MONASH University

THE STRUGGLING ADOLESCENT READER: AN EXAMINATION OF EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL PRACTICES IN FOUR AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

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Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Steven Thomas Townsend

Date 23/6/2020

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Abstract

This study investigates four Australian secondary schools in the State of Victoria. These schools have large enrolments of students with very low reading skills. Despite this these schools have achieved consistent gains above the state average on the National Assessment Plan – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) reading test from years 7 to 9. This case study of the four schools was designed to gain an understanding of why they consistently achieved improvement in reading with struggling adolescent readers (SARs), while in most schools in Australia, the UK and USA, these readers show little or no progress. Principals, literacy leaders and three to four teachers were interviewed at each school and this data were analysed using qualitative content analysis methods. This analysis involved individual case and cross case analysis based on eight conceptual categories derived from the literature and theory. This analysis identified very similar policies, practices and processes in each of the case study schools with leadership, interventions for SARs and the learning environment being identified as critical to their success. Two features of the learning environment, individual reading conferencing and the use of English as an additional language (EAL) strategies with SARs were prominent in each of the schools. These findings were viewed from a socio-cultural perspective, with community of practice and Vygotsky's theory central to the analysis. The study concluded that successful intervention with SARs requires a holistic approach. The intervention needs to be part of a whole-school learning environment that supports SARs. This type of learning environment is the product of a community of practice and a culture of knowledge sharing that have evolved through a culture created by distributed and instructional leadership. These features of the schools have provided an environment where targeted interventions have improved the performance of those who struggle to read.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study investigates four Victorian schools with large enrolments of students with reading skills below expected achievement standards as determined by the Australian National Assessment Plan – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN, 2016). Despite this, these schools achieve consistent gains, above the state average, in student reading from years 7 to 9. The purpose of this multi-case study is to explore factors that support positive learning outcomes for this little-studied group, of struggling adolescent readers (SARs).

The performance of SARs declines as they 'progress' through their secondary education. This phenomenon is experienced across the Western world, and there is a lack of research, particularly in the Australian context, on a problem that has severe social and economic repercussions. This research aligns with a constructivist paradigm, with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory providing the theoretical frame for analysis of the data collected from the qualitative multi-case study. Multiple case studies have the potential to provide valuable insights into phenomenon such as the four schools achieving positive results with SARs, which are the focus of this study. Participants in the study included principals, literacy leaders and classroom teachers in each school who provided data on the study period 2008–2015.

This introduction is followed by an overview of the genesis of this study and the background that has led to its creation. The problem statement, statement of purpose and research question, which direct this study, are then outlined. A general discussion of conceptual frameworks and theoretical frameworks is linked to the specific framework that guides this study and its relationship to the methodology employed. This includes discussion of the researcher's background and perspectives and their influence on the study. Discussion of the position of the study in the literature and definition of key terms, such as the struggling adolescent reader, conclude the chapter.

To summarise, this study is an investigation into four schools that have achieved above expected gains in NAPLAN reading scores from years 7 to 9 while having a high percentage of SARs. The aim of the study is to provide evidence-based direction for the many schools that are not meeting the needs of their SARs. This aim may not be achievable due to the complexity of schools, reading and the nature of the SAR, but detailed analysis of schools successfully working with SARs should provide some insights into the problem and add to the collective understanding of how the gap can be bridged for this oft forgotten group of students.

1.2 Genesis and Background

This research has its genesis in a large outer suburban secondary school in one of Australia's largest cities, Melbourne. In 2005 the new leadership, of which I was part, recognised that 25% of students were arriving in Year 7 at two to three years below the required reading level, and fewer than 50% were at the required level as measured by the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). As part of a review of Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) performance, the leadership group realised that poor reading and writing skills were the major impediment to improvement. This led to a search for evidence-based programs that would lift the performance of SARs. Initial research uncovered a paucity of evidence-based programs. This lack of evidence base for literacy interventions is discussed by (Brooks, 2013).

> In the UK, there are very few successful reading or spelling interventions for teenagers. Indeed, more generally, rather few educational innovations are rigorously evaluated using strong research designs before being implemented at scale. Such a situation is no longer (officially) tolerated in agriculture or medicine and should not be tolerated any longer in education. (p. 563)

One program, Literate Practices, developed by a Dr Carol Christensen, a Queensland academic, did have unpublished research supporting its effectiveness. Christensen outlined a comprehensive program that was in place in a number of Queensland secondary schools and had data showing students in the program making significantly higher gains in reading than those who did not participate in the program. Three of these schools were visited by a team from the school and a decision was made by the school and five other schools in the region to adopt the program. The program was actively supported by a Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN), a state government initiative to link schools and business to improve youth employment outcomes. The Literate Practices program involved explicit teaching programs delivered to students based on their reading levels. Data collected by the school over four years from three data sets (NAPLAN, TORC 3 and PATr) showed an average improvement of 1.5 years in reading age but there was considerable variability, student to student and group to group.

One particular area of interest was the performance of the very low readers, performing at Year 1–2 level, who were taught using synthetic phonics as part of their program in small groups of four to eight. These students showed the most improvement as a cohort but focussing on mean data, masked the variation in their performance, as some students made three years growth in one year while others stagnated. This situation was identified from research carried out by the school where a group of 63 Year 8 students, two to three years below the required level, were averaging 1.8 years improvement in the 10-month test period based on the TORC 3 standardised assessment tool. However, the aggregated data hid the individual stories. Eight students from this 2011 group improved more than three years in reading age and effectively 'bridged the gap', while another eight declined in performance. These

variable results raised questions about what factors were contributing most to improving these students' reading outcomes. Was it the phonics element of the program or was it the small group environment where they were provided with age appropriate texts and achieved success in a supportive environment? Also why did some students not benefit from this intense intervention? These questions became foremost in my mind when regional 'literacy experts' decreed that 'phonics programs had no place in a secondary school' as all the students' issues were comprehension based. I questioned this edict due to my very close work with very low-level readers, but I needed more research to test my thinking.

As before mentioned, five other schools adopted the Literate Practices Program and for four years a very committed group of teachers and leaders met each term to share their experiences and develop their understanding of the program and how to cater for SARs. After the demise of the group the five other schools either discontinued the program or only retained parts of it, largely due to regional pressure which was adamantly opposed to the phonics component. The program continued at the school with which I was associated, as our data indicated its effectiveness, as noted above. This raised the question, why was the program successful at one school but not at the others? To what degree were contextual factors, that is, the whole school culture and practices as important as the intervention itself?

Two questions, one to do with phonics instruction, the other to do with what makes a reading intervention program effective and a statement from Peter Freebody's work, *Literacy Education in School: Research Perspectives from the Past, for the Future* (2007), provided part of the stimulus for this research

> There is a limited body of research that has approached the question of effective literacy teaching and learning 'from the ground up', that is, by examining schools and classrooms that are performing more strongly than demographically predicted and by attempting to confirm hypotheses from some smaller scale research about the critical features of those sites. (p 50)

The major part however was wanting to provide evidence-based direction for schools that will assist them in providing SARs with the skills required to become proficient readers and eventually achieve some level of success in their time at school.

1.3 Problem Statement

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) reading data shows that if a student enters a Victorian secondary school at Year 7 with reading skills below the required level, their skills are most likely to decline as they 'progress' through the school. This phenomenon has attracted little research, particularly in the Australian context, and many schools are challenged by the performance of their struggling adolescent readers.

NAPLAN reading data for 2014, records 4.1% of students entering Year 7 at NAPLAN Band 4 level. These students are entering secondary school two to three years below the required reading age. This equates to approximately 13,000 students entering Victorian schools without the reading skills required to effectively engage with the curriculum. The impact of this lack of skills is reflected in the 2016 NAPLAN data for reading which records that 9.1% of students at Year 9 are two to three years below the required reading level. In two years a further 5% of students have dropped to two to three years behind the required reading level. If a student enters a Victorian secondary school without the reading skills to engage with the curriculum their reading skills are most likely to decline in an absolute sense not just in relation to their peers.

This decline in performance of SARs is also seen in the USA where in 2002 the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) administered a reading assessment to approximately 343,000 students in grades 4 and 8. According to the NAEP data, there was no significant change in progress for students between 1992 and 2002, and Grade 8 scores in 2003 actually decreased (Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003). This data indicates that the 'struggling reader', irrespective of their locale, is facing similar challenges. These statistics support Stanovich's (1986, 1990) 'Matthews

 Effect in Reading', which contends that the gap between competent and struggling readers increases as they 'progress' through school. This claim by Stanovich, has been rigorously empirically, analysed by Bast and Reitsma (1997) and while they acknowledge it as a useful 'metaphoric model' (p. 137) they argue that, 'conceptual refinement and clarification of Matthew effects in reading are needed' (p. 165). Despite this they note that 'the reading achievement levels of twelfth graders are larger than differences among first graders (Daneman & Stainton,1991, p. 135) and that Stanovich's hypothesis, that the gap between good and poor readers increases with time is intuitively appealing. Whether or not the

Matthew Effect can be proven may be in debate, but the limited statistics outlined above clearly support the phenomena of the rich (readers) getting richer and the poor(readers) getting poorer.

The SARs mentioned here are typically students, 11–13 years of age, reading two to three years below the required level and they are not peculiar to Australia as noted above. Depending on the measures used, SARs comprise somewhere between four and 25% of the student population. In Australia, NAPLAN identifies at the lower end range with 4% of students deemed to be two to three years below the required grade level. In the USA the figures tend to be higher with figures as high as 25% (Manuel, 2003, p. 5). These percentages can hide the reality of the problem in Australia as a conservative estimate based on 4% of students entering Australia's secondary schools two to three years below the required reading age equates to approximately 50,000 students at risk.

Struggling Adolescent Readers (SARs), and how schools can address their needs, is the focus of this study and at a simplistic level they are easy to identify. They are the group who perform poorly on state-

sanctioned tests such as NAPLAN in Australia or, the myriad standardised tests used in education institutions around the globe. These tests generally identify those students who are below a basic or required grade level. For the purposes of this research the focus is on those students who are two to three years below the 'expected level' as it is this group who have great difficulty in meeting the academic English demands they are faced with when they enter secondary school and tend to become disengaged from schooling. (Neugebauer, 2014; Wolters, 2013)

What do we know about this group of students? Judging from the research effort our knowledge should be extensive. Google Scholar has 102,000 entries under a search for, 'The Struggling Adolescent Reader' which jumps to 691,000 if 'effective interventions' is added. A targeted review of this extensive literature does identify some common characteristics of this group.

First, three general groups of SARs have been identified: disabled, English as an additional language and those created by social and cultural factors. Dennis (2013, p. 8) states, 'Students who score below basic on the State Assessments (USA) represent populations that are poor, minority and receiving special services.' Similar observations have been made in Australia with researchers (McGaw, 1996; Birsh, 1999) noting that there remains a disproportionately high number of adolescents from socio-economically disadvantaged and non-English-speaking backgrounds whose educational and other opportunities are compromised by inadequate literacy skills in reading. However, as Au (1993, p. 2) states, 'students' ethnicity, social class, and language do not automatically determine their level of academic achievement'.

Second, SARs are not a homogenous population, even within these general groupings. This notion is summarised by Fountas and Pinnell (2006. p. 111), 'Readers who need extra help are not identical to one another. In fact, they are widely diverse. It is not possible to find the magic technique, program or set of materials that work for everyone.' This idea is built upon by Fisher and Ivey (2008) who contend that older struggling readers (SARs in the context of this study) are extremely complex and if we are to meet their needs, we must take a closer and more sophisticated look at their literate strengths, needs and preferences. Moreover, according to Lesaux and Kieffer (2010, p. 6) 'we still know too little about the heterogeneity of adolescent readers and its implication for instructional intervention policies and practices.'

Third, SARs can improve with appropriate instruction, but improvement is more likely with younger adolescent struggling readers. A meta-analysis of interventions for struggling readers involving 31 studies by Scammaca, Roberts, Vaughn, Wexler, Reutebuch and Torgensen (2008) found all groups of SARs could improve from interventions, including learning disabled students. In addition, middle grades (4–8) achieved significantly greater improvement from interventions compared to high school

(9–12). While this is a consistent message it does not mean these interventions are 'bridging the gap' and bringing SARs up to the required grade level.

Fourth, the reason for the 'struggling' is likely to be unconstrained skills, as discussed by Paris (2005), such as comprehension rather than the constrained skills of alphabet knowledge and decoding. A plethora of studies (Ash, 2002; Dennis, 2013; Fisher and Ivey 2008; Freebody, 2007; Manuel, 2003; Paris, 2004; Scammaca et al., 2008) support the idea that interventions should focus on comprehension strategies and immersion in reading age appropriate literature. However, it is generally acknowledged that students do need to have acquired decoding skills to some level of automaticity and there may be cases with SARs where focus on word skills and fluency is appropriate along with attention to meaning and comprehension strategies. Lesaux and Kieffer (2010, p. 6) support this idea, commenting, 'Additional instruction in constrained skills will not increase development of skills such as vocabulary and comprehension. This is not to say all adolescents have mastered constrained skills'.

Fifth, motivation and the relevance of reading academic English become major factors with the adolescent. Alvermann (2001) argues that school culture creates SARs as it marginalises and demotivates them and while the 'deficit model' argument is a truism, the conclusion that 'The Education System' creates SARs due to a focus on academic literacy, does not help the SARs in their world. Fischer (2000, p. 326) addresses this critical point noting that we, 'need thoughtful and persistent interventions for those students who reach high school without necessary reading skills'. This is critical as the autonomy and agency of individual students must be addressed if they are to become motivated to improve their reading skills. Building this autonomy and agency may well start with acknowledging the reading interest and capacity of the SARs, as they are inexperienced readers not beginning readers. As Greenleaf (2008) notes, 'The, majority of adolescents, experiencing difficulties with the literacy demands of the secondary school curriculum, are under- performing and inexperienced readers, as distinct from beginning, emergent or experienced readers' (p. 8). Motivation of this heterogeneous group of inexperienced readers may well begin with reviewing the assigned reading required at secondary level. This is because the most significant and consistently mentioned catalyst for reading difficulties and plummeting motivation levels in adolescents is inappropriate and ineffectually managed assigned reading materials. (Cope 1997; Bushman 1997; Ivey 1999; Williams 2001). Moreover, from experience working one-to-one with these students, it is not only access to appropriate reading materials but how they are presented to the SAR that is crucial. Those who work with these students must not only be experts in literacy but experts in understanding adolescents. Relationships need to be built so that the individual student willingly engages and is part of the process that will identify where their difficulties and solutions lie. As Decker and Hirshfield (1996) state, 'To assist the indifferent or struggling reader we must work to dismantle the behaviours that surround the act of reading'. This can only happen in an atmosphere of communication, trust and respect.

