and why), as well as content (e.g. what, who, where and when), so that students are well-equipped to critically engage with an information-rich world ... this unbalanced relationship between learning mainly content (what) and learning processes (how and why) through content can be understood as the distance between what teachers know and can do, and what students know and can do. To put it another way, teachers’ work should be centred on equipping students with the learning and thinking tools that allow them to navigate, make sense of and critically examine subject content. (Wright, 2003)

This again highlights the need for systems to provide professional learning opportunities for teachers who lack the knowledge and experiences to equip students with skills relevant for a rapidly changing learning environment. How confident teachers feel in preparing all their students for these challenges is one of the questions explored in this research.

2.12 READING LITERACY – ABILITIES AND ENGAGEMENT

One of the main issues that emerged from the literature is the imperative for teachers to support students in their continued engagement with reading, particularly those students who demonstrate poor reading skills. This requires explicit and continued teaching of reading skills congruent with the complexity of text and language that is demanded of them (Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002). A related issue, therefore, is choice of texts: while students may have the requisite literacy skills to complete the course, student engagement with texts chosen by teachers is difficult to gauge and could well be problematic when it comes to completing tasks and examinations (Gallo, 2001; Hopper, 2005). The literature shows that in the senior secondary English classroom students are engaged in complex
cognitive activities which culminate in the specific ongoing skill of reading literacy: the work “appears to be a complex mix of spoken and written, note-taking and discursive writing, text reading, talk and writing” (Street, 2001, p. 151). In their study on curriculum literacies over a number of subject areas in two Australian schools, Wyatt-Smith and Cumming (2003) found that in subject English, teachers focused on what was taught, rather than looking at what might be best for students at their point of need. In other words, teachers tend to take the line of least resistance – teachers were more inclined to “teach to the middle” rather than differentiate their instruction.

Moreover, programming for students of this age has the potential to be extremely challenging. It is a period of time when students are likely to disengage from the learning process and become distracted by other influences outside the school experience.

In addition to this, a lack of prior knowledge, limited scope in reading outside the classroom and limited personal experience may also prove to be problems for some students (Agee, 2005; Krashen, 1998; Roberts, 2006). There is evidence that to understand students’ prior knowledge and to investigate through discussion and directed activity what they understand about the texts they are reading assists with the process of continuing engagement (Pitcher et al., 2007; VanDeWeghe, 2004). For students who are keen to leave school, but cannot because they have not acquired work or apprenticeships, the problem of engagement with reading and completing tasks is exacerbated. It is also the period of time when the ‘power differential’ between teachers and students can be regarded as the most acute (Konza, 2006a, p. 153). If the teacher is perceived as having advantage over the student who is not engaged enough to read, the student may demonstrate resistant, difficult or passive behaviours. This leads to the notion of assessing what motivates students to read, because it is this motivation that leads to engagement with the reading process. For this reason, the current research also explores the ways in which teachers of senior English seek to motivate their students to engage in reading activity.

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20 New South Wales ‘with a combination of external examinations and school-based assessment for the Higher School Certificate (HSC), and Queensland, with a predominantly school-based system of assessment, including the use of cumulative assessment during the post-compulsory years of study’ (Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2003).
2.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This review of the literature has shown that, in Australia, most research in the area of literacy development has been conducted in the primary years of schooling, and that there is a need for research into the literacy needs of secondary students. International studies of reading development reveal that the literacy levels of Australian students are falling relative to their OECD peers. This is supported by Australian studies that show that higher order literacy skills of students in the 15-19 year age group are falling. Examination of relevant curriculum statements and policies revealed that the demands of the secondary English curriculum, even at the lower levels, are not consistent with the abilities of many students enrolled in these courses. This presents a significant challenge for teachers of secondary English – the range of student abilities is vast, but teachers have a responsibility to support their students in achieving the aims of a complex curriculum.

Chapter Three explains the processes undertaken to answer the research questions with a description of the research design, and the data gathering and analysis procedures.
CHAPTER THREE  METHODOLOGY

3.0  INTRODUCTION

Chapter Two provided an overview of the literature based on research into reading literacy and its relevance to Stage One and Two English Courses of Study. This chapter describes the research design, and the processes of data collection and analysis. The selection of participants of both the survey and interview components is described, as is the design of the research instruments. Limitations of the study are also discussed.

3.1  OVERVIEW

The overall purpose of the research was to explore secondary teachers’ understandings of their responsibilities towards students who demonstrate poor literacy skills with regard to the Reading Outcome in the Western Australian English Courses of Study. The information sought in this study focused on the following primary question:

1. What do English teachers understand are their responsibilities towards students who demonstrate poor reading skills in Courses of Study?

This was explored through the following secondary questions:

i. How were teachers assessing student reading levels?
ii. What adjustments were English teachers making in their programming to accommodate those students with poor reading skills?
iii. To what extent did teachers understand the nature of the reading process, student reading difficulties and how to address them?

To acquire an understanding of what English teachers of Stage One and Two Courses of Study knew about the reading abilities of their students as they embarked on their senior studies in subject English, two phases of research were carried out – an initial survey and a follow up interview with some respondents. This chapter gives an overview of the research approach, the design of the survey and details of the follow up interview and how the data were coded and analyzed after collection.
3.2 Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations relating to the study chiefly concerned the nature of the responses teachers made about their teaching in subject English. With regard to the quantitative data derived from the surveys, the information had the potential to reflect their work environment, colleagues and their own reputations. Similarly, in the process of the interviews, comments made about the specific schools, educational organizations and agencies and colleagues may have been of a sensitive nature. With this in mind, a code was applied to each of the participants in the interviews according to the location and sector of the school at which each of the teachers worked. For example, a teacher from a metropolitan Department of Education and Training school is coded as MDET1, with the ‘1’ indicating the order in which they were interviewed. This coding follows each of the quotes featured in Chapter Four to indicate the range of participants.

3.3 Research Approach

Data were gathered in the following two ways:

i. A survey (Appendix Two) was issued to teachers of Year 11 students who were studying Stage One and Two Courses of Study. The teachers were employees in metropolitan and rural areas in Western Australia across the Department of Education and Training, Independent and Catholic Education Commission school sectors;

ii. Follow up interviews were conducted with 23 teachers either in person or by phone throughout Term Four, 2008. These teachers were asked to address questions pertaining to the survey they had completed which allowed for the elaboration and exploration of their answers. Within each of the categories listed in section 3.5, there were elaborations that informed the discussion of findings in Chapter Five. Face to face interviews were recorded on a digital audio device and transcribed for analysis. Hand written notes were recorded during telephone conversations.

As this study explored what teachers perceived to be their responsibilities in the teaching of reading in Courses of Study, it was also necessary to document background information about participants as the characteristics of English teachers differ widely. This information appeared on the cover sheet of the initial survey.
3.4 **Survey Design**

A survey was considered to be the most time and cost effective method of reviewing the perceptions and opinions of a large number of people. It is often used in education research at the first stage of the investigation so that a variety of questions may be posed (Baumann & Bason, 2004) to a specific group. Therefore, it had the potential to provide a snapshot of the understandings that existed among English teachers about their responsibilities as reading educators and what practices were being undertaken in the classroom. The survey was divided into seven discrete sections, each of which required a different response type. The purpose of this design was to allow for a broader range of questions to be posed, the responses to which informed the follow-up interviews (Kervin, Vialle, Herrington, & Okely, 2006).

3.5 **Categories of Interview Questions**

The purpose of the interviews was to establish the extent to which teachers:

- could identify students who demonstrated low fluency and comprehension skills;
- chose texts to suit student reading levels in their classes;
- adjusted their programs to accommodate students who demonstrated low levels of reading ability;
- had an understanding of the process of reading acquisition;
- understood their responsibilities in delivering curriculum in English;
- prioritized his or her responsibilities as an English teacher.

Thus questions were organised according to the following categories:

1. Teacher Identification of Student Reading Levels
2. Teacher Choice of Reading Text for Learning and Engagement
3. Teacher Adjustments to Programming and Teaching Strategies
4. Teacher Understanding of Reading Instruction and Acquisition
5. Teacher Understanding of the Responsibilities of English Teachers
3.6 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The first stage of this process was a letter of introduction and explanation of the research which was mailed to the Heads of Learning Area in English through the Principals of selected schools, requesting that English teachers who taught Stage One and Two Courses of Study in Year 11 complete the survey (See Appendix Three). Schools were selected on the basis that they had adequate populations of senior secondary students that would necessitate the timetabling of at least three Stage One and Two classes in Year 11. This was to ensure that there would be a large potential sample of respondents and so provide a sound basis for data analysis. A total of five hard copy surveys were provided with permission granted for extra copies to be made if there were an insufficient number. A reply paid envelope was provided so the surveys could be returned when completed. A reply section on the survey allowed for teachers to nominate for an interview to expand upon the answers provided in their surveys if they so wished.

3.6.1 Research Timeline

The time frame for the data collection activity is outlined as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Data Collection Procedure</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late June 2008</td>
<td>Pilot study on researcher’s English staff and other personal contacts not associated with proposed schools listed in Table Two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July/August 2008</td>
<td>Initial contact by mail to Heads of Learning Area through Principals –</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Stage One Data Collection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August - September 2008</td>
<td>• Phone follow up to confirm surveys had been delivered and distributed to relevant staff</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Began recording data in SPSS software as surveys were returned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Final collections of surveys (September 30th 2008) Recording of data using SSPA software</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Preliminary analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contact with interviewees who nominated to take part in interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October – December 2008</td>
<td>Face to face and telephone interviews conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Term Four)</td>
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<tr>
<td>December – January</td>
<td>Transcription and coding of interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February – October 2009</td>
<td>• Analysis of survey data, draft of results, re-draft of Literature Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Analysis of interview transcripts – draft of discussion, conclusion and recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Final draft of thesis</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3.7 PARTICIPANTS

The population targeted for survey was English teachers of Stage One and Two Courses of Study and Heads of Learning Area/Department from the Western Australian metropolitan and rural schools. Only schools with the numbers to support at least three Stage One and Two Year 11 classes were approached, as explained previously. The potential number of respondents was 270.
Data were collected in two stages.

### 3.8.1 Survey Data Collection

In total 270 surveys were sent to 54 schools in the described areas. The distribution of surveys proceeded as follows: in September 2008, letter packages consisting of five surveys, letters of introduction and consent forms were sent to 47 schools in selected areas of metropolitan and rural zones in the three education sectors already described. Reply paid envelopes were included to maximize the possibility of survey returns. Sixty two surveys were returned within six weeks. In March 2009, before the final collation of data was completed, another set of letter packages was sent to metropolitan and rural DET schools in order to improve the representation of this sector in the data. This resulted in a final return of 78 valid surveys from which an analysis could be made.

### 3.8.2 Interview Data Collection

The survey sent to schools allowed the opportunity for teachers to nominate to be interviewed about their experiences with students in Year 11 Stage One and Two English Courses of Study. If teachers indicated that they would agree to an interview, a visit to their school was organized or a time set for a telephone interview. Twenty three interviews were conducted between Monday 13th October and Friday 28th November, 2008. Face-to-face interviews were recorded using a Sony MP3 IC Recorder. These data were then transferred to a specific file on a dedicated thumb-drive and secured by the researcher. Responses to telephone interviews were hand recorded. Table 3.2 below explains the coding use for the interview respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
<td>DET</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catholic Education Office</td>
<td>CEO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associated Independent Schools of Western Australia</td>
<td>AISWA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.9 Data Analysis Procedures

Data gathered from the surveys were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (Version 17.0) where information was generated to show the demographic range of participants. The results of the surveys and transcriptions of the interviews are shown in Chapter Four. The analysis of these data led to the discussion and recommendations, which are detailed in Chapter Five.

The second phase of the investigation was based on the teacher interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to seek more detailed information about the experiences of teachers who have encountered students with poor literacy skills, and more specifically, low levels of reading fluency and comprehension in Stage One and Two Courses of Study. As described by Strauss and Corbin, this style of data collection is designed to “maximize opportunities for verifying the story-line and relationships between categories and filling in poorly developed categories” (1990, p. 187; 1990c, p. 187). Interviews were transcribed and coded using the selective coding process “systematically relating the (core category) to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990a, p. 116). The interviews were transcribed by the researcher based on the five discrete categories of the survey. These were as follows:

1. Teacher Identification of Student Reading Levels
2. Teacher Choice of Reading Text for Learning and Engagement
3. Teacher Adjustments to Programming and Teaching Strategies
4. Teacher Understanding of Reading Instruction and Acquisition as applied to the Reading Outcome
5. Responsibilities of English Teachers and Understanding of Teaching Reading

3.9.1 The Processes of Analytic Induction and Theoretical Sampling

Two processes which are critical to an understanding of the data collection and analysis procedures used in this study are analytic induction and theoretical sampling. These procedures were used to investigate the perceptions of teachers of senior English classes regarding their responsibilities to students with poor literacy skills.