The performance of those who enter secondary schools with low reading skills (SARs) is a problem little addressed in Australia. In the USA and United Kingdom, the research effort is growing which may be because the problem is of greater magnitude there and while some ideas to ameliorate the problem can be provided by these studies, they are no substitute for research focussed in the Australian context. It should be noted that this research does not focus on the reasons why some adolescents who arrive at secondary school struggle to read, instead it focusses on what a school can do to 'bridge the gap' for these students.

1.4 Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

1.4.1 Purpose statement.

The purpose of this multi-case study is to gain insight into why four schools with a high percentage of struggling adolescent readers, achieve results in reading gain, years 7 to 9, above the state averages. The intention is to provide schools, who are challenged by the needs of SARs, some evidence-based direction for how to improve the outcomes of this little studied group.

1.4.2 Research question.

Maxwell (2005) identifies three types of research questions: descriptive, interpretive and theoretical. The following question falls into the latter category as, it is aimed at, 'examining why certain things happen and how they can be explained' (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 63).

The research question driving this investigation of practice is: What are the characteristics of schools, with high numbers of SARs, that leads them to achieve positive gains in student reading in years 7 to 9?

1.5 Research Design

This multiple case study employs a qualitative content analysis method and is strongly influenced by the work of Davis (2007), Freebody (2007), Yin (2009), Glaser and Laudel (2012) and Egbert and Sanders (2014). Freebody (2007) was one of the instigating forces for this research when he argued for a detailed analysis of schools and classrooms that perform at above expected levels in literacy teaching and learning. Davis argues that quantitative studies cannot capture the complexities of social environments such as schools and advocates for rigorous qualitative studies. Yin provided a very detailed argument for qualitative studies and a clear structure for multiple case studies while Glaser and Laudel's version of 'qualitative content analysis' provided the method for analysis of the data. In addition, Egbert and Sanders provided a clear definition of conceptual and theoretical frameworks. The

conceptual framework, which involves the overall world view of this researcher will be outlined in 1.5. The theoretical framework which incorporates the literature and theory reviewed for this research, is based on four bodies of theory: reading, leadership, engagement and motivation and learning, with the overall perspective guided by Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory.

The four cases, schools, central to this study, were chosen on the basis of their performance on the NAPLAN test reading data. Specifically, student gain data for years 7–9, was analysed for all Victorian secondary government schools and four school were identified that had high numbers of SARs but achieved almost double the state averages in reading gain. These schools were approached, after appropriate ethics approval was gained from both Monash University and the State Department of Education and Training and they agreed to participate in the study.

Principals, literacy leaders and classroom teachers at each school were interviewed using a semi-structured interview process with 20 interviews of 20–30 minutes providing the main data source. In addition to the interviews, data were collected from structured observations of Year 7–9 classrooms and unstructured observations of the whole school environment. At the completion of the interviews and observations, which involved at least three visits to each school, field note records were summarised as the final data source.

The data collected for each school were analysed using the qualitative content analysis method outlined by Glaser and Laudel (2012) which involves identification of 'categories' from the literature and theory and then allocation of content from the data sources to the predetermined categories. Any data that cannot be allocated to categories can then be the basis for creation of new categories and alternative explanations, but the initial categories remain. This method is less common than the coding methods advocated by Mayring (2007), Schrier (2012) and Yin (2012). Their method involves coding the data and initially this process was employed but after analysing approximately 20% of the data it was discontinued as the number of codes and the complexity of the process, created 'distance' from the content. This caused a return to Glaser and Laudel's method where the redacted content is allocated to categories rather than codes and a sense of the data retained.

This qualitative content analysis method involved the allocation of content to eight categories identified from the literature and theory. These were: Leadership, Interventions, Literacy Experts/Coaching, Individualised Attention, Learning Environments that support SARs, Testing, Engagement and Motivation and the Whole School Environment. The content from the interviews and observations was summarised in 'extraction tables' for each category. These tables were then use to create 'summary descriptions' for each school. This process was followed by analysing the extraction tables on a single category from each of the four schools and producing 'summaries' of the data relevant to the category. This allowed themes to emerge and Table 4.5 summarises the common themes found for each category

across the four schools. These common themes and the summary of the observations provide the data that is discussed in Chapter 6.

1.6 Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this research lies in the problem and purpose statements outlined above. Data from local and international sources clearly shows that students who enter secondary school with low literacy skills, plateau or decline in performance from years 7 to 9. The logical corollary of this is that many secondary schools are not equipped to meet the needs of SARs. This is supported by experience as a long-time practitioner in the field and by research which shows that many secondary teachers have not seen literacy as their responsibility and do not have the knowledge to support students with low reading skills (Moje, 2008). Consequently, many schools do not know how to improve the performance of SARs and require evidence-based direction if their SARs are to develop their reading skills. Direction of this type is difficult to find, particularly in the Australian context, and this study is an attempt to provide some insight that can assist schools with their SARs.

The significance of this study lies in the potential influence it could have in three areas: theory, practical applications and policy. While it does not purport to propose new theory, it does use existing theory on leadership, engagement and motivation, reading theory and Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory, to provide insights into the SAR and school practices that can support them. One of the central tenets of socio-cultural theory, the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (Wang, Bruce & Hughes, 2011) while not always applied, is widely accepted in secondary education in Australia. If it is used to focus on the SAR, in combination with other aspects of learning and reading theory, there may be positive outcomes. The research could also have practical applications as it identifies evidence-based practices that can support SARs. The final area that the study could contribute to is policy. The first contribution could be the enunciation of the problem in a manner that draws the attention of policy makers. Tens of thousands of students struggling to read is a more potent message than 4% below the required reading age. Moreover, if these four schools have common practices and can provide a compelling story about the success of SARs there is the potential to influence policy makers.

1.7 The Researcher

In 1979 the Victorian education system placed an honours graduate from Monash University in English, Geography and Psychology into a very low socio-economic status school in Melbourne's far south east. Immediately faced with students' low literacy skills, an interest in the reading process was born. This continued through twenty years of teaching and leading in the curriculum areas of English and Psychology, where the 'pedagogical toolbox' acquired many items such as: miscue analysis, process writing, reciprocal teaching, phonics strategies, 'systems' thinking and myriad other strategies to assist

the reading process. These skills proved valuable as the role of principal changed in the new millennium, to one of curriculum leader, and promotion to principal in a low socio-economic school in Melbourne's western suburbs followed. This school had 25% of students classified as SARs and therein began the search for ways to improve their outcomes. This part of the story has been covered in Section 1.2 where the school's efforts to intervene and improve the outcomes for SARs is discussed. It also notes that more information on SARs was desired, to counter opposition from regional sources about the efficacy of our programs. This resulted in a Master of Literacy at Melbourne University and movement into the role of literacy consultant/coach in secondary schools and clinical specialist and part-time lecturer in literacy at Melbourne University. The master's experience created as many questions as answers and led me to follow my supervisor to Monash University and this research project.

The experiences outlined above have provided many insights into the SAR. The chief of these being that they are individuals each with their own unique reason why reading is difficult. With knowledge and will and resources and focus on the individual, these unique reasons can be identified and remedied for most SARs, but it needs to be in an environment that supports the individual focus and attention. Clearly this research is approached with some knowledge of the SAR and how to address their needs, but it is largely from one place and time. Do the factors thought to support SARs exist in other school settings? What is the place of phonics, motivation, leadership, staff professional learning and the whole school environment, in providing effective outcomes for SARs? My hope is that this research will provide some insights, that can be communicated to the many schools that are asking for direction for their students who struggle to read. This project has chosen me.

1.8 Contextual Information

1.8.1 Victorian government schools.

This section provides context for the analysis of the findings in Chapter 5. The management and operation of Victorian government schools is determined by an agreement the government negotiates with the Australian Education Union. The most recent was in 2017 and it is called the Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017. This document contains specific information relevant to this study. This information pertains to leadership structures, classroom organisation and size, and professional development procedures required in all schools. These three areas coincide with the Leadership, Professional Learning and Learning Environment categories identified in this study. One other category, Testing and Data also has mandated elements, in terms of NAPLAN participation. The other four categories, Interventions, Student Engagement, Individualised Attention and The Whole School Environment are not mandated or part of an agreement. The significance of this is that these last four categories, and their manifestation in a school, is the product of choices the school has made independently, and they may be the features that differentiate them from other schools and helps explain

their success. The other four categories are required and therefore it will be their attributes rather than their existence, that is of interest. The outline which follows focusses on each analytical category and the degree to which the Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017 (VGSA, 2017) influences how that category manifests itself in a school.

1.8.2 Leadership.

Victorian government schools are all required to have a 'leadership' structure. This usually involves a school principal, assistant principal and a group of leading teachers who are assigned to roles determined by the principal. Two of the case schools were multi-campus and these schools had a college principal and campus principals who are supported by leading teachers. The leadership style and processes are determined by the principal as long as appropriate consultation processes are followed.

> School-Based Consultation 12 (2) The principal, as the Employer's representative, has ultimate administrative and operational responsibility for decisions at the school, provided that these decisions are made in accordance with the consultation principles outlined below. (VGSA, 2017, p. 5)

Principals have a significant degree of autonomy, but they are required to follow planning procedures and processes determined by the Department. This involves three-year strategic planning cycles, built around school reviews and Annual Implementation Plans (AIPs). Long-term priorities, goals and targets are outlined in the triennial reviews while specific detailed strategies are provided in the AIPs. The Department sometimes requires specific areas to be included in the planning process. Schools are also required to teach and report against curriculum guidelines provided by the Department but have considerable discretion in how they do it.

Principals are also provided with a 'Whole School Budget' based on student numbers and student needs. The major part of this budget goes to funding staff. Schools with a high percentage of students from low socio-economic backgrounds are provided with equity money to address those students' needs which was the case with our four case schools. The principal has considerable discretion on how this equity money is spent.

Employment of staff is also directly influenced by the principal who either directly interviews prospective staff or delegates the process to senior staff members. It is the principal's responsibility to keep within the budget provided by the Department and this influences their capacity to hire staff.

These features of the Victorian Government school system do make principals accountable, but they do have significant capacity to provide direction for their schools.

1.8.3 Interventions.

Victorian government schools receive equity money if they have a low socio-economic profile and they are required to show how the money is spent to meet the needs of low socio-economic students. However, there is no requirement for any specific intervention. Interventions in any area are at the discretion of the school.

1.8.4 Professional learning.

The Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) stipulates that all teachers must complete a certain number of hours of professional learning each year to keep their registration current: this is the individual teacher's responsibility. Teachers are required to produce professional development plans, usually tied to the overall school Strategic Planning Process which influences the type of professional learning accessed. The Agreement stipulates a minimum Professional Learning requirement.

> Professional Practice Days Clause (12) (a) From the commencement of the 2018 school year each teacher is entitled to one day per term (four days per year) release from their scheduled duties, including teaching, to focus on the improved delivery of high-quality teaching and learning. These days are in addition to existing pupil free days and pro-rata for a teacher employed part-time. (VGSA, 2017, p. 24)

1.8.5 Learning environment.

The 2017 agreement determines class sizes and teacher allotments. These stipulate the maximum number of students in classes and how many face-to-face hours a teacher can teach. This excerpt from the agreement provides detail of these directions.

> Clause 22 Teacher Work 4b (a) It is recognised that the allocation of teacher work is managed by the principal, as the Employer's representative, at the school in accordance with this agreement. (b) A teacher cannot be required to undertake face-to-face teaching that exceeds: (i) 20 hours per week for a secondary school teacher or 18 hours 40 minutes per week if a teacher supervises sporting activities of students on a structured basis for a period of two hours per week (p. 22). Clause 25 Class Sizes 3(b) years 7 to 12 – groups of up to 25 students. (VGSA, 2017, p. 28)

Period times, and the number of periods, are at the discretion of the school. Classroom organisation and pedagogy are also at the discretion of the school and/or individual teachers.

1.8.6 Student engagement.

This area is not addressed directly in the agreement.

1.8.7 Testing and data.

Schools are required to participate in the NAPLAN testing process and report against the 'Standards' stipulated in the National Curriculum. Additional use of data is at the schools' discretion

1.8.8 Individualised attention.

Individual aides are supplied to students with 'funded disabilities' and welfare and careers staff provide individual counselling. There is no requirement to provide individualised attention to low performing students.

1.8.9 Whole school environment.

Schools are required to provide a safe environment for their students and create an environment that, 'Recognises the differential needs of students and schools in order to achieve high quality outcomes for all students' (VGSA, 2017, p. 4).

This information briefly outlines the requirements the Education Department places on schools in Victoria. Schools are required to have systems in place in relation to leadership, professional learning, learning environment and use of data and testing. There is little direction in terms of interventions, student engagement, individual attention and the type of whole school environment the students experience. Close analysis of these features/categories, not required in schools, but evident in our four case studies, may provide an avenue to understanding their success with SARs.

1.9 Definitions of Key Terminology

This section provides definitions of terms used throughout this thesis.

1.9.1 Exemplary schools.

The four schools chosen for the case study have been described as exemplary or high performing schools in relation to performance of SARs. This definition is based on NAPLAN data on student gain in reading years 7–9 from 2008–2016. NAPLAN Annual Reports show the mean gain in reading achievement for this period is consistently around 33 points on the NAPLAN scale. The eight schools initially identified, consistently exceeding this benchmark.

1.9.2 Intervention.

Intervention in this context refers to schools providing support for SARs beyond the classroom. This involves withdrawing students from mainstream classes and providing them with additional support, either individually or in small groups.

1.10 Chapter Summary

Many secondary schools in Australia receive students in Year 7 who do not have the reading skills to successfully engage with the curriculum. For these students, the Matthew effect, coined by Stanovich (2000), that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer in terms of reading skills, is a potential reality. Experience as a principal in a school that attempted to address this problem illustrated the complexity of the problem and a desire to understand it more and if possible be able to offer evidence-based advice to other schools and teachers on how to approach the problem; the research has a clear focus and purpose.

Freebody (2007) provided the architecture for this research with his exhortation to identify sites where performance is higher than demographically predicted and examine them for critical features. Identifying the critical features of schools performing highly in reading, despite having high numbers of SARs, is the focus of this research. This focus led logically to a case study methodology with multiple cases providing the possibility of more robust and generalisable findings.

Five bodies of literature: reading, learning, motivation, leadership and effective schools were reviewed with a focus on effective interventions for SARs. There was a common theme that emerged in this literature review, that being socio-cultural theory. This rich body of theory, evolving from Vygotsky's work, provides a context for the findings that have emerged from the multiple case study and is used extensively in the discussion, Chapter 6. The literature review also led to a theoretical understanding of the main factors influencing SARs which in turn led to the categories presented in 1.5. These categories have been derived from the theory and they have been used to analyse the 20 interview transcripts from the principals, literacy leaders and teachers in the four schools using the qualitative content analysis method advocated by Glaser and Laudel (2013).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this multiple case study is to gain insights into why, four schools with a high percentage of struggling adolescent readers, achieve results in reading gain, years 7–9, well in excess of state averages. This statement places reading as a central component of the research and accordingly a very detailed investigation of reading theory with a particular focus on the SAR, was conducted. This is detailed in 2.2 and provided insights into the complexity of the reading process but also clarified the essential skills that have to be acquired by students if they are to effectively engage with the curriculum at the secondary level. This review also identified the gap between the theory and a theory of practice. The reading process is largely understood but is not reflected in an agreed theory of practice, particularly for older readers.

The second area reviewed was interventions for SARs. The purpose statement refers to schools with high percentages of SARs achieving whole cohort success with reading. This led to the consideration of 'effective interventions for SARs'. What was the experience across the Western world of effective practice that improved the performance of those who struggle to read at secondary school level? While there was little literature at the Australian level there was a considerable body in the USA and in the United Kingdom. The extent of this body of literature required a strategy to narrow the material down to that which was germane to this study. To achieve this a 'comprehensive review' of the literature was carried out. This process is described in 2.4 and provided clear direction for further literature to review and for the categories that directed the qualitative content analysis of interview data. Multiple component interventions were clearly identified as those most effective but 'motivation' and 'whole-school focus' also emerged as factors influencing interventions.

The findings from the comprehensive review highlighted the role of leadership and led to leadership theory being reviewed in sections 2.5. Of particular interest was the role of leadership in supporting interventions for SARs. As discussed in 1.1 the success of the interventions for SARs could rely as much on the whole school environment into which they were introduced, as to the intervention itself and the major influence on the whole school environment is leadership.

The comprehensive review also identified motivation and engagement as a factor influencing the performance of SARs. This area has received some attention in the literature and experience and elements of socio-cultural learning theory indicate this to be a critical factor if SARs are to improve their skills. Adolescence adds a complication to the reading process not necessarily encountered in the 'early years' when most students acquire the ability to read. The literature on motivation and engagement provides some insights both expected and counter-intuitive into how motivation and engagement can improve the performance of SARs and is detailed in 2.4.

The third area discussed in this review is research and literature on effective schools and its relevance to this study. The focus of this research is effective practices for SARs in secondary schools. While this focus is very specific the more general research into school effectiveness may provide some insights into the characteristics of schools that led them to have positive gains in student reading years 7-9

The final area reviewed was learning theory as how students, teachers and leaders learn and develop new skills and understandings in relation to SARs underpins this whole study. Entry into this area is fraught as learning theory's long and extensive history spreads across disciplines and epistemological, ontological and theoretical positions. Woolfolk, Hoy and Hoy (2013) summarise learning theories into four general categories of behavioural, cognitive, constructivist and socio-cultural and for the purposes of this research learning will be viewed from a socio-cultural perspective. This perspective is approached with a particular focus on socio-cultural learning theory as introduced by Vygotsky and developed and extended by many other researchers in the field. This not only provides insights into learning generally but also provides a perspective on the adolescent and how those with learning disabilities should be viewed. The central tenets of Vygotsky's theory provide the theoretical framework that will give context to the findings that emerge from the case studies.

2.2 Reading Theory and the Struggling Adolescent Reader

2.2.1 Historical perspective.

Theorising about reading, in an academic sense, seems to have its genesis in Huey's (1908) work, *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading*. Hartley (2007) argued that this work, formally initiated the discipline of literacy research and was quite prescient in some of its assertions. Walczyk (2014) commented that the picture of reading that emerged from Huey and his contemporaries (Thorndike, 1917; Buswell, 1922) was of active, meaning gathering, not a passive decoding of text. Adherence to these principles may have allowed us to circumvent five decades of research, as modern definitions of reading sound very similar to that posited above. Iser (2000) explained the act of reading as, a product arising out of the interaction between text and reader and Rumelhart (1977) saw reading as an active perceptual and cognitive process, both resonating with Huey's views. However, to pass over the decades between Iser, Rumelhart and Huey, would ignore a rich body of research that is still adding to our

understanding of the reading process. This research and more recent investigations are hopefully edging us closer to a coherent theory of reading, but the reading community should not hold its academic breath as more forensic research seems to expose an ever more complex entity. According to Cain and Parrila (2014) 'the lack of coherent theories of reading may also be the result of the complexity of reading itself' (p. 1).

2.2.2 Five eras of reading research.

This review of reading theory uses Alexander and Fox's (2004) framework of five eras of educational theory and while providing a broad overview, focusses on aspects of the theories that can provide insights into effective interventions for struggling adolescent readers. In addition, it also draws upon Turbill's work (2002) *The Four Ages of Reading Philosophy and Pedagogy: A Framework for Examining Theory and Practice*, as she focusses on reading theory more from a practitioner's perspective than the academic focus of Alexander and Fox. The two frameworks are presented in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1. Five Eras of Reading Research

Decades	Alexander and Fox's Eras of Reading Research	Turbill's, Ages of Reading Philosophy and Pedagogy
1950	Conditioned Learning	Decoding
1960		
	Natural Learning	
1970		Meaning Making
	Information processing	
1980		Writing connections
	Socio-cultural learning	
1990		Social purpose
	Engaged learning (multiliteracies a specific focus)	
2000		Multiliteracies
2010		

While there are differences in these two frameworks there is considerable overlap. Conditioned Learning/Decoding, Natural Learning/Meaning Making, Socio-Cultural Learning/Social Purpose, Engaged Learning/Multiliteracies, are almost interchangeable and while Information Processing and Writing Connections do differ, they reflect the academic versus practitioner's perspectives of the two frameworks. Alexander and Fox acknowledge that the eras are not quite as well defined chronologically as they appear, but they are still a useful construct. Each of these broad eras and their protagonists in reading theory will be discussed in the body of this dissertation.

2.2.3 Conditioned learning and decoding era.

The industrialisation and economic growth across the Western world following world war two created the need for an educated work force and literacy became an important focus of research. The population needed to be able to read, if they were to participate in the new economies and reading failure and theory became the focus of educationists, psychologists and politicians in the Conditioned Learning Era. The 'Behaviouralists', led by Skinner (1954), Flesch (1955) and Glasser (1978), believed reading could be broken down into its constituent parts and phonics instruction was part of the logical groundwork for beginning to read (Chall, 1967, 1995). Readers were seen by these theorists as passive recipients of information with the meaning residing in the text that the reader had to access. Chall is identified with this Traditional, Bottom Up theory of reading, because of her early focus on phonics. Her 'six stage model of reading acquisition' (Chall & Feldmann,1966), also aligns here with the 'Top Down' theorists lead by the Goodmanns (1967, 1969, 1993). They saw reading as an inside–out, concept driven, whole to part process. Goodmann's (1967) oft-repeated phrase, 'reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game', based on his work on miscue analysis, has had a major impact on the development of reading theory. However, while his views held sway into the Information Processing era in the mid-1970s, and his miscue analysis is still a very valuable tool today, they don't provide a holistic view of the reading process. In addition, he was never able to quell the call from the phonics advocates, often politicians and uninformed, who saw a golden age when phonics apparently dominated reading instruction. This 'golden age' notion has been refuted by researchers such as, Turbill (2002) who clearly states, 'it is impossible to go back to a golden age when all students, exited our schools, literate, because such a time never existed' (p. 2). However, the idea still persists, and it may cloud the path to effective interventions for struggling adolescent readers.

2.2.4 The natural learning era.

The natural learning era, 1966–75, while identified as a different era from that earlier, still had the phonics, whole word debate in the background leaving reading practice in schools in a state of minor confusion. This confusion, is echoed by Turbill (2002) who noted that,

Not all educators accepted the move to the meaning-making age, however and the debate between phonics and decoding first and reading for meaning groups resulted in the development of two distinct schools of reading theorists and pedagogies. (p. 6)

Amid this confusion, linguists like Chomsky (1966) were influencing the debate. He proposed that oral language was hard wired and that humans were biologically programmed to acquire language under favourable conditions. This thinking, while later discredited, led to the idea of the reader as an active participant in the reading process, who according to Halliday (1969) is a constructor of meaning who uses many forms of information to arrive at comprehension.

Halliday's view resonates with Clay's body of work (1975, 1993a, 1997, 1998) that began in this era and is still influencing reading theory and practice today. Clay's theory of literacy processing, while developed through a focus on the 'early years', has strong messages for interventions with struggling adolescent readers. Clay, a developmental psychologist, based her theory on extensive observation of beginning readers. This approach differs from the quantitative studies conducted in this era but despite this, her conclusions had much in common with theories such as, Rumelhart's (1977) Interactive Theory and Singer's (1994) Working Systems Theory. They all saw reading as an interactive process and as Doyle (1998) states in her review of Clay's theories, 'Readers operate on multiple sources of information, visual, syntactic, semantic and Clay found this processing reflective of Rumelhart's interactive theory of reading' (p. 12). Clay's theory evolved into the Reading Recovery Program prominent in the engaged learning era and while it was aimed at younger students with reading difficulties it has strong messages for interventions with older struggling readers. She believed in individualised specialist instruction from the most skilled teachers who, through continuous observation of their students' literacy behaviour, and linking reading and writing instruction, could have the most positive effect on promoting the complex neural networks she believed readers needed to develop. In addition, she along with Singer (1994) believed 'individuals may attain the same level of achievement but by means of different compilations of 'working systems' (Clay, 2001, p. 113). These working systems involved the reader developing systems and subsystems that allowed them to minimise the mental energy required for perception and thus maximise the mental energy to assist cognition. This message of active working systems, individualised instruction and multiple pathways to reading success has direct application for interventions for the struggling older reader.

2.2.5 The information-processing era.

The information-processing era, with its access to new technologies, focussed on measurable, cognitive components of reading, many to do with orthography. This work lead to a raft of diverse models, frameworks and theories outlined in Frost's (2012) dissertation, *Towards a Universal Theory of Reading.* In this work Frost contends that research should focus on all components of language

acquisition, orthographic, phonological, semantic and morphological if a universal model of reading is to be achieved. He also questions the 'theoretical shortcomings and misconceptions of the influx of models, which centre on orthographic processing' (p. 263). This debate and the notion of a universal model accounting for different orthographies is not directly relevant to our struggling, English-speaking, adolescent readers, but his expressed need to focus on all components of language acquisition, if we wish to understand the reading process, is. The following reading theories and models have been chosen either for their prominence in the lexicon or for the insights they may provide into assisting our struggling adolescent reader. Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory (1938, 1983), LaBerge-Samuels on automatic information processing (1974), Rayner (1978) and Just and Carpenter's (1980) work on eye movement, Lueer's Short Circuit Model (1983), Anderson's Schema Theory (1984), Stanovich on the Matthew Effects in Reading (1986, 1990), Ehri's work on Phase Theory (1991, 1994, 1995), Rumelhart's Interactive Model (1977) and Coltheart's Dual Route Cascaded Model (1993).

Rosenblatt's Transactional Model first presented in *Literature as Exploration* (1938) and revised in four editions, the last in 1983, presents a significant contrast to the other theorists listed above. Grounded in the philosophy of James (1890), Dewey (1957) and Bartlett (1932) and born out of instructional practice and observation, rather than quantitative research, it is more an overriding philosophy of literary instruction than a reading theory. However, it can provide an overarching construct under which to place our interventions for the struggling adolescent reader. Rosenblatt contends, 'a transactional perspective highlights the dynamic, generative relationship between the reader and the text in the formation of meaning' (1983, p. 35) and while she is referring to the study of literature and aesthetic appreciation, the message is clear that reading is a very personal process. This is acknowledged by Connell (2001) who states that 'Rosenblatt's primary contribution to literary theory is to emphasize the intensely personal nature of the learning process' (p. 53). This message needs to be carefully considered when dealing with adolescent readers both proficient and struggling and Rosenblatt (1983) provides a very clear statement about the type of environment we need to create to nurture readers at any developmental level,

> The teaching of reading and writing at any developmental level should have as its first concern the creation of environments and activities in which students are motivated and encouraged to draw on their own resources to make 'live' meaning. (p. 1389)

This foregrounding of environment, motivation and the student's own resources in the teaching of reading broadens the focus on what effective interventions for SARs need to consider.

Rayner's *Eye Movement in Reading and Information Processing* (1978) provides a very detailed historical account of research into eye movement and the reading process. He identifies three eras of research beginning with Huey (1908), Wordsworth (1930) and then the 'voluminous studies dealing

with tachistoscopic presentations' (p. 618) that evolved with the advent of computers. However, according to Rayner the success of the third era of eye movement recording, is not yet known. This sentiment was also expressed by Just and Carpenter (1980) other major researchers in this field. They used 'gaze eye fixation theory' in the hope of understanding reading comprehension and developing new reading technologies. However, they acknowledge, 'the proposed model for the reading of scientific texts in this task is only one point in a multidimensional space of reading models' (p. 1212). All three researchers express hope that computer simulations and MRI scanning in the future will allow a more complete theory of reading to be developed, but direction for future interventions for struggling adolescent readers will have to come from other sources.

The LaBerge-Samuel's Model of Automatic Information Processing (1974) is a complex body of work that has at its core the idea of automaticity. This concept assumes the mind has limited capacity to process information and if too much attention is required in one part of the reading process, such as decoding, then insufficient will be left in another, such as cognition. While this work has its detractors (Logan, 1988; Stanovich, 1990) the debate is often about detail not the essential construct. Automaticity has been of significant interest to practitioners as Samuels (1994) notes, 'It attracted the interest of teachers and researchers because it used the concept of automaticity to explain why fluent readers are, able to decode and understand text with ease while beginning readers have difficulty' (p. 1127).

The idea of automaticity is still of interest today. In 2012, Sadoski, McTigue & Paivio in their work, *A Dual Coding Theoretical Model of Decoding in Reading: Subsuming the Laberge and Samuels Model*, reinforces the current interest in automaticity and how greater understanding of the role it plays in developing reading skills may be relevant in assisting the struggling adolescent reader. However, this model may also offer other avenues for investigation for our adolescent reader. A strength of the dual coding model of reading theory, is its origin in Dual Coding Theory (DCT), a general theory of all human cognition (Paivio, 1971, 1986, 1991). This theory has many components but two of interest are, concrete and abstract language and imageability. Sadoski and Paivio (1994) contend that 'word imageability' is one of the best predictors of oral reading performance in beginning reading or in certain acquired disorders of reading' (p. 1341). In addition, they found concrete language is processed more quickly than abstract language particularly with beginning readers. Both observations have implications for how teachers work with struggling adolescent readers and require further research.