This investigation began with a broad interest in how English teachers of senior students with poor reading literacy skills respond to the wide range of needs of these students in the classroom. This interest gradually directed and informed the shaping of questions for the survey: this is typical of much qualitative research (Burns, 2000). Analytic induction
and theoretical sampling are processes that allow that initial broad interest to be increasingly refined to a clearer understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

*Analytic induction*

Analytic induction, a “logic of qualitative research which employs a systematic and exhaustive examination of a limited number of cases in order to provide generalizations” (Marshall, 1998), was used to explore the perceptions teachers had about their responsibilities when teaching students with poor literacy skills. As survey data were collected and initially analyzed, early ‘propositions’ about teachers' perceptions of their responsibilities emerged. Analytic induction assists with the development of firm propositions, as it demands that each data collection period supports the proposition being developed. If this doesn’t occur, then the propositions must be reviewed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990a). The second phase of the collection exemplified this process. The interview phase provided the opportunity to explore, through analytic induction, particular issues that arose from survey responses.

An example of this process concerned the proposition that teachers sought information about students' extra-curricular reading practices in a relatively formal manner. What emerged when following up this point in the interviews, however, was that the ‘surveying’ of students was, in fact, much more likely to be casual questioning in class of some students, rather than through a written survey completed by all students. The proposition, therefore, required review.

Another instance of analytic induction resulted in the refinement of the proposition that teachers knew how to diagnose the problems of readers who struggled with texts in the course, a view formed after analysis of the survey responses. This proposition required review when the issue was explored in interview. It became clear that teachers could identify reading difficulties, that is, they could tell which students were having difficulty but they could not diagnose, they could not explain the causes of their students’ reading difficulties.

There were two instances, however, where propositions were confirmed through the process of analytic induction. The first related to the proposition that teachers considered engagement with text to be an important consideration when selecting texts for students to read. The proposition was developed in the initial stages of survey data analysis and was confirmed in interview. Another proposition that emerged from the survey data was that teachers believed it was important to negotiate with students about text selection and task completion, a proposition that was again confirmed through the interview process.
Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990a, 1994) assists the process of analytic induction by directing the sampling procedures to follow up particular lines of inquiry. In this study, early analysis of the survey responses revealed a far greater response from metropolitan schools than rural. This raised the question of whether this was a genuine pattern, or an anomaly. A second mailing of surveys to a new range of metropolitan and rural schools was organized. The response from metropolitan teachers increased but there was, again, no increase in responses from the rural schools. Thus, theoretical sampling allowed a developing proposition to be further tested.

3.9.2 Interview Coding Process

In the analysis of the transcribed interviews, selective coding was employed to look for statements by teachers that either supported or negated the data gathered in the surveys. Information was sought that would ‘illustrate themes and make comparisons and contrasts after all data collection was complete’ (Neuman, 2007). Concepts which emerged from the coding of the interviews were categorized and samples from interview transcripts were placed under each of the category headings. It became clear that there were common experiences teachers had with students with regard to teaching the Reading Outcome in senior school courses.

Tables 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 provide the key and examples of how different sections of the transcripts were coded to demonstrate this process.

### Table 3.3 Key for Selective Coding Analysis

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Teacher Identification of Student Reading Levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Teacher Choice of Reading Text for Learning and Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Teacher Adjustments to Programming and Teaching Strategies</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Teacher Understanding of Reading Instruction and Acquisition as applied to the Reading Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Responsibilities of English Teachers and Understanding of Teaching Role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3.4 Sample One: transcript demonstrating selective coding in a range of category responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>MAISWA1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When you have students coming into your Stage One classes, what do you notice about their reading levels when you first meet with them?</td>
<td>Probably it takes me a little while to notice a great deal about their reading levels because, to be honest, I don’t assess their reading levels when they come in. There’s one class, my Eleven 1A, I’m aware they’ve come from a support-base class,</td>
</tr>
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</table>


so sooner with that group I assess and usually so far the reading is fairly sound. So oral reading is fairly sound, there’s reluctance often – I have a mostly male class - to read out loud, so it’s quite difficult for me unless I say ‘this is what we are going to do, we’re just going to read a paragraph each as we go around the class.’ I don’t individually take them aside and do them one on one reading and that’s something I could look at but the reading itself I’m finding is fairly sound and fairly pedestrian in terms of expression but they’ll recognize punctuation and I suppose in terms of decoding, they have text material that’s not super challenging but they will stop and balk and try to sound out. Where I come across difficulties is perhaps more with comprehension, so that reading for meaning as opposed to reading the print – deciphering the words with the kids I have is achievable, however, in terms of comprehending beyond the literal is where there’s difficulty for my kids.

Table 3.5 Sample Two: transcript demonstrating selective coding in a single category response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You’ve indicated you want to talk about choice and control that students have over the texts that they read – to what extent do you feel students need to have that choice?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have two Year Eleven classes and we pick all their texts from reading the short stories in class to all the novels, and while they don’t ever really complain about it, I don’t think they ever really get into them or take ownership of them. They do purchase them but quite often they’re really out of their understanding. It’s not something they would really pick up and read of the shelf themselves and so I think we need a mix between what we think is good for them to be reading and what fits into the course and what they enjoy reading and maybe read again later ..., but I also enjoyed being able to pick up something that I enjoyed and I would study that. I believe it’s left up to school to provide (books) but I would prefer more input from the kids than what we get at the moment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do we get that input?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would rather do it on a class by class basis, get some ideas from them. Obviously some things they suggest might not be suitable, or things that are on booklists at the moment, or suggested reading that the kids reflect on and nominate as books that they enjoyed in the previous years that perhaps those in the years after them might enjoy – that could be one way. It’s probably one of those things that could...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
never be resolved, though, because kids will all have different opinions to teachers. I think it should be worked on at least at a classroom level. (1.56)

Do you think that within a class students should be given a choice of more than one text covered?  

Absolutely. I already do that in lower school so I don’t see why it shouldn’t be done in upper school. I think running a few texts at a time allows for greater discussion as well, particularly if they have a similar theme or topic. Boys can be reading a text … but I don’t think its anything that can’t be worked around.

So do you think the way the Courses of Study are constructed now lend themselves to the study of the variety of texts in the one class?  

I think so until schools pick them up and write the units to suit them and that’s when we narrow things down to simplify it for ourselves so we can apply it in our schools. But as it is originally I think it is quite open to anything. I am quite lucky at this school, we get quite a bit of leeway – we get to pick.

Coding in this manner allowed important points to be categorized for discussion. It also provided a very visual display that was helpful in determining those categories that resonated strongly with the interviewees.

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A major limitation of the study was the number of survey returns. The return rate was 29.6%. Given the time frame provided, it was expected that more surveys would have been returned. When inquiries were made to English departments about the possibility of having surveys returned, the reply in all cases was that the teachers were too occupied with teaching, administrative roles and report writing to take the time to fill out the survey.

On reflection, the way in which the pilot study was conducted was also a limitation. Piloting of the survey took place in the researcher’s own school, and significant issues in survey design were not picked up in the responses of the small sample of teachers who took part. This may be a reflection of the fact that the teachers were personally known to the researcher and responded positively to the survey, rather than suggesting amendments or offering criticisms. A wider sample of teachers for the pilot would probably have provided more critical feedback. Some of the issues that may have been identified included the wording of some of the statements. For example, it eventuated that
the use of the word ‘diagnostics’ in Section One of the survey required clarification. Also, the use of the word ‘reading’ also needed clarification: some respondents may have defined reading as referring to ‘comprehension’; others may have interpreted it as ‘decoding’ or any one of a number of other interpretations of the word.

Another limitation of the study was the time allowed by the researcher for interviews. As the researcher was working full time in a middle management position in a secondary Catholic college, the timeframe allowed for interviews was limited. A greater range of representatives from the schools would have provided a broader perspective in terms of how responsibilities of English teachers were perceived.

3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has outlined the research design, participant selection and potential ethical issues relating to this study. The processes of data collection and analysis have also been outlined. Examples of analytic induction, theoretical sampling, and selective coding as they were used in the study have been described.

Chapter Four presents the data from both the quantitative and qualitative phases of data collection in order to present the perceptions of teachers regarding their responsibilities towards students who struggle with the literacy demands of the texts set in their senior English courses.
CHAPTER FOUR  RESULTS

4.0  INTRODUCTION

Chapter Three described the research design of this study and explained the data collection and analysis procedures, including a discussion of analytic induction and theoretical sampling. This chapter begins with the demographic details of the survey respondents, after which the results of the survey are presented. Information gained through follow-up interviews is presented using categorized extracts from the interview transcripts.

4.1  Description of Participants - Survey Respondents

Of the 270 individual survey forms that were sent to 55 schools, a total of 78 surveys were returned. This constituted a 29.6% return on the surveys. The respondents were all current or recent teachers of the Courses of Study in English Stage One and Stage Two courses, namely 1AENG, 1BENG, 1CENG, 1DENG.

4.2.1  Frequency of Survey Returns from Metropolitan and Rural Schools

Of the 78 participants, 55 (70.5 %) were returned by teachers working in the metropolitan area and 23 (29.5 %) were returned from rural areas of Western Australia, as depicted in Figure 4.1. This compares with the distribution of 161 (52%) metropolitan schools and 148 (48%) rural schools operating in Western Australia (Department of Education, 2011).

![Figure 4.1](image)

**Figure 4.1  Frequency of Survey Returns from Metropolitan and Rural Teachers**

4.2.2  Frequencies of Respondents from Education Sectors

Seventy eight surveys were returned with 27 (34.6 %) from the CEO, 22 (28.2 %) from AISWA, and 29 (37.1 %) % from DET, as depicted in Figure 4.2. This compares with the
actual distribution of 47 (18.8%) secondary schools in the CEO sector, 101 (40.4%) in the AISWA sector and 102 (40.8%) in the DET sector (Department of Education, 2011).

![Bar chart showing numbers of respondents in education sectors in Western Australia.](chart)

**Figure 4.2** Numbers of respondents in education sectors in Western Australia.

### 4.2.3 Teaching experience of survey participants in years
Participants were asked to provide information about their years of teaching experience including teaching of other subject areas. Of the 78 respondents, 72 provided information which is presented in Figure 4.3. Eleven respondents (15.1%) had 0 – 4 years experience, 20 (27%) had 5 – 10 years experience, nine (12.3%) had 11 – 15 years experience, 14 (19.2%) had 16 – 20 years experience and 18 (24.7%) had 20 or more years experience in teaching.
4.2.4 Tertiary Institutions where Survey Respondents obtained Teaching Qualifications

Teachers were asked to provide details of the tertiary institution where they attained their pre-service qualifications. Of the 78 respondents, 72 provided details, which are reflected in Figure 4.4. Eighteen (24.7%) of respondents attended Edith Cowan University, or the Western Australian College of Advanced Education as it was known prior to 1990. Two (2.7%) attended Notre Dame University in Western Australia. Eight (11%) attended Curtin University, 25 (34.2%) attended the University of Western Australia, five (6.8%) attended Murdoch University and 14 (19.2%) attended institutions outside of Western Australia.

Figure 4.3 Years of teaching experience of respondents
4.2.5 Teaching qualifications attained by survey respondents
Teachers were asked to provide details of the undergraduate qualification completed as part of their pre-service training. Of the 78 respondents, 72 provided details. Eight (11%) of the respondents earned a Diploma of Teaching, 26 (35.6%) attained a Bachelor of Education, and 38 (52.1%) graduated with a Degree and a Graduate Diploma in Education. These results are presented in Figure 4.5.

4.2.6 Post-graduate Qualifications of Survey Respondents
Of the 78 respondents to the survey, 35 indicated they had completed post-graduate qualifications. Eight (11%) had completed a Masters by Coursework, four (5.5%) had completed a Masters by Research, seven (9.6%) had completed a Graduate Certificate, 14 (19.2%) had completed a Graduate Diploma, one (1.4%) had completed a Professional
Doctorate and one (1.4 %) had completed a Doctor of Philosophy degree. These results are presented in Figure 4.6.

![Bar chart showing postgraduate qualifications of survey respondents.]

**Figure 4.6** Postgraduate qualifications of survey respondents.

### 4.3 Interview Participants

Twenty three survey respondents agreed to be interviewed about their teaching of Stage One and Two Courses of Study. The numbers of interviewees from metropolitan and rural schools were six from metropolitan government schools, seven from metropolitan Catholic schools, seven from metropolitan independent schools, and one each from rural government, Catholic and independent schools.

### 4.4 Quantitative Data - Survey Results

The statements in this section of the survey focused on teachers’ perceptions of the reading abilities of their students.

#### 4.4.1 Teacher Identification of Student Reading Levels

4.4.1.1 Response One

In response to the statement ‘I can easily diagnose specific problems students have when they demonstrate low decoding, fluency and comprehension skills in his or her reading’, six (7.7 %) participants responded with ‘Rarely’, 30 (38.5%) responded with ‘Sometimes’, 33 (42.3 %) responded with ‘Frequently’ and nine (11.5 %) responded with ‘Always.’ This indicates that more than 50% of respondents believed they could diagnose specific problems with decoding fluency and comprehension skills in their students most or all of the time.
Figure 4.7 Teachers’ beliefs regarding their ability to diagnose specific decoding fluency and comprehension problems

4.4.1.2 Response Two
In response to the statement ‘There are students in my classes who are unable to effectively read a text for the English Course of Study’, two (2.6%) responded with ‘Never’, 19 (24.4%) responded with ‘Rarely’, 36 (46.2%) responded with ‘Sometimes’, 17 (21.8%) responded with ‘Frequently’ and four (5.1%) responded with ‘Always’. This demonstrated that more than 70% of respondents believed that there were, at least sometimes if not more often, students in Stage One and Stage Two Courses of Study who did not have the required reading skills to complete the tasks associated with the Reading Outcome.