Another extensive body of reading research has been developed by Stanovich and is outlined in his publication Progress in Understanding Reading (2000) His early work focussed on 'alternative ways of interpreting the relationships between cognitive processes and reading ability'. (1986, p. 360). His observations about how strong and struggling readers use context, the importance of automatic word recognition skills, the relationship between the quantum of words readers' use and reading speed, and identification of many different types of reading failure, are all rich areas on which to base effective

interventions for struggling readers. In addition, Stanovich contends that while we know a great deal about the reading process, which he refers to as the 'Grand Synthesis' (2000, p. 405), much of this knowledge is not applied, as theories of process do not easily translate into theories of practice.

The five alphabetical phases of word learning (Ehri, 1991): pre, partial, full, consolidated and automatic, may provide a structure for teachers to intervene with struggling readers as 'knowledge of the characteristics of each phase can provide teachers with a basis for assessing the strategies available to readers when they respond to text' (Ehri, 1991, p. 21). This model emphasises the need to accurately diagnose a struggling reader's word skill base and then use appropriate strategies to assist them. As with Clay's work (2001) discussed above, the individual nature of the learner and the need for individualised instruction is a focus of this research. Individualised interventions, conducted by experts and based on expert analysis of struggling readers' needs, is an area requiring close focus.

Coltheart et al. (1993) developed the Dual Route Cascaded Model. This complex computational model built upon Seidenberg and McClelland's, Interactive Activation and Competition Model (1989). The model demonstrates a pathway from print to speech that includes visual systems, letter units, an orthographic input lexicon, semantics, grapheme phoneme routing systems, phonological output and phoneme systems. Coltheart et al. conclude in their 2001 paper, *DRC: A Dual Route Cascaded Model of Visual word Recognition and Reading Aloud,* 'that the DRC model is the most successful of the existing computational models' (p. 204). This claim is based on the model's ability to successfully simulate a wide range of reading behaviours. How this knowledge can be applied to instructional practice for struggling readers is a challenge for future research.

The relevance of schema theory is demonstrated by Anderson (1984). He describes a schema as 'an abstract structure of information … a set of expectations, expectations fulfilled by the specific information that a scene, message or happening delivers to the senses' (p. 5). This construct has been used and reviewed by many (Carrell, 1984; Che, 2014; Reutzel, 1985; Richgels, 1982; Rumelhart, 1977; Sadoski, Paivio, & Goetz, 1991) and provides some very specific possibilities for instructional practice with struggling adolescent readers. Anderson (1984) notes,

> When compared to children in high-ability groups, children in low ability reading groups receive more word-list drill but read less connected text; they are asked more simple, factual questions and fewer questions that require inference or synthesis; they spend more time reading aloud and less time reading silently; and when they do read aloud, they have a higher percentage of their pronunciation errors corrected by the teacher. (p. 10)

Anderson (1984) also contends that this situation leads to students developing weak views of knowledge, or schemas that prevents them comprehending text easily. The clear message is that

instructional practices, that provide low ability reading students with a strong 'view of knowledge' need to be developed and they may be more like the practices we conduct with high-ability groups.

The Interactive Reading model by Rumelhart (1977) which built upon the idea of the reader as an active participant, combined features of both top down and bottom up theories in an effort to create a reading model better able to accommodate the body of data coming out of the computational age. This model can help us understand the complexity of the reading process and the interaction between word knowledge and textual information in the comprehension process. Rumelhart (1980, p. 33) also extended the idea of schemas developed by Anderson (1984) and contended that, 'if our schemata (building blocks of cognition) are incomplete and do not provide an understanding of the incoming data from the text we will have problems processing and understanding the text'. This idea supports the possible value of teachers using a range of activities, prior to introducing a text, that develop students' schemas and thus promote reading comprehension.

Lueer's Short Circuit Model (1983) receives comment as it was an effort to synthesise the existing theories at the time. It is meant to attend to the part (Gibson and Levin) as well as to the whole (Smith and Goodmann) of the reading process. It is meant to be linear and hierarchical (Gough, La Berge and Samuels) as well as simultaneous (Rumelhart) in its description of how processing occurs. (p. 86)

This theory posited six short circuiting factors. A 'short circuit being-any interference occurring during the reading process which somehow decreases or misaligns authors meaning and readers' (p. 80). These factors were: linguistic, socio-cultural, attitudinal and motivational, neurological, perceptual and cognitive. The introduction of motivational factors, apparently absent from most theories of the time, gives this theory some prominence as it may be a critical factor with struggling adolescent readers. This observation, that motivational factors were ignored by research in this period is supported by Matthewson (1994) who, 'found lack of research interest in affective topics such as attitude, motivation and interest' (p. 1131). This model of 'attitude influence' posits a, 'tricomponent approach to attitude', involving cognitive, affective and conative (action readiness) components. From this theory he identified 10 implications for instruction that have direct relevance for learning environment with struggling readers (pp. 1454–1457).

Reading research in the information-processing era, reviewed above, was still evolving its ideas and influence when social constructivist theory began to influence research in the socio-cultural learning era, 1986–1995 (Alexander & Fox, 2004). The dominant perspective during this time became the view of learning as a socio-cultural, collaborative experience (Alexander, 1996). Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD), possibly one of the most important concepts to flow from research into practice in schools, was embraced in this period and influenced teaching practice in schools to a

considerable degree. The ZPD concept required the teacher to reconsider the nature of knowledge, evaluate students' skill and knowledge levels and organise classrooms on a more individual basis.

2.2.6 Socio-cultural learning era.

As noted above information processing was still a driver of reading research through this latter part of the twentieth century and one of the protagonists in this area was William Kintsch. His early, Construction Integration Model (198) was followed by the Predication Model (2000) and his major work, *The Construction of Meaning* (2011) was an effort to 'model how sentence meanings are constructed as opposed to word meanings' (p. 346). Kintsch was part of a very large group of researchers (Barsalou, 1987; Just & Carpenter, 1992; Dennis, 2008; Landauer & Dumais, 1997; Murdock, 1982; Rumelhart, 1979) who developed a multiplicity of statistical models attempting to simulate the comprehension of text. This modelling is part of an ongoing endeavour, but as yet does not seem to offer any great insights into interventions for our target group of adolescents.

2.2.7 The engaged learning era and multiliteracies.

From 1996 to the present, the 'engaged learning era', saw the emergence of multiliteracies, the importance of motivation, classroom discourse and a focus on strategies to assist reading comprehension. Unfortunately, for somewhere between 4% and 25% of our students (NAPLAN 2012; Manuel, 2003) engagement is not a reality because they cannot read at the required level to fully participate in the mainstream classroom. The struggling adolescent reader still needs to be able to read the texts used in the classroom to succeed in our school environment and while there are many opportunities to use 'other literacies' and technology to assist in this process they may not provide the effective intervention our struggling readers require. However, there is some evolution of reading theory that may offer directions for the future.

Multiliteracies as a concept came to the fore with the publication of, *Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures'* (The New London Group, 1996) and has had a major influence on reading research since. Luke and Freebody's definition of literacy, 'Literacy is the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken, print, and multimedia' (2000, p. 9), describes the fundamentals of multiliteracies which sit easily with their four roles of the reader model (Freebody & Luke, 1990). This model which evolved into the four resources model (Luke & Freebody, 1997, 1999) placed reading in a socio-cultural context with the reader seen as code breaker, text participant, text user, and text analyst, and provided and still provides a broad 'lens' through which to view the reading process. This 'lens' in turn has had a major influence on literacy and reading research in Australia as it has been interpreted and extended both by the authors (Freebody & Luke, 2003; Freebody 2007) and others. Luke, Dooley and Woods (2011) applied the model to low socio-economic schools and 'bridging the gap' for low achieving readers.

They note that, 'the model is not an instructional script or program' (p. 156) but provides a broad structure for schools to consider when addressing reading deficits and literacy instruction in general. Serafini (2012) in his detailed work, *Expanding the Four Resources Model: reading visual and multi-modal texts,* posits that we need to 'reconceptualize the reader as reader/viewer' (p. 151), in light of multiliteracies thinking. In addition, he acknowledges that the, 'power of the four resources model was its inclusion of different theoretical perspectives, not in its exclusion' (p. 160). Anstey and Bull's (2006) work *Teaching and Learning Multiliteracies, changing times changing literacies*, also refer to Freebody and Luke (2003) in their teacher focussed exposition that provides many useful strategies for including multiliteracy thinking in learning environments that may assist the struggling reader.

There are also a number of other theorists, working in this 'engaged learning era' who deserve comment. Guthrie and Wigfield's work on motivation (2000) drew on socio-cultural theory, recognising that readers are active and wilful participants in the construction of knowledge with motivation playing an important role. This resonates with the aforementioned Lueer's (1983) work, where motivation, or the lack of it, was one of the factors that might 'short circuit' the reading process. Motivation and engagement may be pivotal factors when working with struggling adolescent readers.

Gee (2004) *A Strange Fact About Not Learning to Read,* makes the compelling case that reading is not a natural process but a 'cultural learning process' (p. 12) and 'the failure to bring prototypes of academic language to school is exactly why the fourth-grade slump occurs' (p. 19). This idea has obvious major implications for our struggling adolescent reader and possible intervention, as does Paris' work, *Reinterpreting the Development of Reading Skills* (2005). Paris investigated the ideas of constrained and unconstrained skills. He argues that skills such as letter knowledge, phonics and print knowledge are more constrained than others, as they are small sets of knowledge, learned quickly and mastered entirely. 'Other skills such as vocabulary are unconstrained by the knowledge to be acquired or the duration of learning' (p. 187). The implications of this research are considerable as it questions the reliability of data from studies of constrained skills; phonics and letter knowledge in particular. However, he does note,

> That constrained skills need to be mastered because they are necessary, but not sufficient for other reading skills. They enable automatic decoding, deployment of attention, and application of comprehension strategies so they set the stage for reading development, but they are not simple causes for complex reading skills to develop. Indeed, unconstrained skills such as vocabulary and comprehension develop before, during, and after constrained skills are mastered so there is no evidence to warrant instructional priority of constrained skills over unconstrained skills. (p. 200)

This observation, if correct, has significant implications for our struggling adolescent reader and those who teach them. Paris acknowledges this in his concluding comments, in this paper, 'teachers need to

be provided with useful and multidimensional assessments of children's reading skills that are designed to support their diagnostic evaluations and instructional decisions about individual children' (p. 200); individual instruction for struggling readers being a theme that seems to be repeated in the literature (Clay, 1994; Ehri, 1991; Gardner, 1999; Just & Carpenter, 1980).

Paris' (2005) call for new research on constrained skills, in his 2005 paper, *Reinterpreting the development of reading skills,* seems to have been heeded. Alexander and Fox (2004) drew upon some of the early behaviouralist work from the 1960s (Glasser, 1978; Skinner, 1954) and labelled it 'reconditioning'. This idea revisits the notion that the sub-skills, particularly those to do with phonemic knowledge and orthographic knowledge, recognised as underlying reading acquisition, may need to be explicitly taught, especially to struggling readers. Gathercole (2006) suggests that 'superior phonological working memory for novel words explains why good readers are better at building their vocabularies than poor readers' (p. 12). Ehri (2014) has added to this strand of the research. She built upon her phase theory of pre, partial, full and consolidated alphabetic knowledge, developed in 2005, with orthographic mapping theory.

> Orthographic mapping occurs when in the course of reading specific words, readers form connections between written units, either single graphemes or larger spelling patterns and spoken units, either phonemes, syllables or morphemes. (Ehri, 2014, p. 5)

Ehri's work suggests orthographic knowledge is more important than phonology in developing reading skills but both may play a part in developing effective strategies for struggling adolescent readers. Perfetti & Stafura (2014) support and build upon Ehri's work with their component model of reading and advocate word interventions that, 'promote advanced decoding skills and word identification development.' (p. 15) It may appear we are moving into the past with this focus on sub-skills, but this emphasis is balanced with the attention to background knowledge in the component model of reading, 'The probability of promoting deep comprehension in children with reading disabilities is maximized through instruction that emphasizes the building and activation of background knowledge as it applies to the text' (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014, p. 10).

This refocus on orthographic and phonemic knowledge within aspects of a social constructivist framework seems to reposition reading theory and offer possibilities for new and effective interventions for struggling readers. This is needed as the effectiveness of prevailing interventions, intended to improve word-reading and comprehension skills in children with reading disabilities are questioned by Compton, Miller, Elleman and Steacy (2014), 'we call for the development of a new generation of reading interventions that target the fundamental knowledge structures and learning mechanisms known to support typical reading development' (p. 55). To this end, Compton et al. offer specific suggestions in relation to word identification and reading comprehension strategies that could assist children with

reading disabilities and call for more research in the area. This call resonates, as there is a vacuum in secondary schools when it comes to intervening with struggling adolescent readers. Reading research and the theories it has generated can provide the answers as noted by Stanovich (2000) above, but they are not simple ones, as, 'There is no single model of reading. Reading varies as a function of who is reading, what they are reading and why they are reading' (Just & Carpenter, 1980, p. 350).

2.2.8 Reading research, curriculum and practice

The challenge is to take the research and translate it into a curriculum and pedagogy that can be implemented in schools in a form that teachers will embrace and apply because they will be confident it works. Due to the complexity of the reading process, and the further one delves into the research the more complex it becomes, it will not be an easy task to translate the theory into effective practice, but the plight of struggling readers make this task an imperative. Luke, Woods and Dooley (2011) summarise the situation and make a clear suggestion for future research,

> We have not here outlined a particular method, but rather a way of thinking about culturally inclusive and intellectually demanding school curriculum planning and reform. It is time to move beyond the simple binary policy debates—between phonics and comprehension, between implicit and explicit instruction, between community and canonical knowledge, between local knowledge and scientific discipline—and begin a thorough qualitative re-examination of those schools that have been successful at achievement of more equitable and just education. (p. 163)

This thesis is an attempt to provide a thorough, qualitative examination of four schools that have achieved success with SARs. Understanding why these schools have been successful could be a step towards the more equitable and just education Luke et al., call for.