Figure 4.8 Teachers’ beliefs regarding the presence of students in senior English classes who are unable to read a text effectively.

4.4.1.3 Response Three
In response to the statement ‘I employ diagnostic tests (eg. Neale Analysis of Reading Ability, Tests of Reading Comprehension (TORCH) to determine the reading rates, comprehension and fluency of my students’, 33 (42.3%) responded with ‘Never’, 18 (24.4%) responded with ‘Rarely’, 20 (25.6%) responded with ‘Sometimes’, 4 (5.1%) responded with ‘Frequently’ and 2 (2.6%) responded with ‘Always’. This revealed that a significant majority of the respondents did not regularly use standardized testing methods to assess the reading levels of their students prior to planning and teaching a Course of Study.
4.4.1.4 Response Four
In response to the statement ‘I survey students to determine their personal extra-curricula reading practices, four (5.1%) indicated that they ‘Rarely’ do this, 21 (26.9%) indicated that they ‘Sometimes’ do this, 33 (42.3%) indicated that they do this ‘Frequently’ and 20 (25.6%) indicated that they ‘Always’ do this. This demonstrated that more than 60% of the respondents sought information regarding what students read outside of the curriculum frequently or all of the time.

4.4.2 Teacher Choice of Reading Texts
The statements in this section focused on the reasons behind teachers’ choices of texts for their students to study as part of the Course of Study in English.

4.4.2.1 Response One
In response to the statement ‘I choose texts for study that all students can read with confidence’, 1 (1.3%) responded with ‘Rarely’, 11 (14.1%) responded with ‘Sometimes’, 49 (62.8%) responded with ‘Frequently’ and 17 (21.8%) responded with ‘Always’. This indicated that most teachers chose texts they believed their students could read with confidence.
Figure 4.11  Frequency of teachers who choose texts students read with confidence

4.4.2.2  Response Two
In response to the statement ‘I allow students to choose from a range of texts studied in the Course of Study English units’, four (5.1%) responded with ‘Never’, 13 (16.7%) responded with ‘Rarely’, 33 (42.3%) responded with ‘Sometimes’, 17 (21.8%) responded with ‘Frequently’ and 11 (14.1%) responded with ‘Always’. This revealed that, in the main (64.1%), teachers did not allow students the opportunity to have input into the choice of texts they study.

Figure 4.12  Number of teachers who allow students to choose texts

4.4.2.3  Response Three
In response to the statement ‘I choose texts to engage and motivate my students’, one (1.3%) responded with ‘Rarely’, three (3.8%) responded with ‘Sometimes’, 40 (52.6%) responded with ‘Frequently’ and 33 (42.3%) responded with ‘Always’. This showed that more than 90% of teachers chose texts they believed would engage students.
Figure 4.13  Frequency of teachers who chose texts to engage students

4.4.2.4  Response Four
In response to the statement ‘I use texts upon instruction from my Head of Department /Learning Area’, five (6.4%) responded with ‘Never’, seven (9%) responded with ‘Rarely’, 28 (35.9%) responded with ‘Sometimes’, 24 (30.8%) responded with ‘Frequently’ and 14 (17.9%) responded with ‘Always’. This revealed that more than 80% of teachers take instruction at least some of the time from their Heads of Department/Learning Area as to which texts are to be used in English Course of Study delivery.
4.4.2.5  Response Five
In response to the statement ‘I use texts which are available in our department ’, two (2.6%) respondents answered with ‘Rarely’, 11 (14. %) responded with ‘Sometimes’, 43 (55.1 %) responded with ‘Frequently’, 22 (28.2%) answered with ‘Always’. This indicated that more than 80% of teachers used texts already available in their department.

Figure 4.14  Frequency of teachers who chose texts on instruction from Heads of Department/Learning Area
Figure 4.15  Frequency of teachers who chose texts based on availability of school resources

4.4.3  Teacher Adjustments to Programming
The statements in this section of the survey focused on the extent to which teachers adjusted their English Course of Study programs to suit the reading abilities of their students.

4.4.3.1  Response One
In response to the statement ‘I allow sufficient time in programming to explicitly teach reading skills with students who demonstrate low levels of reading fluency, decoding and comprehension skills’, two (2.6%) responded with ‘Never’, 18 (23.1%) responded with ‘Rarely’, 31 (39.7%) responded with ‘Sometimes’, 21 (26.9%) responded with ‘Frequently’ and four (5.1%) responded with ‘Always’. Two (2.6%) of the 78 participants did not complete this section of the survey. These results indicated that the majority of teachers – 65.4% - did not usually prioritize time in programming to teach explicit reading skills.
Figure 4.16  Frequency of teachers who believe they allowed sufficient time in programs to explicitly teach reading skills

4.4.3.2  Response Two
In response to the statement ‘I offer extra time to complete reading activities to students who demonstrate low levels of reading rate, comprehension and fluency’, one (1.3%) responded with ‘Never’, three (3.8%) responded with ‘Rarely’, 23 (29.5%) responded with ‘Sometimes’, 35 (44.9%) responded with ‘Frequently’ and 15 (19.2%) responded with ‘Always’. These figures revealed that while 64.1% of surveyed teachers ‘Always’ or ‘Frequently’ allowed extra time for students to complete their reading tasks, nearly 35% did not.

Figure 4.17  Frequency of teachers who allow additional time for students to complete reading activities.

4.4.3.3  Response Three
In response to the statement ‘I adjust my programs as they are being taught to accommodate students who demonstrate low levels of reading rate, comprehension and
fluency', one (1.3%) responded with 'Never', four (5.1%) responded with 'Rarely', 25 (32.1%) responded with 'Sometimes', 31 (39.7%) responded with 'Frequently' and 16 (20.5%) responded with 'Always'. This revealed that more than 60% of the respondents adjusted English Course of Study programs to suit the needs of students in the class but 38% of the group responded they did this only 'Sometimes', 'Rarely' or 'Never'.

![Bar chart showing frequency of teachers adjusting programs to suit literacy needs of students]

Figure 4.18  Frequency of teachers who adjust programs to suit literacy needs of students

4.4.3.4  Response Four
One (1.3%) respondent did not participate in this section. In response to the statement 'I negotiate with students who demonstrate low levels of reading rate, comprehension and fluency how they will complete reading tasks', seven (9%) responded with 'Rarely', 28 (35.9%) responded with 'Sometimes', 31 (39.7%) responded with 'Frequently' and 11 (14.1%) responded with 'Always'. The option of responding with 'Never' was not taken by any of the respondents. In summary, 54% of teachers surveyed negotiated task completion with their students 'Always' or 'Frequently', but 45% did this only 'Sometimes', 'Frequently' or 'Never'.
Figure 4.19  Frequency of teachers who negotiate with students with low levels of reading rate about how they will complete reading tasks

4.4.3.5 Response Five
In response to the statement ‘I employ what I know about early reading strategies to assist students who demonstrate low levels of reading fluency, decoding and comprehension skills’, two (2.6%) responded with ‘Never’, nine (11.5%) responded with ‘Rarely’, 27 (34.6%) responded with ‘Sometimes’, 30 (38.5%) responded with ‘Frequently’ and nine (11.5%) responded with ‘Always’. This indicated that while 50% of surveyed teachers employed what they know about early reading strategies to assist students, 49% did this only ‘Sometimes’, ‘Rarely’ or ‘Never’.

Figure 4.20  Frequency of teachers who believe they employ knowledge of early reading strategies to assist students

4.4.4 Teacher Understanding of Reading Acquisition

The statements in this section of the survey focused on what teachers understood about the acquisition of reading skills.
4.4.4.1 Response One
In response to the statement ‘Students will never be independent readers without extensive phonic knowledge, 15 (19.2%) ‘Disagreed’ with the statement, 46 (59%) ‘Agreed’ with the statement, and 15 (19.2%) ‘Strongly Agreed’ with the statement. Two (2.6%) of the respondents did not fill in this statement on the survey. No respondents chose the option ‘Strongly Disagree.’ This demonstrated that while 80% of surveyed teachers agreed that phonic knowledge was necessary, close to 20% disagreed.

![Bar chart showing frequency of teachers' responses regarding the importance of phonic knowledge for independent reading.]

**Figure 4.21** Frequency of teachers’ responses regarding the importance of phonic knowledge for independent reading

4.4.4.2 Response Two
In response to the statement ‘Teaching students to syllabify unknown words is a useful teaching strategy’, two (2.6%) ‘Disagreed’ with this statement, 55 (70.5%) ‘Agreed’ with the statement and 21 (26.9) ‘Strongly Agreed’ with this statement. This is an indication that the vast majority of teachers believed that this was a useful teaching strategy to assist with reading.
4.4.4.3 Response Three
In response to the statement 'Student knowledge of word derivation (eg, Greek, Latin, French) will help them read and understand unknown words in all subjects’, one (1.3%) respondent strongly disagreed with the statement, 20 (25.6%) disagreed with the statement, 39 (50%) agreed with the statement and 17 (21.8%) strongly agreed with the statement. This revealed that while the majority of teachers believed that knowledge of word derivations would assist students in the reading and understanding of new words across subject areas, more than a quarter of the respondents believed this was not so.

4.4.4.4 Response Four
One (1.3%) respondent did not respond to this section of the survey. In response to the statement 'Students can learn to read without explicit instruction in how to decode words’, 12 (15.4%) respondents 'Strongly Disagreed' with the statement, 43 (55.1%) 'Disagreed'
with the statement, 21 (26.9%) 'Agreed' with the statement and one (1.3%) 'Strongly Agreed' with the statement. This indicated that more than 70% of respondents believed that explicit instruction in decoding skills was necessary for students to learn to read.

**Figure 4.24**  Frequency of teacher responses regarding the need for explicit instruction in decoding

4.4.4.5  Response Five

In response to the statement ‘A student’s vocabulary is closely related to his or her reading skill’, one (1.3%) 'Strongly Disagreed', five (5.1%) 'Disagreed', 31 (39.7%) ‘Agreed’ and 42 (53.8%) ‘Strongly Agreed’. These results demonstrated that the majority of teachers believed that vocabulary is closely related to students’ reading skills.

**Figure 4.25**  Frequency of teacher responses regarding vocabulary being closely related to reading skills

4.4.5  Understanding the Responsibilities of English Teachers

The statements in this section of the survey focused on what teachers believed to be their responsibilities in relation to the teaching of reading skills to students in the senior school.
4.4.5.1 Response One
In response to the statement ‘By the time students have reached senior secondary school, they should be able to read with competence that does not require further instruction’, two (2.6%) respondents ‘Strongly Disagreed’ with this statement, 17 (21.8%) ‘Disagreed’ with the statement, 48 (61.5%) ‘Agreed’ with this statement and 11 (14.1%) ‘Strongly Agreed’ with this statement. This revealed that more than 75% of teachers believed that by the time students reached secondary school they should be able to read with a level of competence such that they would not require further instruction.

Figure 4.26 Frequency of teachers who believed that senior students should have established reading skills

4.4.5.2 Response Two
In response to the statement ‘It is my responsibility to make explicit the reading requirements for the completion of a unit in the Courses of Study’, one (1.3%) ‘Strongly Disagreed’ with this statement, one (1.3%) ‘Disagreed’, 39 (50%) ‘Agreed’ with the statement and 37 (47.4%) ‘Strongly Agreed’. Overwhelmingly, teachers believed that they must make clear the requirements for completing the Course of Study unit.
4.4.5.3 Response Three
In response to the statement ‘It is my responsibility to ensure that all students have adequate comprehension of all the texts covered in class’, one (1.3%) ‘Strongly Disagreed’, four (5.1%) ‘Disagreed’, 41 (52.6%) ‘Agreed’ and 32 (41%) ‘Strongly Agreed’. While there was a small number of respondents who indicated that teacher responsibility did not include ensuring that students had adequate comprehension, the majority of respondents believed they needed to ensure students understood all texts adequately.

4.4.5.4 Response Four
In response to the statement ‘It is my responsibility as a senior school English teacher to teach reading skills’, 17 (21.8%) respondents ‘Disagreed’, 40 (51.3%) ‘Agreed’ and 21
(26.9%) 'Strongly Agreed'. This indicated that more than a fifth of the respondents did not see it as their responsibility to teach reading skills at senior secondary level.

Figure 4.29  Frequency of teachers who accepted the responsibility as a senior school English teacher to teach reading skills

4.4.5.5  Response Five
In response to the statement 'Beginning reading strategies should be an integral part of programming in English Courses of Study', five (6.4%) respondents 'Strongly Disagreed' while 24 (30.8%) 'Disagreed' with the statement. Thirty nine (50%) 'Agreed' with the statement and nine (11.5%) 'Strongly Agreed' with the statement. This indicated that while more than 60% of teachers believed strategies should be included, almost 40% did not.
4.4.6 Prioritization of Activities of the Senior English Teacher

This section of the survey asked respondents to rank a range of statements relating to the relative importance of their different roles from 1 – 5, with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important. The median score of each of the responses was used to rank the statements. The results are presented in Figure 4.31.

1. It is a requirement that I choose reading material which covers topics and issues that will engage students in my class.

2. It is a requirement that I choose reading material to best suit the varied reading abilities of students in my class.

3. It is a requirement that I choose reading material that will promote further reading for pleasure or recreation.

4. It is a requirement that I choose reading material that will prepare students for further study at a tertiary or TAFE level.