A consistent theme in this discussion of reading theory is the complexity of the reading process and the difficulty with translating the theory into instructional practice (Stanovich, 2000). This complexity is echoed in Just and Carpenter's comments (1980) that, 'There is no single model of reading. Reading varies as a function of who is reading, what they are reading and why they are reading' (p. 350). These observations about the complexity of the reading process provide some basis for individual instruction for struggling readers, which is another theme repeated in the literature (Clay, 1994; Ehri, 1991; Gardner, 1999; Just & Carpenter, 1980;) and one which is explored in this case study.

Of the theories outlined above, Luke and Freebody's Four Resource Model (1990) and its later expansion to consider multiliteracies (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Serafini, 2012), provides the focus on reading most closely aligned with the socio-cultural framework of this study. In addition, the direct application of the model as a broad structure to consider how low socio-economic schools can, 'bridge the gap' for low achieving readers (Luke, Dooley & Woods, 2011) increases its relevance. Some details

of the model have been provided above but Serafini's (2012, p. 151) assessment of the model is particularly apt.

> Freebody and Luke (1990) proffered an expanded conceptualisation of the resources readers utilize and the roles readers adopt during the act of reading. The four resources model and its associated four roles of the reader expanded the definition of reading from a simple model of decoding printed texts (Gough, 1986) to a model of constructing meaning and analyzing texts in socio-cultural contexts (Gee, 1996). The goal was to shift the focus from trying to find the right method for teaching children to read to determining whether the range of resources available and the strategies emphasized in a reading program were indeed covering and integrating the broad repertoire of practices required in today's economies and cultures. (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 153)

This assessment by Serafini, illustrates how the four resources model can be used to analyse reading programs such as those in the case study schools. Schools need to have the range of resources and the strategies in their reading programs the model contends are essential. Schools also need to move beyond the notion of reading as just decoding printed text. A recent study by Lamping (2016) provides a very clear example of a program that successfully used the resources and strategies referred to above, with adolescents with low reading skills. Lamping (2016) contends that the four resources model, 'provides us with a complex way of looking at emergent adolescent reading as both individually pivotal and shaped by the interactions beginning readers have with teachers and texts' (p. 70). The study involved new arrivals to Australia 'learning in one of Australia's only stand-alone adolescent New Arrival Programs (NAPs) for students learning English' (p. 68). It involved analysing the teaching methods of two teachers who were using the four resources model to structure their practice. It found that the 'process was not linear, nor was it compartmentalized. Instead, it employed all four resources in a simultaneous relationship with the aesthetic experience and created a dynamic space for these readers' (p. 73). This study also noted the difference between early and adolescent beginning readers and the need to recognise and use the often quite sophisticated skills and knowledge the adolescent brings to the classroom. The four resources model resonates with socio-cultural theory and adds to the frame supporting this research.

2.3 Comprehensive Review of The Literature on Interventions for Struggling Adolescent Readers

2.3.1 Background.

Andrews (2005) in, *The Place of the Comprehensive Review in Educational Research,* provides historical background on comprehensive reviews as a research methodology and outlines the debate as to the efficacy of the process. He notes, 'they are seen as favouring hard statistical evidence rather than interpretative strategies' (p. 398). However, recent thinking in the United Kingdom (Gough, Oakley &

Elbourne, 2002) has emphasised the process can be used for qualitative, quantitative, meta-ethnography and meta-analyses. A final comment in Andrew's, 2005 paper is of particular relevance as he comments in regard to doctoral theses, 'they may wish to adapt some of the principles of comprehensive reviews to their own ends' (p. 414), and in effect that is what has been done in this review. It is beyond the limitations of this study to carry out a comprehensive review that follows the recommendations of the PRISMA-P reporting methods and protocols (Shamseer et al., 2015), a protocol designed more for medical research than education, but the basic principles will be adhered to, to allow a comprehensive review of the literature on interventions for SARs. Andrews (2005) notes that, 'a research question that is investigating the efficacy of an intervention will tend to look at random controlled trials and controlled trials' (p. 409). As one aspect of the research focus of this thesis is the impact of interventions, Andrews' advice will be considered but the complexity of the SAR requires that all types of research be considered. The protocol adopted is an attempt to minimise bias in the selection of research, which is the purpose of any comprehensive review.

2.3.2 Rationale.

Students entering secondary school, typically young adolescents 11–12 years of age, who struggle with reading and test at least two years below grade level, require intensive intervention if they are not to fall further behind their higher reading ability peers. This review will 'capture' interventions that have attempted to improve the performance of the SAR. The investigation is important, as there is a lack of direction in secondary schools on how to effectively intervene to improve the performance of the SAR. The review will look for common themes in the research.

2.3.3 Objectives.

The objective of this study is to comprehensively review the literature for qualitative and quantitative evidence from interventions in secondary schools designed to assist SARs. The comprehensive review will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How common are studies of interventions for SARs, aged 11–15, across the English-speaking world from 2005–2016?
2. What are the features of interventions for SARs?
3. How is the effectiveness of interventions measured?
4. What are the features of effective interventions?
5. Can the broad educational environment of schools with effective interventions, be assessed from the research?
6. Do any studies focus on schools successfully intervening with SARs and try to determine why they are successful?

2.3.4 Methods.

Studies will be selected according to the criteria outlined below. Acknowledging Andrews' (2005) criticism of comprehensive reviews, 'favouring hard data', there will be an endeavour to include a full range of research methodologies in the review.

2.3.5 Study designs.

Only peer reviewed studies from the years 2004–2016 will be included. The quantitative studies will have verifiable data on student improvement on standardised tests, expressed as effect size or reading age, or against standards such as NAPLAN. Qualitative and mixed methods studies, reviews and meta-analyses will be assessed individually on their capacity to add to the theory of instructional practice. This more subjective judgement will be based on the methodology employed and/or the number and quality of studies reviewed.

2.3.6 Participants.

The target group is students 11–15 years of age, generally found in the first three years of secondary school in the Australian context, at least two years below age or grade level. Studies that include years 6 to 10 or any of years 7–9 were also included.

Quantitative studies will need to have a minimum of 30 participants in this 11–15 age group to be eligible. Qualitative, mixed methods studies, meta-analyses and literature reviews will also have to be based on the target group defined above and will be evaluated on a case by case basis. Ideally all studies identified by the search will be reviewed if practical.

2.3.7 Timing.

Studies will have been conducted after 2015.

Improvement in reading performance data should be calculated over at least a six-month period to avoid test effect and Paris's (2005) concern, regarding the statistical significance of data, on constrained skills.

2.3.8 Setting.

Students should be in 'school' settings.

2.3.9 Language.

English.

2.3.10 Information sources.

Monash Universities 'Search' multidisciplinary data base.

2.3.11 Search strategies.

The search into the database used the following key terms, '*struggling adolescent readers*' and '*interventions*'. The search was restricted to years 2005–2016 and peer reviewed journals only. Monash University's multi-database search engine SEARCH, which incorporates ERIC, ProQuest Education, A+ Education and Psych Info (Ovid), recognised education focussed data bases, was used for the search.

2.3.12 Search results.

The search identified 100 peer reviewed articles from 2005–2016. The abstracts and methodology sections of these articles were reviewed against the criteria outlined above with each article being identified as either: quantitative, qualitative or meta-analysis/review. Thirteen articles met the quantitative criteria, six were qualitative and 24 were meta-analysis/reviews. The other 47 either didn't meet the criteria or were repeat studies. Summaries of the 43 articles are included in Appendix A as they are quite extensive. The first section of the two summary tables are shown below in tables 2.2 and 2.3.

Table 2.2. Summary of Included Quantitative Studies

Study	N	Source	Topic	Intervention Type	Effectiveness Measures and Results	School Environment Supporting Intervention
Calhoon, Hollis, Scarborough & Miller (2013)	155	USA	Testing three different modes of multi-component intervention	Testing different combinations of decoding, spelling, fluency and comprehension	Reading age improvements of 2–4+ years in one year.	No reference to school environment.
Fritjers (2013)	255	USA	Testing different methods to determine the effectiveness of interventions for SARs	Integration of phonology and strategy based-PHAST	Testing of four measures of effectiveness of an intervention. Illustrated difficulties with measuring improvements.	No reference to school environment.
Rezaie (2011)	27	USA	Using brain imaging to predict RTI	Small group remediation in word skills and comprehension	Focus on brain imaging's capacity to predict improvement. Indication of importance of automaticity of word recognition.	No reference to school environment.
Lang (2009)	1,265	USA	Testing the effectiveness of four interventions on SARs	Commercial programs, RISE, Read180 and REACH and school-based SOAR. All used multi-component	Florida State Testing (similar to NAPLAN) all four interventions showed improvement greater than 'state' means but not enough to bridge gap in one year.	Interventions supported by content area professional development.

				strategies, some computer assisted		
Lovett et al. (2012)	268	USA	Evaluating the impact of PHAST PACES, a three-stage program including word identification, text structure and comprehension strategies, on SARs	A 60–70-hour intervention using word, text structures and comprehension strategies, assessed and followed up 12 months later	Average effect size of.68, better than control on all measures.1.91 on sound combinations (a constrained skill).34 on comprehension.	Need to support in-school with age level texts, positive relationships and attitudes and enjoyable activities.
Vaughn (2010)	546	USA	Influence of group size with interventions for SARs	50-minute sessions daily for a year, focussing on fluency, word study, vocabulary and comprehension	Few statistically significant results or clinically significant gains were associated with group size or intervention.	School wide approach required. More individualized testing and focussed interventions for longer durations.
Simmons et al. (2014)	921	USA	Influence of instructional quality and entry level of students on reading comprehension in English language, arts classes	Study compared typical practice with program comprised of teacher-directed Text Setup, partner-regulated Text Analysis and Dialogue, and teacher- and student-directed Text Synthesis	No difference found between intervention and control. Effect size of.46 found for both groups that is significantly higher than state means. Students with lowest entry level benefitted least from comprehension strategies.	Hypothesises that.46 effect size due to the same teachers, teaching in both groups: skill transference from professional development. Students cannot self-regulate when they cannot access content of text.
Vaughn et al. (2015)	77	USA	A two-year literacy intervention including word study, vocabulary, comprehension strategies linked to content areas, combined with engagement, 'preventing dropout' strategies	Two-year intensive sessions (320 × 50 minutes in total) in groups of 10. Used word study REWARDS Plus (Archer et al. 2005) and comprehension strategies using content area texts	Results support extensive (2-year) interventions in reading for high school students with disabilities. Effect size of 0.44 achieved at ninth grade when average annual progress 0.19 (Hill 2008).	Engagement and 'dropout prevention' strategies employed by school. SARs still below grade level. More individualized approaches recommended.
Mallette et al. (2009)	30	USA	A mixed methods study examining effect of a summer school program on literacy outcomes in the following school year	A six-week program involving intensive small group, literacy coaching and careers focus, followed by 12 months monitoring of progress in school	A.43 effect size improvement over six-week program (possibly illustrates Paris's concern re constrained skills). Factors influencing performance over next 12 months unclear.	Authors explore importance of:self-perception, attitudes to school and relationships with teachers as factors influencing literacy performance.
Cantrell et al. (2014)	462/389	USA	A three-year study across 12 schools investigating the impact of Learning Strategy Curriculum (LSC) (Tralli et al. 1996) on comprehension strategy use, motivation to read	School wide PD for content area teachers. Training in LSC delivered over 250 minutes each week to experimental group	Surveys and 'Think Aloud' records showed significant increases in motivation to read and strategy use but no increase in reading performance.	Literacy PD for all content area teachers prior to intervention. And intensive PD for LSC teachers.

Study						
			and reading performance			
Beltramo (2012)	112	USA	An eight-month multi-component intervention focussing on fluency, word study and reading comprehension and student perceptions of reading	All students received specific literacy instruction in whole-class format with SRA and Accelerated Reader. SARs provided with additional small group instruction	All students, including the 48%, 3–4 years below grade level, showed statistically significant improvement with Year 7s showing 1.78 years growth in 8 months.	A whole-school literacy focus with high interest texts in classroom libraries and PD of all staff in comprehension strategies and use of rubrics.
Hock et. al. (2014)	34/35 20/20 871 40/60	USA	This study tests the Fusion Reading Program, based on the Simple Reading Model (Hoover and Gough 1990) against two other programs, Corrective Reading and Second Chance and 'business as usual'	FRP explicitly teaches word recognition and comprehension strategies in daily sessions of 60 or 90 minutes to groups of 12–15 SARs	FRP showed greater effect size than control 'programs', varying from .11–1.35.	Three major observations about "School playing a critical role" in the success of any intervention: there must be transfer from intervention to core classes; all teachers need to teach literacy; and students must be engaged in literature.
Solís et al. (2014)	1,748	USA	Why intensive intervention matter: longitudinal studies of adolescents with reading disabilities and poor reading comprehension	A three-year study across seven schools investigating the effectiveness of a RTI framework	The multi-tiered intervention looked at different combinations and intensity of word study, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension strategies. One lesson a week of supported reading not effective ES =.15-.19. Multi-component interventions ES =.52-.56. Two-year intervention Comprehension ES=1.20 Word Attack ES=.49	For adolescents with low reading skills, intensive interventions should be considered using texts that build background knowledge and understanding of content learning.
Cirino et al. (2013)	Statistical analysis of test data on 'typical'(at level) readers and SARs	USA	This study investigated how measures of decoding, fluency and comprehension in middle school students overlap with one another.	Data on decoding, fluency and comprehension for 1,025 SARs and 723 typical readers across seven schools was analysed for overlap	Most SARs demonstrate reading problems that include word level reading, fluency and comprehension. Sources of reading difficulties in middle school students are diverse, requiring interventions that integrate instruction in accuracy, fluency and comprehension.	School interventions need a multi-component approach that uses multiple data sources pinpointing the sources of reading difficulties and the nature and level of intensity of intervention needed.

Table 2.3 Summary of Included Qualitative Studies

Study	Type	Source	Topic	Characteristics of Study	Position on Interventions	School Environment Supporting Intervention

Moss (2011)	Teaching Strategy	USA	Tiered texts: supporting knowledge and language learning for English learners and SARs	Description of a strategy to explicitly teach academic language	Need interventions that facilitate mastery of academic vocabulary. Claim this 'tiering' process differentiates and scaffolds learning, develops 'schemas' and engages students.	This is a 'whole classroom' strategy that could support specific interventions.
Dennis (2009)	Classroom study	USA	How assessment drives inappropriate reading instruction.	An intervention designed by a classroom teacher	Interventions must be based on a series of reading assessments, not just standardised tests, be individualized and focus on SARs strengths. Students need to set goals and self-monitor.	Independent reading level texts must be available. All teachers need to understand the intervention, and know instructional methods supporting the SAR.
Francois 2014	Single school case study	USA	Getting at the core of literacy improvement: a case study of an urban school	Study used grounded theory and constant comparative analysis to investigate literacy improvement	Whole-school intervention involving instructional leadership; building teacher capacity in literacy; provision of time and space and focus on the instructional core (Elmore 2007).	Whole-school processes more important than individual classroom interventions. Emphasis on principal's leadership.
Moreau (2014)	Case study	USA	An analysis of teacher attitudes to SARs	A phenomenological case study approach employing within, cross case and thematic analysis.	Interventions at classroom level influenced by teacher attitudes. Teaching reading is not their job and they do not understand the SAR and do not have strategies and practices to meet their needs.	Schools need to provide high-quality professional development and effective literacy coaching.
Santa (2006)	Personal position on improving adolescent literacy	USA	A vision for adolescent literacy	A reflection on a lifetime of working with SARs. Positing of a set of research-based principles to assist SARs	Four research-based principles for designing effective literacy programs: classroom relationships; direct strategy instruction and modelling; teaching metacognition; professional expertise.	Should not be focussed on high stakes testing and teacher reward for results on these tests. Whole-school vision and plan for explicitly meeting the needs of SARs is required.
Wolters (2013)	Survey based study of student motivation and performance	USA	Motivation as a predictor of performance on standardised tests,	Survey of student attitudes correlated with standardised measures of reading performance	Motivational beliefs as a whole can be used to predict performance on standardised measures. Motivation can improve SARs' engagement and ability in reading.	
Harmon (2016)	Qualitative study	USA	The study looked closely at the perceptions of both teachers and students about aspects of high school reading instruction	Five high school reading teachers and two to three students in each of their reading classes, were interviewed individually by the researchers	Instruction for struggling readers, needs to be student based rather than commercially based, with a program of study developed upon individual needs. More monitoring of effectiveness and rigorous engaged instruction required.	Time in the intervention could be well spent in supporting the actual readings demanded of the students in the content courses.

Table 2.4. Summary of Included Reviews and Meta-Analyses

Study	Type	Source	Topic	Characteristics of Study	Position on Interventions	School Environment Supporting Intervention
Fisher & Ivey (2008)	Review	USA	Evaluating the interventions for SARs	Authors assess interventions and offer five guidelines for choosing a program	Interventions should: involve expert teacher instruction; comprehensive reading and writing activities; be engaging; driven by ongoing assessment and provide opportunities for authentic reading and writing.	Interventions should only be considered if general learning environment includes wide reading of high interest, age appropriate texts and whole-school literacy approach.
Hennessy 2012	Review	USA	The problem and potential solutions for the SAR	A review of journal, *Perspectives on Language and Literacy, spring 2012.* Focussing on SARs and interventions.	Remediation works best as an additional instruction. Need 'literacy champions' at district and school level designing and supporting interventions.	Require principal and team who bring 'unique knowledge to the process'. Build whole-school consensus on the (literacy practices) 'mission'.
Malmgren et al. (2009)	Review	USA	Assessing Interventions for SARs against cognitive information-processing model	A review of a wide selection of the research on interventions for SARs	They can be effective. Effective strategies include: graphosyllabic analysis, vocabulary instruction, word study, fluency, text structure-narrative and expository, simultaneous multi-component interventions, graphic organisers, questioning summarising and predicting comprehension strategies.	Curriculum initiatives at the classroom level need to support the SAR: these need to be investigated and implemented,
Roberts (2013)	Review	USA	New directions for reading instruction for adolescents with significant cognitive disabilities	A comprehensive review identifying 19 empirical studies from 1975–2011	Sight word instruction the most common but other approaches identified such as: integration of functional and academic content, use of technology and modified grade level texts. More research needed.	Study emphasised the use of modified and authentic texts as effective strategies.
Edmonds et al. (2009)	Meta-analysis of 29 studies from 1994–2004	USA	A synthesis of reading interventions and effects of reading comprehension outcomes for older struggling readers'	A comprehensive review identified 29 quantitative studies targeting improvement in reading comprehension A meta-analysis was carried out on these studies.	Study found an effect size of .89 for comprehension and .34 for word level focussed interventions. SARs can improve when provided with targeted reading intervention in comprehension and multiple reading components.	Study acknowledged limitations and need to consider motivation, context, engagement, self-efficacy and stimulation of reading interest with SARs
Solís et al. (2012)	Review of 12 studies 1979–200	USA	Reading comprehension interventions for middle school students with reading disabilities: a synthesis of 30	Twelve empirical studies of interventions on grades 6–8 (12–14-year-olds) coded and summarised	Most interventions involved summarisation that was effective along with self-monitoring, mnemonics, mapping and questioning. Most consistent finding was effectiveness of explicit instruction including	Study noted absence of interventions involving vocabulary instruction, discussion of texts and motivation and engagement all

			years of research		modelling, feedback and practice.	recommended by Kamil (2008)
Galuschka et al. (2014)	Meta-analysis of 22 random controlled trials	USA	Effectiveness of treatment approaches for children and adolescents with reading disabilities	A comprehensive review of studies to June 2013. Meta-analysis of the 22 studies meeting criteria	Phonics instruction- a combination of phonemic awareness and reading fluency training- most frequently investigated and the only approach statistically efficacious for children and adolescents. Longer and more intensive interventions more effective.	Reading fluency training alone not effective.
Boon (2015)	Comprehensive review	USA	A review of effectiveness of Story Mapping instruction for secondary students with reading disabilities	Twelve research papers, from 1975–2015, on Story mapping were reviewed	Study determined that Story Mapping was an effective, evidence-based intervention to increase the reading comprehension skills of secondary students with reading difficulties.	Students were in 1:1. 2:1 or in small groups when receiving intervention.
Hempenstall (2009)	Review of reading assessments	AUS	Research-driven reading assessment	A review of the research on reading assessments of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension	Interventions need to be based on evidence from proven testing materials and regimes. Students should be individually tested after initial 'state' data such as NAPLAN, indicate issues. Testing should determine nature of intervention.	Questions teachers use of random and non-standardised methods of testing for reading difficulties.
Whithear (2011)	Comprehensive review of fluency research for SARs	AUS	A review of fluency research and practices for struggling readers in secondary schools	A comprehensive review of research on fluency in reading at secondary level from 2000–2009. Nineteen articles identified and reviewed	Interventions should involve authentic and appropriate texts; concurrent comprehension strategy training; modelling; feedback and time to practice. Fluency-based programs, taught within a comprehension context, have the potential to improve SARs.	Set Class texts detrimental for SARs. Independent reading not effective for improving fluency. All teachers need to model fluent reading particularly with expository texts.
Swanson (2008)	Comprehensive review	USA	A synthesis of studies observing reading instruction for students with learning difficulties	Twenty-one papers from 1980–2005, using the classroom observation method, were identified and reviewed; five of these referred to SARs.	The instruction was: of low quality; little or no explicit instruction in phonics or comprehension strategies; little time on oral or silent reading and most common grouping the whole class.	Little description of schools where observations were conducted
Marchand et al. (2013)	Review		Key areas of effective adolescent literacy	This paper reviews best practices for effective	The critical components of interventions for SARs are explicit instruction in word, fluency, vocabulary and	

			programs[SEP]	adolescent literacy programs	comprehension skills and motivation.	
Barton-Arwood & Little (2013)	Review	USA	Secondary teachers can use graphic organisers (GO's) to minimise the barriers and increase the success of adolescents with LD	A review of the evidence on effectiveness of GO's for secondary students with learning disabilities	GO's are an empirically validated instructional tool that secondary teachers can use to support meaningful access to the general curriculum.	Focus of review was on general classroom application.
Scammacca et al. 2013	Meta-analysis	USA	This meta-analysis synthesises the literature on interventions for SARs in grades 4 through 12 published between 1980 and 2011	Eighty-two studies, from 1980–2004 and 2005–2011 were analysed	Four findings: interventions produced positive results for all SARs; a decline in effect size from 2005; larger effect size for shorter interventions and reading comprehension interventions highest effect sizes.	Postulated that improvement in 'business as usual' reducing effect of interventions. Teachers more involved in longitudinal studies.
Whithear (2009)	Review	AUS	A discussion of why too many adolescents still struggle to read	National (Australian) and international reports on interventions for SARs reviewed	Interventions should include word level, vocabulary knowledge, fluency and comprehension strategies. They should be longer, more intensive more frequent and provide opportunities for practice. Self-efficacy, motivation and engagement are critical.	Whole school environment can improve reading comprehension (Rothman, 2003)
Allington et al. (2007)	Literature review and case study	USA	Intervention all day long: new hope for SAR"s	Case study of Learning environments at Monroe Middle School	Cannot rely on 'single intervention' designs. Interventions must be all day long affairs involving age appropriate content area texts and whole class, small group and side-by-side instruction.	Effective schools and teachers employ multi-sourced, multi-level curriculum plans in whole-class, small group and side-by-side instruction.
Reed (2009)	Comprehensive review	USA	The comprehensive review identified four studies that were analysed to determine the effect of PD on student literacy outcomes	This paper synthesised four studies of PD for middle school content area teachers and the teachers' subsequent implementation of literacy strategies	No definitive results but some tentative suggestions. Effective PD is based on teacher need and should build over time; minimum of 14 hours; involves reflection time and in class coaching and should involve trained literacy coaches.	A school wide approach most effective. Collective efficacy of school-based teams creates substantive change in instructional practice in literacy.
Albro et al. (2009)	Review of the Institute of Education	USA	A review of research on reading and outline of work	Discussion of the research being conducted by the IES with some	Proven empirical support for explicit vocabulary instruction and focussed, intensive, small group intervention. Moderate	More precise measures of comprehension may allow teachers to target comprehension

	Sciences (IES)		of IES	specific research on SARs	support for motivation and engagement.	strategies for SARs.
Wilson et al. (2013)	RTI model's Tier 3 outlined	USA	Presentation of an RTI and planning tools for its implementation with SARs	This paper uses recent meta-analyses and research syntheses of adolescent reading instruction to support the RTI model	RTI involves three tiers of intervention: 1. high-quality core curriculum; 2. small group; 3. individualized, high intensity, frequent and precise monitoring of progress. Model provides planning tools for content and pedagogy at Tier 3.	Emphasis on high-quality core curriculum where students are screened, supported in the classroom and provided Tier 2 or 3 support where appropriate.
Douglas & Albro (2014)	Outline of Reading for Understanding's (RFU) extensive research focus	USA	RFU has the goal of developing, piloting, and testing the efficacy of interventions across multiple grade levels and content areas within a 5-year time frame.	130 researchers across 25 institutions in the USA are attempting to fast track research on reading comprehension with a major focus on SARs	Results from this five-year plan should be available in 2016 and should provide an evidence base for interventions into reading comprehension.	
King-Sears (2010)	Literature review	USA	Attending to specialised reading instruction for adolescents with mild disabilities.	Literature on SARs reviewed and frameworks for matching interventions to SARs needs and effective specialised reading instruction, outlined	Adolescents with mild disabilities can learn to read and comprehend at higher levels when they receive individualised, specialised and intensive instruction.	The intensity and amount of reading instruction, currently provided for adolescents with mild disabilities, is insufficient.
Heibert and Morris (2012)	Review	USA	The study looks at the development of silent reading habits that involve strong comprehension and optimal reading rates	A review of the limited literature and a case study	A strong correlation between word count per minute in oral reading and comprehension. Research is insufficient to provide guidelines for practice.	Need efficient silent reading habits for success in the digital global world: these habits are enhanced through scaffolding by teachers and ICT.

2.3.13 Discussion.

Analysis of the research papers identified in the comprehensive review, provide quite clear answers to four of the six questions initially posited. The first question was:

1. How common are studies of interventions for SARs, aged 11–15, across the English-speaking world from 2005 to 2016?

The answer here is quite definitive. Of the 301 papers identified in the SEARCH database, only 100 were peer reviewed and of these 43 met the criteria outlined for the review, with 13 being quantitative studies. Of these, 40 were from the USA and three from Australia. A search for 'struggling readers-

interventions' revealed 1,746 papers with 501, peer reviewed, a five-fold increase over that for 'struggling adolescent readers-interventions'. This supports the oft-repeated comment that while there is a large body of research on reading in the 'early years' there is limited research on the SAR (Malmgren et al., 2009; Reutebuch, 2006; Roberts, 2013; Scammacca et al., 2007; Swanson 1999).

2. Features of interventions for SARs.

Table 2.4 below summarises the findings based on key words used in the studies to describe the type of intervention. Multiple component studies refers to interventions that used different combinations of decoding, spelling, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension strategies. The other interventions had a single focus on either vocabulary, motivation, whole-school focus or specific strategies such as story mapping. Individualised/specialised refers to programs developed for individual students by literacy experts.

Table 2.5. Features of Interventions for SARs

Type of Intervention	Quantitative	Qualitative	Review/Meta Analyses
Multiple component	9	13	
Comprehension	1	1	
Vocabulary/Word Study	1	3	
Motivation		3	
Whole-school focus		3	
Strategies(story mapping/graphic organisers)		2	
Individualised/Specialised		2	

Table 2.5 shows the clear predominance of multi-component studies in the research.

3. How is the effectiveness of interventions measured?

The quantitative studies use three measures to determine effectiveness of the intervention: reading age, 'state' test results and effect size. Of the 13 studies reviewed eight showed significant results, that is, improvement in reading comprehension relative to control groups or standardised measures. It is of particular interest that all of these eight studies were multi-component. The other five could not determine any significant improvement as a result of the intervention and highlight the complexity of

the reading process and the difficulty in controlling for extraneous variables. One study, in particular Fritjers (2013), illustrates the difficulties with measuring improvements in reading performance of SARs. Different measures of reading performance produced quite different results when used on the same experimental group thus further complicating how we assess the effectiveness of interventions.

The qualitative studies generally do not provide standardised test-scaled measures of the effectiveness of interventions, although there is evidence for the efficacy of particular strategies such as story mapping and graphic organisers. What is apparent is that 22 of the 43 studies employed and advocated for the effectiveness of multi-component interventions, usually involving a combination of phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension strategies.