5. It is a requirement that I choose reading material that reflects the values and attitudes of the school in which I teach.

On average, choosing texts that explored relevant topics and issues that pertained to students’ own experiences was viewed as the most important aspect of teaching reading. Teachers were also very aware of the need to choose texts that would be accessible for
students with a range of reading abilities. The third priority reflected the value that teachers placed on encouraging reading for pleasure and recreation. Fourth on the list was the objective of preparing students for further study. The lowest priority among all respondents was the need to reflect the culture of the school in which they taught.

4.4.7 Prioritization of Responsibilities

This section of the survey asked respondents to focus on what they believed would help them in their roles as teachers of English senior school students.

4.4.7.1 Response One

In response to the statement ‘It is necessary for me to undertake further studies to help me understand how students read in senior school’, 24 (30.8%) participants responded with ‘Unsure’, 16 (20.5%) responded with ‘No’ and 38 (48.7%) responded with ‘Yes’. This indicated that almost half of the respondents believed that further studies would assist with developing their understanding of how students read.

![Figure 4.32](image)

**Figure 4.32** Frequency of teacher responses regarding the necessity to undertake further studies to assist in helping understand how students read in senior school

4.4.7.2 Response Two

In response to the statement ‘It would assist me in my teaching of Year Eleven students to carry out action research on reading to assess the effectiveness of my teaching’, 23 (29.5%) respondents indicated they were unsure about this prospect, 12 (15.4%) responded with ‘No’ and 43 (55.1%) responded with ‘Yes’. This indicated that less than half of teachers believed that undertaking action research would help them to evaluate their teaching effectiveness.
4.4.7.3 Response Three
In response to the statement ‘I have access to the latest research about reading and literacy in my work environment (eg., journals, professional organisation publications, websites), 17 respondents (21.8%) indicated they were ‘Unsure’, 16 (20.5%) indicated they did not have access and 45 (56.6%) indicated they did have access to reading research materials.

4.4.7.4 Response Four
In response to the statement ‘I seek opportunities to access the latest research about reading and literacy in my work environment’, six (7.7%) of the respondents said they
were ‘Unsure’, 28 (35.9%) said ‘No’ and 44 (56.4%) said ‘Yes’. This indicated that more
than 50% of the respondents said they sought opportunities to access latest research at
work but more than a third of the respondents did not.

![Bar graph showing the frequency of teachers' responses regarding their seeking of opportunities to access the latest research about reading in the work environment.]

**Figure 4.35** Frequency of teachers' responses regarding their seeking of opportunities to access the latest research about reading in the work environment

4.4.7.5 Response Five
In response to the statement ‘I believe the delivery of research results about reading
through in-service training will assist me with my teaching of students in the area of
reading’, 18 (23.1%) respondents indicated they were ‘Unsure’, seven (9%) said ‘No’ and
53 (67.9%) said ‘Yes’. Thus around two thirds of the survey respondents believed that the
delivery of research findings about reading through in-service professional development
would assist with the teaching of reading.
Teachers’ responses regarding whether or not in-service professional development about reading research would assist their teaching of reading

4.5 Qualitative Data – Interview Responses

4.5.1 Introduction

To further understand what teachers considered to be part of their responsibilities as English teachers in relation to the elaboration of the Reading Outcome in Courses of Study, follow up interviews were conducted with 23 teachers, either in person or by phone throughout Term Four, 2008. The interviews allowed for the elaboration and exploration of the categories of survey statements. Quotes from interview transcripts are presented in this section because they form part of the data set. A full discussion of these data is included in Chapter Five.

The categories of statements were set prior to the interview process as follows:

1. Teacher Identification of Student Reading Ability
2. Teacher Choice of Reading Text for Learning and Engagement
3. Teacher Adjustments to Programming and Teaching Strategies
4. Teacher Understanding of Reading Instruction and Acquisition as applied to the Reading Outcome
5. Responsibilities of English Teachers and Understanding of Teaching Role.
4.5.2 **Category One: Teacher Identification of Student Reading Ability**

One of the responsibilities mentioned by teachers was the need to define and understand the literacy skills of students as they commenced a course so they could instruct students at an appropriate level. Teachers did this mainly through their observations of students who showed signs of being disengaged, rather than completing any detailed standardized testing. Teachers spoke about the reactions of students to texts and the activities associated with reading. In the process of interviewing, one concern was often mentioned: the students’ lack of engagement with the text.

They just are switching off in class, glazing over, they wouldn’t read the text. Even when you do close study of the introduction and you give them quite detailed notes or you do some sort of work with visual stuff, they still weren’t taking up the idea. They just weren’t interested in reading it. You can just tell the mood of the room that you just lose them. (MAISWA 3)

Another teacher described the following approach by students:

Leaving it (the book) at home, leaving it in their lockers, not ever having read it. Pushing, pushing, pushing them to read it and then them just utterly rejecting it. (MCEO 2)

Another spoke about the clearly expressed opinions of students who found reading in the Courses to be a challenge:

Yes, especially with the Year Eleven 1CENG and 1DENG course I’ve done ... most of them, the current response is that they hate reading or they don’t like reading, so it’s a constant challenge and in the Year 12 2A/2B course the motivation there is very low among some of the students ... reading is for many of them a challenge. (MCEO1)

Teacher perception of students’ ability to read a text for understanding was also expressed:

The ability to read deeply into a text ... is quite poor amongst many students. It’s usually quite superficial reading of what’s going on, and knowledge of theoretical concepts or terms, whether it just be a definition of culture or terms like ‘ambiguous’ or any sort of words with several syllables aren’t understood correctly. (MCEO1)

Teachers were asked what standardized tools they used, if any, to assess the reading skills of students. In the surveys, most respondents indicated that they did not employ standardized testing to determine literacy levels of students in their classes. When asked what specific knowledge of testing instruments they might use such as TORCH (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003) or the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (Neale, 1999) the following response was typical:
I don’t really diagnose. They’re in a class and you just assume that they struggle to make independent sense of reading and so when you are going through comprehension statements and passages when you’re discussing or reading things in the novel, you tend to make things very explicit. (MCEO 5)

Another teacher indicated that to find out about literacy skills among students was not a priority.

Probably it takes me a little while to notice a great deal about their reading levels because, to be honest, I don’t assess their reading levels when they come in. (MAISWA 1)

A number of interviewees made the observation that, although most students could decode the text, they struggled with anything more than superficial comprehension.

I suppose a lot of them struggle with encapsulating a main idea from the text … they tend to have very literal readings of the texts, particularly students who aren’t readers. (MAISWA 3)

I would say that reading comprehension skills, for the types of students I see, are a bit limited. They tend to not read very carefully, or they can make inferences but they don’t always make a lot of inferences, or enough inferences or enough connection to widen knowledge. (MAISWA 7)

Where I come across difficulties is perhaps more with comprehension, so that reading for meaning as opposed to reading the print - deciphering the words with the kids I have is achievable, however, in terms of comprehending beyond the literal is where there’s difficulty for my kids. (MAISWA 1)

They’re not keen readers in general … they read voluntarily practically not at all. They manage directional skills and their reading is not obviously bad, but they begin to slow down when they start to take notes and things or try to pin them down to specific tasks: they have trouble. (RDET1)

One teacher made an observation about the ‘tricks’ students use in order to give the impression they are readers:

We’ve still got kids … who have not read a book, possibly ever, particularly in the Stage One courses and some of the Stage Two, too, who have learned the tricks of pretending to have read a book, or who have watched a film of the book, who have borrowed books from the library in Years Eight, Nine and Ten and carried them around for a long time and then brought them back and hoped that would be enough to convince people that they have read (them). (MDET2)

4.5.3 Category Two: Teacher Choice of Reading Text for Learning and Engagement

Some teachers indicated that texts were chosen with a reasonable amount of freedom due to the availability of money in budgets:

We're quite lucky because we have a good budget and the students will pretty much buy anything we tell them to. (MAISWA 3)
One interviewee responded with regard to the capacity of the school being able to resource the English department adequately:

We're well resourced - if I'm planning ahead enough, if I want to try something new - we have a book hire system so we have quite a well stocked book room, but part of that is that we can buy a set of books that the kids will keep because kids don’t buy books from a booklist and part of that deal is that they receive a text that year to keep so if there’s something that we don’t have, we can get around it in that way if it’s not too expensive to buy it. (MAISWA 1)

Another teacher said that it was necessary to give students examples of what they are likely to face in testing or Stage Two external examinations\(^\text{21}\), rather than what documents they would face when they left school. This influenced the types of texts offered in class:

The choices of text would be more about making the students familiar with the types of things they can expect from a certain type of text...We look at those sorts of generic things – ideas and themes or a particular genre or type of text. (MAISWA 7)

In the next response, a teacher referred to the fact that teachers in other subject areas were moving towards using material that was not text or chapter based for students at Stage One level:

... most Science teachers have stopped giving them textbooks and reading. Most of the work for those kids comes parcelled into worksheets and they don’t read text books or chapters or those kinds of things. There is no demand on them in those classes, it seems, to have to do any reading. (MDET 2)

The teacher in the following response used a variety of text types to encourage reading in the classroom:

I try to direct them into texts that they might like ... try to get them to do things that might be easier. Just simple things like a newspaper to expand their knowledge. (MCEO1)

Another teacher talked about a possible strategy in choosing a variety of texts simultaneously within a class:

I think running a few texts at a time allows for greater discussion as well, particularly if they have a similar theme or topic. Boys can be reading a text that they are interested in and girls can pick up a text that they are interested in and they can swap ideas... it does complicate things sometimes if you are trying to do a close analysis and those kinds of things but I don’t think it’s anything that can’t be worked around. (MCEO2)

\(^{21}\) These are compulsory for completion of the Stage Two Course of Study
One interviewee said she waited until she knew her students before choosing text from the school store that she felt would be appropriate:

I waited until I had them for a while before deciding on what I would give them to read so that I could find something that I could feel was very appropriate. I used the *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*\(^\text{22}\) and got a lady in to talk (about autism) to the kids and that was really good. (MDET3)

The focus on characterization and point of conflict or ‘rising tension’ in text was a factor in text selection for one interviewee:

... with my 1A students we did 'Caught in the Headlights'\(^\text{23}\) ... we'll play with, obviously, characterization, which is really driving it, and we focus mainly because it takes so long, characterization and rising tension because they were the two biggies in that – and the setting – for those kids. (MAISWA 1)

Another teacher summarized the process of text selection as driven by the teacher but inclusive of students:

We do two, no, three things. One is we make it necessary to get decent marks that they have actually done the reading. I mean, we put them in situations where if they haven't they are at a disadvantage. Secondly, we always try and promote reading positively and thirdly we expose them as much as possible in class to it and when we do investigations we try to get them to choose things initially that they might respond to and sometimes you have fantastic results by that. (MAISWA 2)

4.5.4 *Category Three: Teacher Adjustments to Programming*

When asked how they adjusted their programs to suit the literacy skills of their students, teachers described their strategies.

I would start with activating their (students) prior knowledge and then discussing the topic, the scenes, the impressions they've formed from the cover and title and so forth. Then we would read it through twice – the first time is to get an idea and the second to read it more carefully. Doing things like asking statements about the text, making connections, linking it to outside, their prior knowledge, the other knowledge they have, checking vocabulary, those sorts of things and then making sure when they are reading it the second time they are slowing down, rereading sections that they don't understand. (MAISWA 7)

The following response was offered by a teacher in a rural school who made a point about the changes brought about by the education reforms in Western Australia and how

\(^{22}\) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Haddon, 2003)
\(^{23}\) *Caught in the Headlights* (Shillitoe, 2003)
they had impacted on programming – the adjustments made were on a greater scale to respond to the outcomes in Courses of Study:

> It is not Courses of Study that have changed: it’s outcomes that have changed and the students doing Courses of Study would only be different in their reading ability if they’ve come through an outcomes system because otherwise, they would have come through the other system ... outcomes have made a big difference in the approach that kids have in that it is more methodical. (RDET1)

Another teacher stated that there needed to be a response to the specific literacy needs of students in the class.

> I didn’t go into it in the way you would with a normal class, if that makes sense. I dipped into it and took bits that I felt would be relevant and they could actually get their heads around because there is a big range of kids in the class because quite a few of them, as you would be aware, have actually worked out their destinations. (MDET4)

One teacher made an observation about a student who would be described as a struggling reader. Discussion with the student and inquiry about what engaged him allowed the teacher to implement an alternate negotiated task based on a web-site text rather than a traditional print text:

> I’ve got a kid in my Year Eleven class at the moment who is not unintelligent but he is utterly disengaged. He has also had a brain injury earlier in the year which rendered him belligerent a lot of the time, and intractable; however, I have discovered he really, really, really likes Top Gear, the television show, and he is also the most proficient browser of high performance vehicle websites that I have ever seen in my life. He can find anything you need to know about a particular high performance vehicle. He has written me a review - it was an incredibly good review - that I thought he had copied and pasted from various sites. Now I am convinced because I sat and watched him (work.) On his subject of interest, he is phenomenally literate. (MDET2)

4.5.5 Category Four: Teacher Understanding of Reading Instruction & Acquisition

While teachers indicated in the survey their agreement that there should be instruction about reading skills (including phonics technique, vocabulary and word derivations), some survey respondents made statements to the effect that students entering senior school should be able to read efficiently and autonomously:

> By the time we get to Year Eleven and Twelve there is so much to get through that going back and teaching kids how to read and teaching a child what a good reading practice is - the horse has already bolted. Not only do we not have the time to do it, we would be misplaced doing it then, I feel. (MAISWA 5)
The following response came from a teacher of many years experience who had progressed through the range of education reforms in Western Australia, along with the growth of technology based information and entertainment systems now embedded in the cultural and educational experiences of students of all ages:

Most kids, when it comes to reading, though, are proficient readers of other kinds of texts, such as websites, web pages, electronic texts. When you look at the amount of complex reading that is required of a MySpace page and they can all do that no matter how seemingly disengaged they are from the more academic kinds of reading, they are able to manage the different kind of forms, the popups, the multi-tasks, the reading of their friends who email them and message them on that site. They do all of those kinds of things and they manage that reading quite well. (MDET 2)

4.5.6 Category Five: Understanding the Responsibilities of English Teachers

Teachers commented on what they believed were their responsibilities as English teachers:

Look, good English teachers know their students and that’s the first thing you have to do … conferencing, talking to kids, getting them to keep a reflective journal of their reading, getting them to respond on a regular basis to prompts in the classroom, either written or oral, about particular aspects of the book that they’re reading, or particular techniques that the writer might be using … teaching them some particular things about predicting or making inferences or those kinds of things and then giving them an opportunity to go off and try that out and then listening to them to see whether or not they’ve got it. (MDET 2)

Another teacher put forward the idea that the teacher takes on the responsibility of launching discussion about books and encourage reading outside of the curriculum offerings in order to promote further reading practice:

I share with them my own reading experience. I also look at their peers - there are kids in the room who do love to read so we do have some random sharing experiences. It doesn’t just have to be a novel; it can be short stories, feature articles and those sorts of things. … the girls have seen ‘I need to pick up my act … I need to start expanding my reading and expanding my knowledge of the wider world and just not focussing on the prescribed texts that the school has told me to read’ … our librarians are fabulous at promoting (text). (MCE07)

The issue of technology and information systems was raised by respondents when asked about the significance of their influence on teenage reading practices. This teacher expressed wariness about using technology as part of the Reading Outcome:

There’s two big problems with technology … teachers are very reluctant to let go of their (position) as the locus of power in the classroom. In other words ‘Here’s a book, I’ll teach a book, we’ll analyse the book and deconstruct it’ … teachers are very reluctant to embrace technology and say to kids ‘You might know more than me.’ The second problem is that you
just can’t say, I’m going to get an online book now and just read it’ and rely on it because it is online it is going to be more inspirational and engaging. You still have to work with children about how to read effectively. (MAISWA 5)

The following comment was made by a teacher who elaborated on the idea that the teacher is the focus of leadership in the classroom when it comes to directing the learning experience:

I think it comes back to the teacher in the classroom. (MAISWA 1)

The following comment reflected how one teacher worked with students who were reluctant or disengaged readers:

I usually do a lot of one on one work and I will set work as a group or individually and then... we work on small segments of the text at a time because the students I find here who are having trouble decoding and understanding and making meaning, they don’t get the whole text ... I photocopied the work in a booklet and ended up giving it out to the other classes so the others understood what the other group had achieved - they had a chapter by chapter analysis of what had happened so this is probably the best it has ever worked ... they achieved something, this is great. (MCEO7)

The following comment was made about the requirement of teachers to teach reading skills to those students with poor literacy:

We certainly have to teach them those skills of being able to read and when I mean read, it has so many different facets but reading in terms of the actual mechanics of being able to read because some of the kids coming in at Stage One in Year Eleven still need some help but more to the point ... (they need to be) able to interpret stuff in the written form whether it’s reading newspapers or magazine articles or texts like novels or plays ... they have kind of lost that skill and we continually are trying to find ways that are conducive to that. (MAISWA 6)

The following comment was made with regard to the purpose of reading not just for information or entertainment, but for promoting and establishing critical thinking:

We’re also looking at the way all texts, not in a negative way, are manipulative instruments and are trying to position people and that’s our basic philosophy, to look at the way texts try and position people. (MAISWA2)

Other comments focused on the way texts were used in the class, and on the demands placed on English teachers when it comes to their own reading practice:
I'm not just reading about novels (but also) non-fiction texts. I'm always reading articles in the Weekend Australian, the STM magazine, that's quite interesting, the odd teacher comes into me and says “That would be good to use in an exam.” I'm always thinking in that regard but if I don't do it I just feel I'm missing out so much. We've got to get the teachers reading them as well but the emphasis on assessment makes it difficult to go home and say “Well, I've just marked for three hours and now I've got to read for another two hours.” It's a difficult thing to do. I find it enormously difficult but I know I've got to do it because it's my bread and butter, I suppose (MAISWA 6)

The following series of comments reflect how the respondents view themselves as teachers of English.

You're actually relying on the teacher having an extraordinarily engaging and entertaining personality plus the ability to convey information to students to have them take it seriously. (MDET 6)

I think a good teacher will use whatever lever they can to get the kids to think about something and then reading just becomes an adjunct of that because you say 'Well, why don't you read that article about that' or “Why don't you watch this about that or talk about that” so reading doesn't just become this weird thing you do - it's out of life, it's in life. (MAISWA 2)

The next comment was in response to the statement about how teachers perceived themselves and their responsibilities as teachers and the nature of the subject they teach and how this fits in with the public perception of their role.

I think that the importance of English is understood. I think people do recognise it in Australia, even if it's grudging, that literacy, per se, is important for communication ... Because even if we, in our hearts, as a country don't feel it's important, we recognise people who are powerful do and we want to keep up with the Joneses. (MAISWA 2)

This teacher made statements about her attitude to her students:

The 1C/1D, I enjoy them, I like them as people. (MCEO 5)

This teacher commented on the capacity of reading to influence and promote critical thinking among students:

Anyone can be shaped, as human beings we are shaped by stories. We read 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas' with the 1C/1D kids this term and it's a book that they enjoyed and some of them...had some insightful things to say about what they thought about the pacing of it, the climax and the finale of it and so they had been engaged in the story. These are students who - and I was very surprised to find that - one of them was actually reading it independently ... he made these great comments in class and then in his book review he didn't put the good comments he made into his book review, and I noted that he made these great comments and I pointed it out

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24 Sunday Times Magazine
25 The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas by John Boyne (Boyne, 2007)
in class ‘Why didn’t you put that in your review’. ‘I was in a hurry and put it off.’ And so, yeah, they can be reached with a story and they enjoy it but I guess the translation of that experience of reading into the exercises required for producing class materials as the requisite evidence of learning they struggle with more so. (MCE05)

This comment emphasizes the point that while the ‘official’ curriculum of the Courses of Study was outlined in professional learning sessions prior to their introduction, the specific pedagogies of teaching the Reading Outcome were not articulated:

I think it’s got to be through, perhaps, more and more networking, and the networking the PDs available, I think so much the PD that came with the introduction of the new courses has been so focused on the big picture – the structure of the courses and what has to be included – but not the pedagogy (MAISWA 1).

Finally, this teacher is clear about what is perceived to be one of the responsibilities of the English teacher:

We are always teaching critical literacy…We are always trying to put things into their historical context… to look at the way texts try and position people (MAISWA2).

4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the demographic descriptions of participants, with data from the surveys presented in the form of graphs and descriptions. Interviews were presented in categorized transcription sections. Chapter Five discusses these results and offers recommendations for action in four areas of consideration: for the education sector, for the professional learning of teachers of senior English and for pre-service teachers in secondary English and for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four presented both quantitative and qualitative findings in relation to the research questions. In this chapter, discussion of the findings will be followed by a series of recommendations for education sectors, for teachers of senior secondary English, for pre-service teacher education and for future research.

5.1 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS REVISITED

This research focused on how English teachers perceived their responsibilities towards students who demonstrated poor literacy skills in Stage One and Two Courses of Study in senior schooling. The research questions were based on the researcher's observations of student levels of literacy as they embarked on English studies in senior schools. The main observation of the researcher was that some students were for the most part disengaged and unable to process the complexities of texts studied. Other students had demonstrated that they did not have the literacy skills to manage reading requirements of the Courses of Study. It was the view of the researcher that the reading abilities of some students were not congruent with the aims and objectives of the courses being studied.

The primary research question was framed as:

What do English teachers understand are their responsibilities towards students who demonstrate poor reading skills in Courses of Study?

This was explored through the following secondary questions:

i. How were teachers assessing student reading levels?
ii. What adjustments were English teachers making in their programming to accommodate those students with poor reading skills?
iii. To what extent did teachers understand the nature of the reading process, student reading difficulties and how to address them?

5.2 Survey Responses

At 29.6%, the survey response rate was poor. Response rates of postal surveys undertaken by homogeneous groups such as teachers have been tracked at around “61% and seem to be as good as other techniques especially when the topic under investigation is of particular relevance to the group” (De Vaus, 2002, p. 16). An online survey was
considered, but as it was understood that not all teachers had access to a computer or had fully functioning internet access, particularly in some rural areas, this was discounted as not being a reliable method of gathering data. Research by Yetter and Capaccioli (2010, p. 266) has supported the use of “paper-and-pencil methods ... for surveying professionals in secondary school settings.” The decision to use a mail-out system, however, was mainly influenced by the ethics requirements of the Department of Education (Brown, 2008), the CEOWA , and AISWA which required all survey material to be sent to Heads of Learning Area and teachers through the school principal. The fact that these surveys had to be sent to principals first may have had an effect on the response rate: it is probable that if a principal saw value in his or her staff completing the survey, it was passed on. If, however, the principal viewed the completion of the survey as an impost on the teachers’ time, or of little value to the staff, it may have been disregarded. The covering letters which accompanied the surveys clearly stated that its completion was voluntary and the decision was the principal’s to pass the surveys on. It is also probable that if surveys were passed on to the Head of Learning Area and English teachers with the instruction it was to be completed, it was likely to be done so within a reasonably quick time frame.

A smaller percentage of rural teachers responded than expected based on the proportion of metropolitan and rural teachers. When follow up calls were made to schools to ensure the surveys were delivered, the major comment for not completing the surveys was that teachers’ days were ‘crowded’ and ‘busy’ and completing the survey was not a high priority. Whether rural teachers felt more pressed for time than their metropolitan colleagues could perhaps be considered. When a personal visit to one of the country areas to encourage participation was suggested, the lack of time was given as a reason to discourage such a visit. Other explanations for the poorer response rate from rural teachers could be an increased level of disengagement by country teachers in teaching generally, although there was no specific evidence of this. It could be that the particular issues faced by teachers in these communities, such as their isolation, affected their general motivation to participate in a survey they may have perceived as being relevant to teachers working in city schools but irrelevant to their particular context. These teachers, therefore, may have felt removed from the purpose of the research. The fact that there were no survey returns from teachers in schools located in the Kimberley, Goldfields and Pilbara regions of Western Australia supports this interpretation. There was a greater than expected response from teachers in the Catholic Education sector. This could be attributed to the personal profile of the researcher within this sector, as opposed to the other sectors.
There was a widespread range of teaching experience represented. The spread of institutions where teaching qualifications were obtained broadly reflected those factors in the population it was targeting.

5.3 **Interview Participation**

Twenty-three teachers agreed to be interviewed for this study. The table showing participants indicates that there was a much greater representation of metropolitan teachers to rural teachers who agreed to take part. Again, this could be attributed to a lack of perceived value in talking about their experiences with Stage One and Two students or because their duties other than teaching may have taken higher priority.

5.4 **Discussion of Surveys and Interviews**

5.4.1 **Teacher Identification of Student Reading Levels**

Most teachers believed that students’ literacy abilities *should* be well established by the time they entered senior secondary school, but were cognizant of the fact that not all students demonstrated these abilities. Teachers’ identification of poor literacy levels of students in Stage One and Two English Courses of Study was shown to be based chiefly on observation rather than on the basis of formalized assessments. Survey results revealed that overall in senior secondary classes, teachers believed they could ‘diagnose’ students who demonstrated low fluency and comprehension skills. Because teachers generally did not use any formalized methods of reading skill assessment, it is likely that they could *identify* which students had problems with reading, which is not difficult to determine by simply listening to a student read, rather than *diagnose specific reading problems*. The survey did not explore the difference between these two important points. It could also be that teachers did not understand the difference between the two terms. (Problems in the survey design are mentioned in the Limitations section in Chapter Three of this thesis.)

English teachers’ use of standardized reading assessments with senior students is not common practice because it is not generally seen to be part of their role. An understanding of the reading process, and how to assess the different components of reading, are not part of secondary English teacher preparation courses, thus teachers would understandably not be confident in doing this. This survey and the subsequent interviews suggest, however, that secondary English teachers do need an understanding of the reading process, assessment procedures and strategies in order to support students who do not have the requisite skills. This is a view supported in the literature by Allen and Bruton (1997), Winograd (2001), Snyder (2008) Moats (1994, 1999, 2009) and Harper
and Rennie (2009). This is even more critical when considering that more than 70% of the surveyed teachers believed that they did have some students in their classes who could not comprehend the texts they were given.