4. What are the features of effective interventions?

The discussion in question three above indicates that multi-component interventions seem to be the most effective. The complication here is that multi-component interventions vary considerably in the emphasis, mix, duration and intensity of the components used in the interventions. Studies such as that by Solís et al. (2014) where different combinations and intensity of word study, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension strategies have been tested for effectiveness may be providing direction for effective interventions. While these multi-component studies generally focus on the four factors just mentioned, there are often references in the discussion in these papers to variables such as motivation and engagement (Solís et al., 2012; Vaughn et al., 2015), age level texts (Lovett et al., 2012), whole-school environment (Hock, 2014) and 'other' factors that may be influencing the effectiveness of interventions. An insight into these 'other factors' can be gained by analysing key words and phrases that repeat in the discussion sections of the 43 articles reviewed; these are summarised in Table 2.6 below.

Table 2.6. Repeated Themes All Studies

Themes	No. of studies
Whole-school literacy focus	13
Ongoing individual testing	8
High interest age appropriate texts	6
Staff professional development (comprehension strategies and explicit instruction)	5
Engagement and motivation	5
Individualised approach	3

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Longer duration	3
Transfer from intervention to content areas	3
Literacy experts/coaching	3
Leadership	3

This table indicates that the most consistent theme in the studies reviewed was a whole-school focus on literacy. Effective interventions were supported by the everyday practices in the classroom with individualised testing to determine students' needs, supported by age appropriate texts in an engaging environment created by teachers who are trained and coached by experts. The effective interventions were individualised, of longer duration and involve transfer from the intervention to content in the classroom. It would be of interest if this is an accurate description of schools with effective interventions for SARs.

5. Can the broad educational environment of schools with effective interventions be assessed from the research?

This question may have been answered above but not in a definitive fashion. The studies do not focus on the broad educational environments of the schools within which the interventions occur, and this environment can only be inferred from contextual information provided. The themes identified from the studies in the schools, are derived from discussion points, speculation and directions for further research, rather than from the specific aims of the studies but they may account for why it is so difficult to objectively evaluate interventions. The complexity of assessing interventions for SARs is highlighted by the difficulty of isolating the intervention from the broad educational environment. As a consequence, future research into the effectiveness of interventions for SARs may be more productive if it focusses on the context of the intervention as much as its content.

6. Do any studies focus on schools successfully intervening with SARs and try to determine why they are successful?

Only one of the studies identified explicitly took this approach. Wilson, Faggella-Luby, and Wei (2013) carried out a meta-analysis of schools in the USA, following the Response to Intervention RTI model. They concluded that schools successful in improving results for low-level readers emphasised high-quality core curriculum where students were screened and supported in the classroom and provided with Tier 2 or 3 support where appropriate. Tier 1 involves support through high-quality core curriculum. Tier 2 involves withdrawal into small groups for explicit targeted instruction and Tier 3 provides individualised, high intensity, frequent and precise monitoring of progress: planning tools

were provided for content and pedagogy at this level. This RTI model will be investigated in more detail in Chapter 6 and will be considered in the analysis of the study's findings.

While there was only the study above which focussed specifically at schools, the research analysed, does provide some quite promising direction for effective interventions with SARs. Individualised, multi-component measures are seemingly the most productive, but they are not the whole answer. The indications are that the whole school environment may be equally as important as the intervention and schools need more definitive answers as to the look of that environment.

This comprehensive review identified the themes that provide direction for this research. The 10 themes outlined in Table 2.6 have been reduced to eight. A whole-school literacy focus is seen to be the product of leadership and transfer from intervention to content areas and high interest, age appropriate texts fits into the category, learning environments that support SARs. Therefore, the themes or categories that have emerged from the review and will initially frame this multiple case study are:

- leadership
- interventions
- literacy experts/coaching
- individualised attention
- learning environments that support SARs
- testing and data
- engagement and motivation
- whole school environment

2.4 Effective Schools Research

The body of research on effective schools can provide a framework against which the general characteristics of the case study schools can be assessed. Effective schools research was in large part a response to the report by Coleman et al. (1966) which was interpreted to present the position that public schools do not impact on student achievement (Trujillo 2013; Prenkert 2015). This body of research has consistently identified seven correlates of effective schools. Lezotte and Snyder (2011) define the word correlates to mean the characteristics demonstrated by effective schools and they classify the current correlates as:

1. High expectations for success
2. Strong instructional leadership
3. Clear and focussed mission
4. Opportunity to learn/time on task

5. Frequent monitoring of student progress

6. Safe and orderly environment

7. Positive home-school relations

These seven correlates of effective schools are not the result of research focussed specifically on disadvantaged students such as the SAR, which is the focus of this study, but they do provide a broad framework from which to view the general characteristics of the case study schools in Chapter 6.

A body of research on effective low-socio-economic schools in Australia and New Zealand provides insight into the characteristics of schools that are effective with disadvantaged students. Fullan (1999, 2001, 2007, 2008,) Elmore (2003) and Hattie (2012), provide details of the type of school environment that support student learning particularly for disadvantaged students. In summary the research indicated that to be truly effective the school organisation—staff, principals, parents and council—needs to have:

- moral purpose
- awareness of the complexity of the organisation
- an understanding of the different dimensions of leadership
- an understanding of change management
- real distributed leadership
- effective teams
- a clear teaching and learning focus and
- constant evaluation of all aspects of the organisation.

These eight features focus on the school environment and show some similarity with the seven correlates identified above but do not specifically focus on home school relations. Parents are mentioned in a general reference to the type of school environment that supports student learning.

Two other studies, Joseph (2019), and Zbar et.al. (2008) on high performing low socio-economic schools, provide evidence for school practices effective with SARs. Joseph (2019) conducted a study into nine top-performing disadvantaged schools across Australia, three of which were secondary schools. This study identified, six common themes across the nine schools:

1. *School discipline*. Based on high expectations, a clear set of consistently applied classroom rules, and a centralised school behaviour policy.

2. *Direct and explicit instruction*. New content is explicitly taught in sequenced and structured lessons. Includes clear lesson objectives, immediate feedback, reviews of content from previous lessons, unambiguous language, frequent checking of student understanding, demonstration of the knowledge or skill to be learnt, and students practising skills with

teacher guidance.

3. *Experienced and autonomous school leadership*. Stable, long-term school leadership, and principal autonomy to select staff and control school budgets.

4. *Data-informed practice*. Using data from teacher-written NAPLAN and PATr assessments to improve teaching, track student progress, and facilitate intervention for underachieving students.

5. *Teacher collaboration and professional learning*. Collaboration among teachers and specialist support staff to cater for the often, complex needs of disadvantaged students, with a focus on teacher professional learning, involving peer observations, mentoring, and attending practical professional development activities which help refine literacy and numeracy instruction.

6. *Comprehensive early reading instruction*. Including five necessary elements of reading instruction: Phonemic awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension.' (p. 2).

These six themes again show some similarity to the school effectiveness correlates with the exception of positive home school relations.

The second study, Zbar et.al. (2008) is a case study of eight high performing, low socio-economic schools in Victoria, Australia. 'Ten lessons were identified as underpinning the success of these case study schools' (p. 3) The first four involved the preconditions for improvement: strong shared leadership; high expectations and teacher efficacy; an orderly learning environment; and few priorities focussing on the core things students need. The other six 'lessons' pertained to how improvement was sustained over time. These involved, building teaching and leadership expertise; structuring teaching to ensure all students succeed; using data to drive improvement; a culture of sharing and responsibility; tailoring initiatives to the overall direction of the school and engendering pride in the school. All of these 'lessons' are consistent with the school effectiveness correlates with the exception of positive home school relations.

A model for school change across three clusters of low socio-economic schools was tested by McNaughton and Lai (2009) in New Zealand. This study, which focussed on reading comprehension as one measure of improvement, found significant improvement, particularly for students from Maori and Pasifika backgrounds. This model for change had six key principles,

Key principles are: that teachers need to be able to act as adaptive experts; that local evidence about teaching and learning is necessary to inform instructional design; that school professional learning communities are vehicles for changing teaching practice; that educative research–practice–policy partnerships are needed to solve problems; that instructional leadership in schools is necessary for

community functioning and for coherence; and that effective programs in schools are built by fine tuning existing practices. (p. 55)

Again, these six key principles align very closely with the correlates identified in the school effectiveness research but positive home school relations is not mentioned.

Positive home school relations, the seventh correlate in the general school effectiveness research, is not mentioned in the research cited on schools effective with disadvantaged students. This will be discussed in Chapter 6 along with the insights the school effectiveness research can provide on the case study schools.

2.5 Engagement Motivation and the Struggling Adolescent Reader

The comprehensive review outlined in this chapter identified 10 factors that may be influencing the effectiveness of interventions for our SARs. Of these, 'motivation and engagement' was the equal fourth most mentioned factor. In itself this ranking may not be significant but the importance of engagement and motivation in the reading process, particularly for the SAR, is supported in the literature. Klauda and Guthrie (2015) contend that reading research on engagement and abilities, must account for motivational factors and there is a small but growing body of research (Cantrell, 2014; Conradi, Jang & Mckenna 2014; Melekoglu, 2011; Neugebauer, 2014; Wolters, 2013) that explores the relationship between motivation, engagement and the performance of the SAR. As a consequence, it is important to understand the role of motivation and engagement when trying to understand why some schools are more effective than others with SARs.

To this end a similar search to that used in the comprehensive review was conducted, using the search terms 'struggling adolescent reader' and 'motivation'. This search identified 45 articles between 2005 and 2016 incorporating a wide range of methodologies and interpretations of motivation and engagement and their relevance to the SAR. All of these articles and additional research identified through them, were reviewed and provide the basis for the following observations on the role motivation and engagement can play in providing effective interventions for the SAR.

On initial reading of the sample of the literature on motivation and engagement and the SAR it became apparent that there was little consistency in how the terms were used and this is highlighted by Conradi et al., in *Motivation Terminology in Reading Research* (2013). In this work 92 studies were reviewed, and an initial finding was, that there are significant and persistent problems in how motivation-related constructs are defined and investigated. It was also noted that 'the disarray that presently characterizes the terminology of reading motivation might well cause some investigators to avoid its study altogether' (p. 27). This very detailed study identified a hierarchy of motivation-related constructs (Figure 2.1) below and calls for a more consistent and nuanced understanding of the role of motivation if it is to

influence instructional practice in a manner that supports the SAR. Figure 2.1 indicates the complexity of motivation as a construct and helps explain to some degree the conflicting messages that are emanating from the research.

Figure 2.1. Conradi's Hierarchy of Motivation-Related Constructs
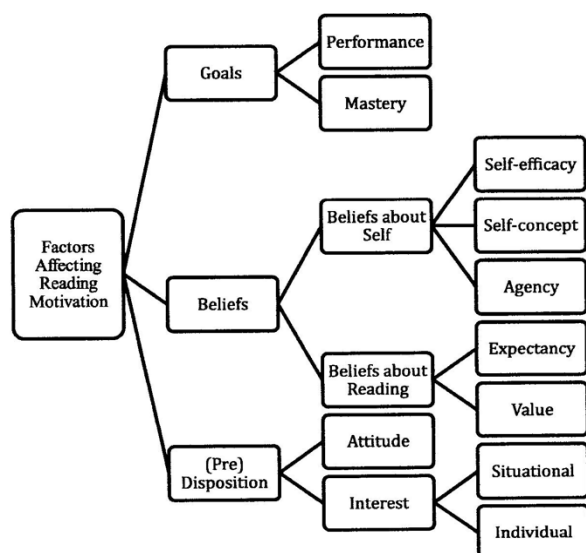
Fig. 9 A Hierarchy of motivation-related constructs

Prior to examining these conflicting views, a review of the terminology around motivation and engagement and a brief history of the research on motivation and reading will provide a context for the discussion. Guthrie, Wigfield, and You (2012) provide a clear definition of engagement and motivation. 'While motivation refers to goals, values and beliefs in a given area, such as reading, engagement refers to behavioural displays of effort, time, and persistence in attaining desired outcomes' (p. 603). Engagement is an observable behaviour and as such more amenable to definition and measurement than motivation. In addition, there seems to be greater agreement on the influence of engagement on reading performance. Guthrie (2000) notes that in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) students' reading engagement predicted achievement on a test of reading comprehension in every nation tested. He also writes about reading engagement and reading achievement interacting in a spiral with high achievers reading more, becoming more engaged and reading even more, with the reverse occurring with the low achievers. This process mirrors and helps explain the process described by Stanovich (1988) as the 'Matthews Effect' where the gap between the struggling reader and their more capable peers continues to increase. Hourigan (2013) adds to our definition of engagement describing two components, behavioural-effort and persistence in learning and emotional-sense of belonging and contends that together they significantly predict reading performance. The observation that students had higher reading scores when they showed more effort and perseverance in learning and when they felt a

sense of belonging at school is easy to understand, particularly from a teacher's perspective.

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) provide further insight into this area with their 'engagement model of literacy development'. This model contends that engagement includes cognitive, linguistic and motivational factors. This is consistent with but adds to Hourigan's observations above. A significant body of research (Brozo, 2005; Connors, 2013; Dierking, 2015; Fisher & Ivey, 2006; Paige, 2011, 2014; Tatum, 2008) investigates the cognitive and linguistic factors that support engagement and provide practical suggestions around student choice, text selection, collaboration, real-life relevance and deep interest that can promote engagement and reading comprehension performance. The 'engagement model' also provides us with the link between engagement and motivation, with motivation being situated as one of three factors that can support engagement. This idea that motivation supports engagement, is developed by Eccles and Wang (2012) who contend that motivation facilitates engagement, which in turn, facilitates achievement.

Motivation, being a product of goals, values and beliefs, is a much more complex construct than engagement and its measurement and effect on the SAR more contested in the literature. Shunk (2000) defines motivation generally as an internal process that activates, guides and maintains behaviour over time and varies in intensity and direction. Klauda & Guthrie (2015) identify seven dimensions of motivation, four affirming motivators: intrinsic motivation, value, self-efficacy and peer value, that support high achievement in reading comprehension and three undermining motivators: devalue, perceived difficulty and peer devalue, all linked to poor performance. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to elucidate each of these dimensions as each has a significant body of literature both general and specific to reading which is not germane to this thesis, but they do illustrate the complexity of motivation as a construct and help explain Conradi et al.'s (2013) frustration with the literature discussed above. The situation becomes even more complex when extrinsic motivation is added to the discussion.