What may be happening is that teachers are not assessing students’ literacy abilities, but are simply assessing students’ abilities to complete the set tasks. Teachers may operate on the understanding that reading literacy levels are fairly well established by senior secondary school and the belief is that there is no scope for improvement. There appeared to be little recognition of the need to adapt programs to include reading instruction and implementation of strategies that may be undertaken by the student to improve reading skills. Teachers’ lack of knowledge about reading development and reading assessments could explain why they did not administer assessments despite their acknowledgement of students who struggled with the literacy demands of the courses they were teaching. Also, it is possible that teachers made assumptions based on their previous experiences with other classes about the texts their students were capable of reading, and continued teaching programs that were largely unrevised. It may be that programs for these courses were written prior to students starting them, and texts were set before any checks were made as to their suitability for students who demonstrated poor reading skills. Thus, teachers made assumptions about reading ability rather than investigating the abilities of students in any depth. Reasons for this may be a lack of time to conduct what this researcher calls ‘exploratory’ lessons to determine what students are capable of in terms of reading. The notion that students enter a course with differing levels of literacy and motivation was mentioned in the literature. While it is recognized by teachers that students read at different levels of ability, no other processes to check this other than conventional classroom discussion or discourse appeared to be employed. It would appear that teachers make fairly broad judgments about students with regard to their reading ability. In the interviews, some teachers also acknowledged that they could identify student literacy ability presumably through written activities, tasks and discussions, or reading aloud of the text. Some teachers (65%) said they surveyed students about what their students read outside of the classroom. This notion was explored further in interviews, and it emerged that the ‘surveys’ were done through discussion in class as a matter of course in the interactions with students. No formalized survey process, however, was undertaken.
5.4.2 Teacher Choice of Reading Texts

The results from this section of the survey indicated that most teachers believed they chose texts that students could read effectively and therefore complete the associated tasks. Most teachers (more than 64%) also reported that they did not allow students to choose texts to be read in class. This may have been because the teacher wanted to choose a text that was familiar (to the teacher), and they already had a range of resources and activities prepared so that teaching preparation of the text was simple and expedient, thus reducing the need to create or source new activities. One respondent in the interview however, said that the ideal would be to ‘run ... a few texts at a time allow(ing) for greater discussion.’ In the main, however, this was not the norm, possibly due to the difficulties of assessing students on different texts. This would prove difficult for a teacher to manage for even just one class, and even more so for the two or three classes included in most teachers’ timetables.

As mentioned previously, it was largely the case that students had no choice in the selection of texts to be studied. Some teachers, however, did make an attempt to select texts with student interest and ability in mind. One particular teacher reported in an interview that students were reluctant to purchase their own books from a set list. This respondent said this was overcome by waiting for a few weeks to ascertain the interests and the differing range of reading abilities of the students. Students were then more amenable to purchasing the text when assured that the teacher had considered their reading ability and interests. The teacher also supplemented this choice of text with a visit from an expert about the theme of the book as a way to engage the students. This strategy, however, was not widely practised. Teachers were still very much the lone decision-makers about what texts were read in Stage One and Two classes.

At the same time, the data revealed that teachers did consider student engagement and motivation when choosing texts: more than 90 percent of respondents said they chose texts with engagement in mind. Teachers may have believed that if a student were engaged with the text, motivation to continue reading would follow and therefore the tasks associated with that reading would be completed. Engagement allows for a reasonable interaction to occur between the teacher and student(s) so that through discussion and application to tasks, learning progression could be demonstrated. The challenge for the teacher, however, was to gauge what constituted a text that motivated the students and then align the text with other areas of consideration, such as content appropriateness, language use and themes. These factors, in some cases, also needed to be congruent with the values of the school.
Another major factor affecting text choice was the instruction of the English department leader. More than 80% of respondents said they took instructions from their HOLA or HOD about the texts set for their classes, thus it was clear that these managers wielded much influence in this area. Teachers, while aiming to choose texts that would satisfy the Reading Outcome requirements, as well as engage and motivate students, may be constrained by the choices set by their line-managers. In terms of budgets, the HOLA or HOD may view the text resources as a cost investment that needed to have an extended shelf life – thus texts needed to be used more than just a few times before being ‘retired’. Restrictions on the supply of texts through book hire schemes within a school could also pose problems: in situations where budgets do not allow for the purchase of class sets of books that may appeal to students, teachers must settle for the texts on offer, which may be out-dated or of little relevance or interest to the students. One respondent in the interview data said that a ‘good budget’ helps the department to resource their stores and that their HOLA or HOD was willing to take instruction from the teacher as to what to purchase for their supplies; however, this was not always the case.

5.4.3 Teacher Adjustments to Programming

Responses in this section of the survey indicated that more than two thirds of the teachers did not prioritize time in Stage One English programs to explicitly teach reading skills to those students who demonstrated difficulties. Given teachers’ previous responses there is a mismatch between the teachers’ recognition of the fact that numbers of their students did not have the ability to read the set texts, and the fact that many of them did not attempt to address this problem by including specific strategies to help their students learn to read. Again, this may reflect their lack of understanding of what the problems were, and lack of strategies to respond to their students’ needs if they found the course work difficult.

One way in which many of the teachers did accommodate differing levels of ability was in negotiating time allowances. Approximately two thirds of the respondents indicated that they offered extra time to students to complete their work with the knowledge that this would assist students with achieving the best grades they could to satisfy the requirements of the course.

26 Head of Learning Area: title based on contractual agreement with school
27 Head of Department: title based on contractual agreement with school
28 A scheme where students borrow from the school store of texts rather than purchase individually from a set booklist.
In exploring the issue of curriculum adjustment further with those who were interviewed, teachers indicated that they tended to teach senior secondary students using a narrow set of strategies, focusing on the task requirements of the course, rather than on the student requirements. Curriculum modification strategies that were used, however, included breaking down or ‘chunking’ the text into smaller sections, setting questions for literal understanding rather than higher level comprehension, supplementing novel reading with magazine articles and the like, or reading only selected passages from a longer text. The latter strategy does not, however, allow for discussion of the whole text and its context, which may lead to ‘fragmenting’ of the reading experience. This reflects a somewhat limited range of strategies, and suggests the need for further professional development of teachers in this area.

5.4.4 Teacher Understanding of Reading Acquisition

The majority of teachers indicated that they understood how phonics knowledge, the syllabification of words and knowledge of word derivations assisted the reading process, although around 25% did not view these elements as important. A significant finding was that more than 70%, of the participants indicated that students can learn to read ‘without explicit instruction in how to decode words’. As discussed in the literature review, there is significant research to support the view that most students benefit from explicit teaching of phonics or alphabetic knowledge (Lokan, et al., 2001; Moats, 2009a; NICHD, 2000; Rowe, 2005), and that this is particularly important for beginning or struggling readers. This again suggests that teachers at this level of schooling do not have a clear understanding of early reading development and the importance of continuing instruction for students with poor levels of literacy, and how this is best achieved with secondary students.

This interpretation of the survey data was confirmed in the interviews. It emerged that teachers were not conversant with beginning reading skills and were not clear about where they, as teachers of senior English courses, fitted into the continuum of teaching reading. There was little evidence that these respondents knew how reading is taught at primary school level, and the importance of maintaining focus on specific reading skills through middle and senior school if required. The respondents focused on the values, attitudes, meanings and experiences represented in the text, as one would expect of study at the senior level. While a significant number of respondents (60%) agreed in the survey that beginning reading skills should be included in the curriculum to accommodate poor readers, the interview data confirmed that they did not know how to actually teach these skills. Overall, the teachers surveyed believed that all students who reached senior school level should be able to read the texts on offer, but were unclear as to how they could
instruct students who were unable to connect with the text because of problems with decoding and vocabulary.

Although teachers tended not to employ specific strategies to assist students with literacy difficulties, it appeared adjustments were made to the type of text used for classroom instruction and to the requirements of the assessment tasks. This appeared to be the main strategy used, perhaps because it is part of the teaching process that teachers can readily control to promote engagement rather than trying to teach students the fundamentals of reading. They agreed that teaching reading would assist disengaged students with poor literacy skills, but to include an expanded and complex range of activities into a Course of Study program would not be feasible within the finite time frame. Respondents, in the main, did strongly agree that the extent of a student’s vocabulary impacted on reading skills—an extensive vocabulary allows for a student to access a wider range of texts and text types, while a limited vocabulary excludes students from engaging adequately in reading and writing activities. This is strongly consistent with the findings of the research previously reported (Lokan, et al., 2001; Moats, 2009a; NICHD, 2000; Rowe, 2005).

5.4.5 Current Understandings of the Responsibilities of English Teachers

While Current Understandings of the Responsibilities and Roles of English Teachers were dealt with in two separate sections of the survey, they will be dealt with together in the discussion. The section concerning teacher responsibilities provided an overall sense of what teachers thought a student should be capable of in terms of literacy: that they should be able to read ‘with competence’. The majority of the participants did, however, agree that making the reading requirements of the course explicit was a part of their job, although two teachers indicated that they did not agree that this was part of their brief. It is possible that teachers make personal decisions about what is within the scope of their responsibilities when faced with students who find reading difficult and it is possible that teachers are not challenged when they claim that teaching reading, or making texts accessible, is not what they do for this student age group. The fact that 21.8% of the respondents disagreed that it was their responsibility to teach reading skills shows that there are teachers who may not be considering the specific needs of students but are simply seeking to complete the requirements of the course in the most expedient way. With regard to the question about beginning reading strategies being part of the curriculum design, half of the respondents agreed they should be a part of the teaching process. However, around 30% believed that teaching reading as a specific skill should not be made a part of the Stage One and Two curriculum design. As a result, poor readers in these courses may not have been adequately accommodated in terms of improving their reading practices and strategies so as to develop greater competency, which is an
imperative clearly outlined in the objectives of the Course of Study published by the Curriculum Council. This assumes that a student has fluency, automaticity in reading and the capacity to undertake what is required to complete tasks. Reading skills need to be secure and well established if a student is to make sense of the range of texts issued in the course to complete tasks. For students who do not have this ability, for whatever reason, the challenges are greater for them as it is clear that provisions are not readily made by some senior school teachers to work on improving their reading processes and strategies.

The section of the survey that looked at the priorities of responsibilities of the senior English teacher required teachers to rank statements from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important to 5 the least with particular attention made to choice of text. This section investigated the role of the teacher in terms of addressing the Reading Outcome, specifically the choice of texts they used as a basis for their teaching and learning programs to enhance students in the understanding of the English language. In other words, these aspects addressed the perception teachers have of reading as a key action of learning. In the ranking process for this section of the survey, teachers considered student engagement and the reading abilities of students, as equal top priorities. This suggests that teachers believe that one aspect complements the other. Experienced teachers in any educational context (not just in subject English) will know that engagement of students overcomes many of the problems associated with disruptive or passive behaviours in the classroom and promotes rich, meaningful learning. Engagement through the active reading of texts, discussion about the elements of the text and working through of tasks associated with the text demonstrate that active learning is occurring and students may feel there is a sense of personal empowerment.

The next priority follows on from this notion of motivation and engagement: teachers believed it was necessary to choose reading material that would ‘promote further reading for pleasure or recreation.’ This demonstrates the high value teachers of English place on the activity of reading. Teachers understand that students who read more improve their vocabulary, fluency and decoding skills and will therefore be better motivated and engaged in the classroom, thus improving behaviour in class and reducing the potential for conflicts about, among other issues, unfinished work assignments.

The lowest priorities were concerned with what could be considered the overt core business of teaching in the broad context of the secondary school and the political agendas in Australia that may influence their administration. The item ranked, on average, fourth in the list of five was concerned with the preparation of students for further study or work. One could argue that this should be considered of higher importance and the integral objective with regard to a student’s learning journey through senior secondary
school to satisfy public demand for improved literacy as preparation for the workforce. The literature supports the notion that literacy skills are a key aspect of success for a student in economic terms (Department of Education and Training, 2011; Lo Bianco, 1999; Louden, 2006; Rowe, 2005). This priority, therefore, may well be considered out of place near the bottom of the list. The preparation of a student to be literate enough to meet the demands of changing global and technology-based economies with specific linguistic applications should be an imperative (Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy, 2004; Lankshear & Snyder, 2000; MCEETYA, 2008). There have been continued calls from political groups and the media that reading material which reflects ongoing changes to the language of information technologies and divergent attitudes in the workplace should be used in senior secondary school if it is to be regarded as a preparatory phase prior to tertiary education or an introduction to the skilled workforce (Bishop, 2007; Department of Employment, 1998; Howard, 2007). According to teachers who responded to this survey, however, this is not a major consideration.

The last item, about the choice of reading material to reflect the values and attitudes of the schools in which the respondents work, rated at 2.7% priority. Again, choosing texts that support school cultures and values was not regarded as a major consideration by teachers. In a sense, student needs are regarded first and foremost with texts chosen to meet and maintain current levels of reading literacy, rather than seeking to improve them. What has been shown here also is that the range of text choices being used in Stage One and Two Courses - internet pages, forms, letters, articles, weblogs, stories and essays (to name but a few text types) - are being used by teachers to engage and actively teach about the wider issues relating to citizenship, race, culture and identity. In other words, the range of texts reflects how people operate beyond school in a digital and global context.

When teachers talked about texts, they referred to books as the main source of reading, with newspapers and magazines acting as supplementary texts. One teacher observed that a student thought to be illiterate and ‘intractable’ was, in fact, adroit at navigating web sites and able to write comments and blogs with little difficulty. This was due to the fact that he was given permission to follow up his interest (in cars): this teacher had effectively facilitated an engagement process with technology he understood. Other teachers referred to ‘distractions’ in a teenager’s life and included technology as part of these, but did not refer to the possibilities of using these technologies to which students have clear and easy access. As already mentioned, this could be due to the fact that schools still essentially operate with resources purchased before the technology boom and the Federal Government provision of computers in schools (DEEWR, 2011). Also, not all schools have the same level of access to the range of technologies available. One of the
main variables could be that teachers do not have the time to learn how to apply these technologies to reading, or have not had adequate professional development to use software programs. Indeed, at this point of the digital age, “closely connected to the speed and complexity of change in our computer mediated culture is the widening gulf between students and teachers” (Snyder, 1997, p. xxii). Another factor is that more than half (56%) of the teachers who took part in this investigation had been teaching eleven years or less. That being the case, it could be that the technology boom over the last decade has been highly accessible to students but not necessarily to their teachers who were themselves educated with books, paper, pens and very little access to electronic or digital technology. That is not to say that these teachers have not embraced technology to some extent as part of their own teaching practice, but perhaps not to the same extent as their students. One could speculate that there appears to be a ‘gap’ in their range of strategies as to how technology can be used not only to motivate and engage, but teach effectively the reading skills they require. There is now a need to change perspectives on how reading is approached in classrooms across all year groups and learning areas because of this access to different modes of text.

5.4.6 Priorities of Responsibilities as an English Teacher

Fifty-five percent of survey respondents agreed that it was important to take on action research in their classes and use the research to inform their programming and undertake further studies. Whether or not this was actually undertaken was not investigated. Given that it has been established that teachers prioritise their time according to the immediate needs of their profession (programming, preparation and teaching), the time consuming process of setting up action research, while desired, may not be practicable. Like any other profession, teachers understand that to continually improve their skills and knowledge is an imperative.

These data suggest that a review of the role of English teachers and the responsibilities they carry to teach literacy could be undertaken not just by professional organizations, such as the Australian Association for the Teaching of English, but by educational organizations that oversee the administration of schools and the place of English departments within them. As there is the strong understanding that literacy skills are a central requirement of learning processes, consideration needs to be made of the time that is required to ensure that effective reading instruction is taking place. However, the reported decline in literacy skills, as shown by the OECD and ABS figures reported in Chapter Two should not be regarded as the responsibility of English teachers alone: management and administration systems in schools are aware of the ever-expanding roles and responsibilities of English teachers but are not always in a position to offer
opportunities to effectively deliver curriculum that will assist students due to time or budget constraints. The various reports reported in Chapters One and Two point to the fact that literacy development should be at the forefront of thinking when educational sectors organize teachers within department systems in schools. As has been shown through the surveys and interviews, these objectives are not necessarily realized: the allocation of personnel and the upgrading of qualifications, skills and expertise in this critically important area is understood to be necessary, but not applied. This encapsulates the findings of this study that has found that while teachers of English Courses of Study are concerned with the Reading Outcome and student engagement, there now needs to be significant provision made for teachers to pursue further professional learning so they are able to understand the complexities of the reading process among adolescents. The increasing numbers of variables that affect the teaching of English have been explored and require careful consideration in the planning of programs. The main objective is that teachers provide opportunities for students who operate at all levels of literacy to have access to resources and instruction that will ensure they are not only engaged in the process while in class, but possess strategies to enable them to begin on their chosen trajectory beyond the realm of senior secondary schooling. Beyond the stated roles and responsibilities, it should become the charter for teachers of English to share their perspectives on literacy teaching through network meetings, professional development, further study and action research. Most importantly of all, secondary teachers need to become conversant with how reading as a cognitive and social activity is taught at the beginning reading level so as to have clearer insights into how literacy issues may be addressed in their Stage One and Two English Course of Study classes.

5.5 **Recommendations**

This research was prompted by the very public commentary surrounding teaching standards, values and approaches to pedagogy in English classrooms, and a desire to investigate the understandings that teachers had about their various roles. At the beginning of this research, the main purpose was to investigate what senior secondary teachers in subject English perceived were their responsibilities in developing the basic reading skills of their students. The limited reading capacity of many students was chosen as a focus as it was an area much commented upon in this researcher's experience as a Head of Learning Area and participant in English teacher network meetings and through the English Teachers Association of Western Australia meetings and conferences. With reading regarded as a key action of learning, teachers expressed concern that a significant number of students in senior school did not appear to have the skills of decoding, or of deconstructing and comprehending texts they were given in class. For the students who
did demonstrate reasonable reading skills, and were viewed as being capable of completing the courses, the level of disengagement from the texts and the tasks set to examine them also posed a significant concern. The results of the survey and the information provided in the teacher interviews, and their subsequent discussion were the basis for the following recommendations. These have been organized into four sections: recommendations for education sectors; for teachers of senior secondary English; for pre-service training of secondary English teachers; and for future research.

5.5.1 Recommendations for Education Sectors

Recommendation One

*That literacy education is recognized as a major responsibility of the English teacher in schools.*

For a student to access and have success in curricula, education systems are required to accommodate a variety of methods to assist students who demonstrate various levels of literacy. The recommendation for education systems is to mandate that schools adopt literacy policies that are adaptive and relevant to the context of the school.

Recommendation Two

*That currently available standardised assessments of reading be systematically used in secondary schools to complement teacher judgements about students’ reading abilities.*

There are assessment available that would be of use in secondary schools but they are not being utilized. Administration of standardised assessments would require training of at least some school-based personnel. While the time and budget costs might be significant in the short term, the outcomes would warrant them. The information would support programming decisions, resource allocation and also act as evidence that would allow a teacher to discuss with a student and parents the level of reading at which the student is operating. The *Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading* have been developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER, 2011) and are suitable for assessing reading in Years 8 – 10. They could provide an indication of literacy levels for students entering Courses of Study in Year 11 with a view to informing teachers about program development and appropriate text selection.
Recommendation Three

That a community or district library of texts be developed that will allow schools to draw from a wider range of titles on offer for study in the Courses of Study in English.

This would be of particular benefit for those schools which are restricted by budget or storage room. It could be administered by a school librarian, or a network of librarians, who are able to advise, provide and oversee the systems for loaning the books to schools in the assigned area.

5.5.2 Recommendations for the professional development of teachers of senior secondary English

Recommendation Four

That teachers of secondary level English undertake professional learning about assessment of reading levels in order to identify specific requirements of students completing tasks and activities for the Stage One and Two Courses of Study.

Secondary teachers need to access information about strategies for reading instruction that may be adapted to assist in the adjustment of programs to accommodate students who have literacy difficulties. Other professional learning opportunities that should be available could focus on the reading process and the development of appropriate strategies to support students who have not developed basic literacy skills and who are enrolled in senior school courses. The interconnectedness of primary, middle and senior school reading practices must be emphasized so that teachers know how the process of reading develops from a young age. This would offer secondary teachers greater insight into why a student may be experiencing difficulties: to have an understanding of what may have come before, with its attendant variables and causal factors, would assist teachers to adjust programs, choose relevant texts and interact with students to ensure successful learning experiences.

Recommendation Five

That, to enhance the engagement of students in class, a greater emphasis be placed on teacher training and professional learning in the areas of computer/digital literacies so that teacher knowledge more closely matches that of their students.

For any meaningful, deep and rich learning experiences to be created, teachers should have access to, and a knowledge of, software and web-based educational programs that may be used within the curriculum that satisfies the requirements of WACE, and further
work or study. Not only does this knowledge have to be made available, it needs to be effectively integrated into the Course of Study curriculum.

*Recommendation Six*

*That a list of titles of various text types based on a theme or topic be provided so students may choose their own reading material, rather than use a set text given to them by a teacher at the beginning of a course.*

At this point, teachers may need to move away from being the ‘locus of power’ in the classroom and provide an extensive text list so the students can draw on their own knowledge of texts for analysis and discussion. This could have the potential to draw out students’ own literacy capacities through the manipulation and interpretation of a variety of texts such as web-sites, blogs, podcasts and the like. The teacher could use these alternate forms of transmitting narrative or information as a way of including students who are not able to read at a level sufficient to keep up with the class. Indeed, rather than write a response, students could take part in group discussions to demonstrate their knowledge of their chosen topic. Essentially, the nature of the assessment task could be negotiated according to the abilities of the student.

*Recommendation Seven*

*That the Standards for Teachers of English Literacy and Language in Australia be reviewed to include a charter for professional learning for secondary teachers who are teaching students with specific reading literacy difficulties.*

This research has revealed that students with significant reading difficulties are struggling with the demands of senior Courses of Study. The professional body needs to respond to this identified need.

### 5.5.3 Recommendations for Pre-Service English teachers

*Recommendation Eight*

*That preparation programs for pre-service secondary English teachers include information regarding the reading process, the range of methods used to teach reading at the primary school level, assessment techniques and a repertoire of strategies to address the needs of students who enter secondary school with limited reading skills.*
5.5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendation Nine

That future research focus on the question of how senior secondary students perceive their own literacy skills.

Specifically, research could be conducted regarding senior student attitudes to reading; how they approach reading; their understandings of what reading contributes to learning; and their perception of reading's contribution to life-long learning.

5.6 Conclusion

While this research has demonstrated that teachers of English Courses of Study are concerned with the Reading Outcome and student engagement, there now needs to be significant provision made for teachers to pursue further professional learning so they are able to understand the complexities of the reading process among adolescents. The increasing range of variables that affect the teaching of English has been explored and requires careful consideration in the planning of programs. The main goal for teachers is to provide opportunities for students who operate at all levels of literacy to have access to resources and instruction that will ensure they are not only engaged in the process while in class, but possess strategies to begin on their chosen trajectory beyond the realm of senior secondary schooling. Beyond their stated roles and responsibilities, it should become the charter for teachers of English to share their perspectives on literacy teaching through network meetings, professional development, further study and action research. Most importantly of all, secondary teachers need to become conversant with how individuals learn to read and the cognitive and social processes involved, so as to have clearer insights into how literacy issues may be addressed in their Stage One and Two English Course of Study classes.

Since beginning this study in August 2007, there have been many observations, research projects, and other developments in understanding literacy across the curriculum that have altered perspectives on the issue of reading, but one perspective remains: teachers are required to constantly collaborate and reflect on teaching practices and the management of their subject to ensure that students are exposed to deep and rich learning in the English language. Teachers need to know as much about their students and how they read texts, as about the texts themselves. This knowledge is integral to the development and delivery of effective Courses of Study in English to prepare students for a literate life beyond school.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX ONE

DESCRIPTIONS OF STAGE ONE AND TWO
ENGLISH COURSES OF STUDY

Course of Study unit descriptions Stage One – English (CCWA, 2011, p. 7)

Unit 1AENG
The recommended focus for this unit is **skill building**. Students develop their language in the context of their future needs, aspirations and areas of interest. They further develop reading, oral, viewing and writing skills to meet their specific needs and achieve their goals. They will work with a variety of everyday and work-based texts that they will be expected to use once they leave school.

Unit 1BENG
The recommended focus for this unit is **strengthening skills**. Students continue to develop language skills and concepts in the context of post-school destinations and interests. They will continue to work with a variety of everyday and work-based texts and accessible literary texts.

Unit 1CENG
The recommended focus for this unit is **language and self**. Students learn to use language to present their experiences, ideas, opinions and responses more effectively, exploring how language can be used differently in different situations. They develop the ability to express responses to texts by exploring how language is used to convey personal information, opinions and experiences. They develop the skills and knowledge needed to expand the range of texts and types of language used for communication and in mass media texts. Students study workplace documents, mass media texts and popular culture texts.

Unit 1DENG
The recommended focus for this unit is **language and society**. Students explore and develop language skills to assist their participation in work and society, such as finding, accessing, using and evaluating information. They also develop skills needed for more general social and cultural participation such as comprehending, interpreting and evaluating mass media, popular culture and literature texts, identifying ideas, attitudes...
and opinions in such texts and discussing their responses and those of other people. Students study more complex workplace documents as well as mass media texts, popular culture texts and less complex literary texts.

**Unit 2AENG**

The recommended focus for this unit is **language and action**. Students develop their language skills by exploring issues of concern or controversy, past or present, and by examining how language is used in relation to these topics: how language can be used to influence attitudes and bring about action or change, and how such uses of language can be challenged and/or resisted. They consider the relationship between language and power; representations of power through language; how particular uses of language can be empowering or disempowering and how they can empower themselves through language. Students study literary texts, mass media texts and popular culture texts.

**Unit 2BENG**

The recommended focus for this unit is **language and the world**. Students examine the relationship between language and the world by exploring how language offers particular ideas and information about topics, events or people. They listen, view and read critically, identifying and critiquing particular uses of language and representations within the texts, substantiating their views in written, visual and oral form. They shape language to produce texts that offer particular ideas and information about topics, events or people. Students study literary, mass media and popular culture texts.

**Unit 2CENG**

The recommended focus for this unit is **language and communities**. Students develop an understanding of the way language operates in a community (e.g. workplaces, subcultures, sporting groups, interest groups, professions, political groups, religious groups etc.) to transmit understandings, create identities, establish power and operate effectively. Students will examine a range of texts and text types to explore the ways a community may create its own language structure in order to influence attitudes and values. They will also examine how language structures/protocols can be used to marginalise, privilege and/or exclude individuals and subgroups.
Unit 2DENG

The recommended focus for this unit is **language as representation**. Students develop an understanding of the way language is used to offer particular representations of topics, events, places or people. They will also consider how these responses are mediated by cultural/social structures. They listen, read and view critically in order to examine the way we make meaning of representations in texts and to account for the different meanings available within textual representations. Students will use language to explore how purpose, context and audience may influence the representations offered in texts.
APPENDIX TWO

SURVEY AND COVERING LETTER SENT TO TEACHERS

Dear Teacher of Students undertaking Stage One and Two Courses of Study in English (Year Eleven only.)

Teacher Understandings of Reading Instruction in Phase One and Two Courses of Study English classes in Western Australian Schools

My name is Liana Strutt and I am writing to you on behalf of the Graduate Research School of Edith Cowan University. I am conducting a research project that aims to find out what teachers understand about reading, teaching reading and how they view the current responsibilities they carry out as teachers of English. The project is being conducted as part of a Masters in Education at Edith Cowan University.

I would like to invite you to take part in the project. This is because you are active educational practitioners of Courses of Study in English at Phase One and Two levels. Your school is one of 46 schools in Western Australia approached for this project.

What does participating in the research involve?

You are invited to participate in the completion of a survey which will take approximately 5 – 10 minutes.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participating in this research project is entirely voluntary. This decision should always be made completely freely. All decisions made will be respected by members of the research team without question.

What if I wanted to change my initial decision?

If you do not wish to participate, the decision will need to be made by Friday 19th September 2008 for you to be included in the project.

Once a decision is made to participate, you can change your mind at any time.

There will be no consequences relating to any decision you make regarding participation, other than those already described in this letter. These decisions will not affect your relationship with the Department of Education and Training or Edith Cowan University.

What will happen to the information I give, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?
Information that identifies anyone will be removed from the data collected. The data is then stored securely in locked storage at the Graduate School Laboratories at Edith Cowan University and can only be accessed by the principal researcher – Liana Strutt – and her supervisor Dr Deslea Konza. The data will be stored for a minimum of 2 years, after which it will be destroyed. This will be achieved by the shredding and disposing of survey materials. Audio data will be deleted from digital recording equipment.

Participant privacy, and the confidentiality of information disclosed by participants, is assured at all times, except in circumstances where the research team is legally required to disclose that information.

The data will be used only for this project, and will not be used in any extended or future research without first obtaining explicit written consent from you.

It is intended that the findings of this study will be the property of the Graduate School at Edith Cowan University. A summary of the research findings will also be made available upon completion of the project. You can access this by contacting the Graduate Research School or the Principal researcher Liana Strutt and expect it to become available in November, 2009.

**What are the benefits of this research for my role as a teacher?**

The findings may offer to teachers a body of knowledge about current literacy and reading issues in the teaching of Courses of Study to Year 10 and 11 students and how curriculum is being delivered, with a view to providing opportunities for professional development on assisting the teaching of English in this area.

**Is this research approved?**

The research has been approved by the Ethics Clearance Office of Edith Cowan University, the Research Office of the Catholic Education Office, and has met the policy requirements of the Department of Education and Training.

**Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?**

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study with a member of the research team, please contact me on the number provided below. If you wish to speak with an independent person about how the project is being conducted or was conducted, please contact [insert name and contact number of representative of ethics committee or equivalent area within organisation].

**How do I become involved?**

If you have had all questions about the project answered to your satisfaction, and are willing to become involved, please complete the Consent Form on the next page.

This information letter is for you to keep.

Mrs Liana Strutt

Masters in Education Research Student

Edith Cowan University
Consent Form

- I have read this document, or have had this document explained to me in a language I understand, and I understand the aims, procedures, and any identified risks of this project, as described within it.

- I have taken up the invitation to ask any questions I may have had, and am satisfied with the answers I received.

- I understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntarily.

- I am willing to become involved in the project, as described.

- I understand I am free to withdraw that participation at any time without affecting my relationship with principal researcher Liana Strutt, Edith Cowan University or the Department of Education and Training.

- I understand any data I contribute to the study may be withdrawn up to and including the 19th September for the survey and 10th October for the interviews.

- I give permission for my contribution to this research to be published in a journal, provided that I or the school is not identified in any way.

- I understand that I can request a summary of findings once the research has been completed.

Name of Participant (printed):

Signature of Participant: ___________________________ Date: / / 

______________________________
Section One: Teacher Identification of Students who demonstrate low fluency and comprehension skills.

Tick the appropriate box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

a. I can easily diagnose specific problems students have when they demonstrate low decoding, fluency and comprehension skills in his or her reading.

b. There are students in my classes who are unable to effectively read a text for the English Course of Study.

c. I employ diagnostic tests (eg. Neale Analysis of Reading Ability, TORCH (Tests of Reading Comprehension or South Australian Spelling) to confirm the reading rates, comprehension and fluency of reading of my students.

d. I seek to find out the personal extra-curricula reading practices of students in my class.
## Section Two: Teacher Choice of Reading Texts

Tick the appropriate box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>I choose texts for study that all students can read with confidence.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>I allow students to choose from a range of texts studied in our Course of Study English units.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>I choose texts to engage and motivate students.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>I use texts upon instruction from my Head of Department/Learning Area</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>I use texts which are available in our department resources.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section Three: Teacher Adjustments to Programming

Tick the appropriate box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

a. I allow sufficient time in programming to explicitly teach reading skills with students who demonstrate low levels of reading fluency, decoding and comprehension skills.

b. I offer extra time to complete reading activities to students who demonstrate low levels of reading rate, comprehension and fluency.

c. I adjust my programs as they are being taught to accommodate students who demonstrate low levels of reading rate, comprehension and fluency.

d. I negotiate with students who demonstrate low levels of reading rate, comprehension and fluency how they will complete reading tasks.

e. I employ what I know about early reading strategies to assist students demonstrate low levels of reading fluency, decoding and comprehension skills.
Section Four: Teacher Understanding of Reading Acquisition

Tick the appropriate box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Students will never be independent readers without extensive phonic knowledge (e.g., of digraphs ['th', 'sh', 'ph'], blends ['tr', 'st'], vowel digraphs ['ea', 'au'] and common letter strings ['-ble', '-tion', '-sion', '-is-', '-ate', '-ope'].)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Teaching students to syllabify unknown words is a useful teaching strategy.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Student knowledge of word derivation (e.g., Greek, Latin, French) will help them read and understand unknown words in all subjects.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Students can learn to read without explicit instruction in how to decode words.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. A student’s vocabulary is closely related to his or her reading skill.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section Five:

Current understandings of the responsibilities of English teachers

Tick the appropriate box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>By the time students have reached senior secondary school, they should be able to read with competence that does not require further instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>It is my responsibility to make explicit the reading requirements for the completion of a unit in Courses of Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>It is my responsibility to ensure that all students have adequate comprehension of all the texts covered in class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>It is my responsibility as a senior school English teacher to teach reading skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Beginning reading strategies should be an integral part of programming in English Courses of Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section Six: Priorities of Roles as an English teacher

Read the following statements and place a number in the box provided showing how to rank the importance of the statements with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least.

a. It is a requirement that I choose reading material to best suit the varied reading abilities of students in my class.

b. It is a requirement that I choose reading material which cover topics and issues that will engage students in my class.

c. It is a requirement that I choose reading material that will reflect the values and attitudes of the school in which I teach.

d. It is a requirement that I choose reading material that will prepare students for further study at a tertiary or TAFE level.

e. It is a requirement that I choose reading material that will promote further reading for pleasure or recreation.
Section Seven: Priorities of Responsibilities as an English teacher

Read the following statements tick the appropriate box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>It is necessary for me to undertake further studies to help me understand how students read in senior school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>It would assist me in my teaching of Year 11 students to carry out action research on reading to assess the effectiveness of my teaching.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>I have access to the latest research about reading and literacy in my work environment (e.g., Journals, professional organisation publications, websites).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>I seek opportunities to access the latest research about reading and literacy in my work environment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>I believe the delivery of research results about reading through in-service training will assist me with my teaching of students in the area of reading.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX THREE

LETTER FOR PRINCIPALS

Dear Principal

My name is Liana Strutt and I am a Masters by Research student at Edith Cowan University. I am undertaking research into teacher understandings of reading among students undertaking Phase One and Two Courses of Study in English.

I am seeking your permission for the enclosed surveys to be issued to the Head of Learning Area/Department in English so they may be distributed to staff who specifically teach the following Year 11 Course of Study English units:

- 1AENG – 1BENG
- 1CENG – 1DENG
- 2AENG – 2BENG

The survey seeks to find out what teachers understand about reading, teaching reading and how they view the current responsibilities they carry out as teachers of English. It is anticipated that the survey will take no longer than ten minutes to complete. There is also a section that allows for staff to nominate to be interviewed at a later date. It is envisaged these interviews will take no longer than 20 – 30 minutes and will be arranged according to the convenience of your staff.

Please be assured that the identity of the teachers and your school will not be disclosed in the final analysis and writing of the thesis. Your teachers and school will simply be identified as a Department of Education and Training, Catholic Education Commission or Independent school operating in a metropolitan or rural area.

If you have any further queries about this research, please contact me on [REDACTED] or at lstrutt@student.ecu.edu.au.

Regards

Liana Strutt

Edith Cowan University
25th August, 2008

Ms Liana Strutt
39 Gleddon Way
HILLARIES WA 6025

Dear Ms Strutt,

I am pleased to write on behalf of the Higher Degrees Committee, Faculty of Education & Arts to advise that your Master's research proposal has been approved - Teacher Understandings of Reading Instruction In Phase One and Two Courses of Study English classes In Western Australian Schools.

I also wish to confirm that your proposal complies with the provisions contained in the University's policy for the conduct of ethical research, and your application for ethics clearance has been approved. Your ethics approval number is 2820 and the period of approval is: 12 August 2008 to 31 July 2009.

Approval is given for your supervisory team to consist of:

Principal Supervisor: A/Prof Deslea Konza

The examination requirements on completion are laid down in Part VI of The University (Admissions, Enrolment and Academic progress) Rules for Courses Requiring the Submission of Theses available at: http://www.ecu.edu.au/GPPS/legal_legis/unirules.html.

Additional information and documentation relating to the examination process can be found at the Graduate Research School website: http://research.ecu.edu.au/gra/

Please note: the Research Students and Scholarship Committee has resolved to restrict Master by Research (1 year) theses to a maximum of 40,000 words or a Master by Research (2 year) theses to a maximum of 60,000 words. Under special circumstances a candidate may seek approval from the Faculty Research and Higher Degrees Committee for an extension to the word length (RSSC 33/04).

I would like to take this opportunity to offer you our best wishes for your research and the development of your thesis.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Leckie
Manager
Graduate Research School
Ms Liana Strutt  
Irene McCormack Catholic College  
Bradman Drive  
BUTLER WA 6030

Dear Ms Strutt

Thank you for your completed application received 11 August 2008 to conduct research on Department of Education and Training sites.

The focus and outcomes of your research project titled, *Teachers understandings of reading instruction in phase one and two courses of study in English in Western Australian schools*, are of interest to the Department, and I give permission for you to approach site managers to invite their participation. However, it is a condition of approval that the results of this study are forwarded to the Department upon conclusion.

Consistent with Department policy, participation in your research project will be the decision of the particular schools invited to participate and individual staff members.

Responsibility for quality control of ethics and methodology of the proposed research resides with the institution supervising the research. The Department will require a letter confirming that you have received ethical approval of your research protocol from the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee as soon as it becomes available.

Any proposed changes to the research project will need to be submitted for Department approval prior to implementation.

Please contact Warren Brown, Policy Analyst, on 08 9264 5344 or researchandpolicy@det.wa.edu.au if you have further enquiries.

Very best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely

DAVID ANSELL  
A/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
POLICY, PLANNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

13 August 2008

151 Royal Street, East Perth, Western Australia 6004
APPENDIX SIX  ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER – CEOWA

DIRECTOR OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

31 July 2008

Ms Liana Strutt

Dear Liana

RE: TEACHER UNDERSTANDINGS OF READING INSTRUCTION IN PHASE ONE AND TWO COURSES OF STUDY ENGLISH CLASSES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Thank you for your completed application received 30 July 2008 to examine the problems associated with the Course of Study English units in Years 11 and 12 that require a higher level of sophistication in reading a variety of texts than in primary and middle school years. Despite teachers’ acknowledging the importance of learning specific literacy skills in the senior years, program design often offers little time for follow-through and consolidation. The study aims to understand a range of responses in terms of what teachers deem as their key responsibilities towards students who demonstrate poor literacy skills in Courses of Study in Year 11.

I give in principle support for Catholic schools to participate in this valuable study. However, consistent with CEOWA policy, participation in your research project will be the decision of the individual principal and staff members. The focus and outcomes of your research project are of interest to the CEOWA. It is therefore a condition of approval that the research findings of this study are forwarded to the CEOWA.

I understand that you have received approval from the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Any changes to the proposed methodology will need to be submitted for CEOWA approval prior to implementation.

The contact person at the Catholic Education Office of WA is Karen Marais at marais.karen@cathednet.wa.edu.au or (08) 6380 5362.

I wish you all the best with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Ron Dullard