Extrinsic motivation is generally defined as motivation that comes from external sources, rather than from within the individual. Guthrie Cox, Knowles and Buehl (2000) and Wigfield (2004) suggest that intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic, results in long-term engagement and deeper learning. However, recent research by Paige (2011) indicates that there may be a useful link between the two types of motivation with the results of their study providing support for the use of oral reading strategies that allow the leveraging of extrinsic reading motivation to encourage reading improvement. Specifically, he explored how activities involving extrinsic motivation can be used to develop intrinsic motivation and he concludes with the comment that,

It is hoped that the model provides a perspective that operationalizes this data into a simple, more easily understood perspective that is useful in illuminating how the classroom teacher can employ extrinsic motivation for improved outcomes in adolescents who struggle with reading. (p. 420)

This idea is also supported by Hidi and Renninger (2006), who have proposed a four-phase model of situational interest that suggests how activities involving extrinsic motivation, can be used to potentially develop intrinsic motivation. This is a potentially rich area of research and indicates that extrinsic motivation should not be discounted as a possible tool in effective interventions for our SAR.

Conradi et al. (2013) provide a very clear historical perspective on the research into motivation and this is briefly paraphrased. The earliest researchers in reading, Arnold (1889) and Huey (1908) both assumed the importance of motivation or love of reading in developing reading skills. By mid-century this had become more nuanced with motivation being seen by Butler (1940) and Holmes (1955) as a multi-component construct. This focus withered in the face of 'behaviourism' and cognitive inquiry and did not re-emerge until the 1990's when Guthrie, Wigfield and Alvermann began their research, which in Guthrie's case has continued to the present day (Klanda & Guthrie, 2015). The research in the 1990s largely focussed on ways of measuring motivation levels in students and led to myriad 'tools' for this purpose: Wigfield and Guthrie's (1997) Motivations for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ); McKenna & Kear's (1990) Elementary Reading Attitude Scale; the Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995) and the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996) are just a few of the motivational measurement tools that became popular, particularly in schools in the USA. These tools were popular as there was a body of research that showed clear correlations between motivation and reading comprehension performance (Anderman & Wolters, 2006; Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Guthrie, 2000: Swalander & Taube, 2007; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009). However, as research became more nuanced and focussed specifically on poor reading performance, after the 2000, No Child Left Behind policy in the USA, some counter-intuitive results on the relationship between motivation and reading performance for SARs began to emerge and it is these 'conflicting' results that are of significant interest as they may provide insight into why some schools deal more effectively with SARs than others.

The conventional wisdom is that motivation and engagement are highly correlated with reading success. While for most students this is clearly the case a body of research is emerging to show this relationship is not so clear for the SAR. Klanda & Guthrie (2015) state that, 'it is of particular concern that current theories may not apply fully to struggling readers' (p. 240) and furthermore, 'motivation and engagement may not facilitate achievement as readily for low achievers as for other students' (p. 267). Similar ideas are also being expressed by a number of other researchers in the field. Neugebauer's (2014) study concludes that context-general assessments of reading motivation may be particularly problematic for understanding the literacy motivation of struggling adolescent readers. She argues that general measures of motivation do not provide an accurate measure of students' motivation levels and

that, 'this study presents findings that are in contrast to educators widely embraced understanding of struggling readers as lacking motivation to read' (p. 190). Moreover, an intriguing finding of this study was that poor readers who were highly motivated in school performed, on average, worse than their peers who were not highly motivated to read in school with comparable reading skills. McGeown (2012) adds to the picture with her findings that very good and very poor readers differed significantly in their overall levels of intrinsic reading motivation; however, differences in levels of extrinsic reading motivation were very small. Melekoglu (2011) also contributes with the finding that students with learning difficulties who showed less improvement in motivation, actually made greater reading gains on standardised tests than those with high motivation: the relationship between improvements in motivation and reading gains was negative. Cantrell (2014) came to similar conclusions when her experimental group of struggling readers showed high intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, but it had no impact on reading performance as measured by standardised tests. It appears that the part motivation can play in improving the reading performance of the SAR is far from clear. Neugebauer may provide a way forward,

> Research that continues to develop sensitive measures of the contribution of setting related factors may uncover heterogeneous profiles of student-specific motivations to read that inform literacy pedagogy for the most challenged readers. (p. 190)

This research, on how setting and motivation can influence how SARs learn, has implications for effective interventions for the SAR and takes the discussion back to the individual nature of the SAR. Student-specific assessments of factors which motivate the most challenged reader to read, is a starting point. In addition, Neugebauer contends that these motivational measures need to be content specific and monitored across daily tasks if they are to be used effectively to promote reading engagement and comprehension. Both measures are features teachers could incorporate into an intervention. Other very practical suggestions are provided by Guthrie and Humenick (2004). They identified four features that are critical to increasing and maintaining students' motivation to read: (1) providing interesting content goals for reading, (2) supporting student autonomy, (3) providing interesting texts, and (4) increasing social interactions among students related to reading. These four features are broadly supported by Piazza and Duncan (2012) who found that three themes emerged from their most successful literacy engagements: text selection, motivation and engagement, and building relationships. Harris and Sloane (2012) support and add to this list, contending that a motivating learning environment is one where 'students receive age appropriate supports to access rigorous, thought provoking content and see evidence of their own progress' (p. 239). Casey (2008) posits that learning clubs have the potential to motivate disengaged and frustrated adolescent readers and writers because they develop in response to the unique literacy needs and interests that exist in each classroom. This idea is supported by McGeown (2015) whose research indicated that reading motivation and engagement in fiction book reading, was

a route towards improving reading attainment. Moje et al. (2000) provide the broad framework for all the above strategies with their stress on the importance of the text, the activity and the social, cultural and disciplinary context of the classroom.

The research by Neugenbauer, McGeown, Cantrell, Guthrie and Humenick, Piazza, Lesaux and Casey, discussed above indicates that motivation, engagement and improving reading skills for SAR is a complex area and applying motivational strategies that work with competent readers to the struggling reader is unlikely to have positive effects on reading performance. Creating an environment where SARs are motivated and engaged in ways that can improve their reading performance may involve student choice of text; identifying the unique literacy needs and interests of each classroom; sharing responsibility for learning and providing ongoing evidence of progress. Changes of this nature would require a major cultural shift in how many classrooms are conducted. For this type of change to occur a great deal more research into motivation, engagement and the SAR is required but the future in this area is unclear as Conradi et al. (2014) note that in their recent review of reading motivation research, only 8% of existing studies had been carried out among high school aged students.

2.6 Leadership and the Whole School Environment

The comprehensive review (Section 2.2) concludes with speculation that, the whole school environment may be equally as important as the intervention in explaining the outcomes for SARs. If this is the case, an analysis of the whole school environment will be of value. Hattie (2003) provides us with some insight into the whole school environment and the relative importance of student background, teachers, principals and the school environment on student outcomes. This work investigates the major sources of variance in students' achievement. Hattie (2003) contends that what the student brings to the table accounts for 50% of the variance in performance and teachers account for 30%. The principal and school only account for 5–10% of the variance so to be effective in any type of intervention, leadership must influence and work with teachers. Combining the influence of teacher, school and principal provides nearly 40% of the possible influences on student performance. This is a powerful lever if used strategically. As, Fullan, Hill and Crevola (2006) contend, 'Change and sustained improvement are impossible without good educational leadership' (p. 95).

A brief review of some of the major theorists on educational leadership, does provide insight into structures, processes and practices that could help facilitate interventions of any type including those required if the SAR is to improve. The body of research on reading reviewed above in Section 2.1 is extensive but it is matched or even exceeded by that on leadership. Strategic, Instructional, Transformational, Entrepreneurial, Distributed, Constructivist, Balanced, Passionate, Situational Sustainable. Moral Purpose and Collective Efficacy are just some of the terms used in recent times to describe leadership models. Leaders should have 'emotional intelligence', as described by Goleman

(1998); they should know their 'inner place' as explored by Scharmer (2008); they should understand the importance of 'trust' as explained by Tschannen-Moran (2004); they should be 'inviting and passionate' as espoused by Davies and Brighouse (2009); and they should be credible, as it is the 'foundation of leadership', according to Kouzes and Posner (2007). In addition, Michael Fullan's 'Change Forces' trilogy (1993, 1999, 2003) explores the idea of chaos or complexity theory and educational leadership and questions the 'Newtonian linear' view of organisational structures and supports Stacey's view that 'educational institutions are not linear but complex networks with equally complex feedback loops' (1992, p. 21). Fullan's extensive body of research can provide some insight into what the best leaders do to help their organisation survive and thrive (Fullan 2008) and into what a leadership model that will allow effective implementation of interventions for SARs might look like. Fullan's work, which is predicated on a socio-cultural perspective, provides one of the theoretical lenses that is used to analyse the data in this study.

Another body of research that provides some insight into the qualities and capacities effective organisations and leaders need to possess has been developed by Bolman and Deal (1984). They provide us with the 'frames' of, 'structural, human, political and symbolic resources', through which to view the leadership process and in Bolman and Deal's words, 'Like maps, frames are both windows on a territory and tools for navigation' (p. 13).

Sergiovanni (1984) with his 'Framework' of Cultural, Human, Educational, Symbolic and Technical domains (very similar to Bolman and Deals) applied the 'framing thinking' directly to education and it was used by the, Victorian (Australia) Education Department's Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders (DLFFSL) in 2007 to support school leaders in the state. This 'framing thinking' is a possible starting point for understanding the type of leadership that may be effective in leading interventions. Leaders need to be able to see their planning implementation and management of any new initiative through each of these frames to ensure balanced leadership. 'Profiles' developed for each of the frames, in the DLFFSL, provides leaders with a comprehensive set of descriptors of what effective leadership 'looks like' in each of the five areas; all of these need to be considered when leading any intervention.

The Balanced Leadership Framework outlined by Waters and Cameron (2008) is the product of an extensive meta-analysis of principals' work and is quite a different framework to the two discussed above and provides incisive insight into change management. The capacity to manage change may be a critical component in those schools effectively improving outcomes for SARs. Given the systemic, poor performance of SARs, as outlined in Section 2.2 above, it can be reasonably assumed that successful interventions for SARs will require some change from the status quo and the ability to manage change is critical for an effective leader. The BLF identifies 21 capabilities that leaders need to understand and apply strategically. The most salient aspect of this model to our discussion is the

perspective it provides on change management. It is critical that leaders understand that the same intervention can mean different things to different teachers. 'First order change', change that is an extension of the past, sits within existing paradigms, is consistent with values and norms and can be implemented with existing knowledge and skills, is a very different prospect to 'second order change'. Second order change involves a break with the past, is outside existing paradigms, conflicts with prevailing values and norms and requires new knowledge and skills to implement. Leadership of any intervention requires an understanding of the teachers involved and whether the proposed changes are first or second order. For many teachers the skills required to meet the needs of the SAR are second order skills and therefore are difficult to acquire and a real challenge for leadership.

The last five leadership constructs reviewed are relevant to any type of intervention and all involve sustainable, distributed leadership and evaluation. Leithwood (2008) claims that, 'School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions' (p. 27). Hargreaves (2008) discusses the importance of leadership as a process and a system, not as a set of 'personal, trainable and generic competencies and capacities that are possessed by individuals' (p. 183) and Harris (2008) argues that, 'The research base also shows that teachers' prime concern in undertaking any leadership role is to improve student learning' (p. 11) and 'in the longer term the key to success lies in the ability to create and manage effective teams' (p. 38). In schools where SARs are performing at above expected levels are the leaders-teachers and principal(s)-focussed on student learning in their planning processes and are they working in teams?

City et al. (2009) provide us with possibly the two most important pieces of 'advice' to guide any intervention. Firstly

> When we work with people, we specifically avoid giving them 'answers' to the most pressing problems they face, because to give 'answers' would be to transfer the responsibility for learning from them to us. (p. 10)

and secondly,

> that for schools to improve comprehensively they have to develop shared practices and shared understanding of the cause and effect relationships between teaching and learning. (p. 160)

These two points illustrate the complexity of the change process and as intervention invariably involves change, the need for leaders to be skilled in its management.

Finally, John Hattie (2012) asserts that, 'The fundamental argument in this book is that leaders in schools (teachers, principals and boards) need to be fundamentally concerned with the evaluation of the impact of all in the school' (p. 154). This is in accord with Fullan, Hill and Crevola's assertions in their

2006 publication *Breakthrough*, which focus firmly on the instructional leader and their use of assessment tools, data and personalised instruction combined with monitoring, managing and testing what works. Herein these last two words, 'what works', may be a thread worth pursuing to find the link between leadership at all its levels and effective student instruction and interventions. Elmore (2003) argues that the downfall of low performing schools is not their lack of effort but the failure of leadership to get teachers to do the 'right work'. 'Right work' and 'what works' seem to be opposite sides of the same process and if schools are to effectively intervene for the SAR, they need to know what the right work is. A major objective of this research is to provide some direction as to what the 'right work that works', may look like.

A publication by Riley and Webster (2016*) Principals as Literacy Leaders with Indigenous Communities (PALLIC) building relationships: one school's quest to raise Indigenous learners' literacy,* provides further insight into what 'right work' might look like from a uniquely Australian perspective. This case study of one of 48 schools involved in the PALLIC program provides valuable insight into practices that may be effective in any school and resonates with the observations on effective school organisations above. Initially the program reviewed the research on reading and identified the 'Big 6'-phonemic awareness, letter sound knowledge, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency and oral language, all consistent with the research discussed in Section 2.1. The program then developed a comprehensive process for school leaders to follow which involved: professional development of all staff in the 'Big 6"; shared leadership; establishing conditions for learning; parent and community support; curriculum and teaching focus; shared moral purpose and disciplined dialogue (data driven). These features and the process followed, reflect what the literature has identified as effective practice and unsurprisingly the intervention was seen to be successful in raising literacy levels in the most challenged group in the Australian school system. However, the results achieved were only seen to be a starting point and Riley and Webster (2016) contend that, 'Upper primary teachers and Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) reported and showed a need for more comprehensive supports and resources for older students who were struggling with basic skills in reading and literacy' (p. 153). This study provides support for the contention that the whole school environment may be equally as important as the intervention in explaining the outcomes for SARs. In addition, the processes followed in this program have relevance for any school with significant numbers of SARs.

This literature reviewed on teaching, learning and leadership provides some insight into the type of school organisation and leadership that is most likely to support effective teaching and learning. In summary the research indicates that to be truly effective the school organisation—staff, principals, parents and council—needs to have:

- moral purpose
- awareness of the complexity of the organisation

- an understanding of the different dimensions of leadership
- an understanding of change management
- real distributed leadership
- effective teams
- a clear teaching and learning focus and
- constant evaluation of all aspects of the organisation.

In this section, eight features of school organisation and leadership have been identified that should assist in understanding why some schools achieve more effective outcomes with SARs than others. These features will provide a theoretical basis for analysis of the schools identified as having the best outcomes for SARs. This process is discussed in detail in the methodology Section 3.1.

2.7 Community of Practice (CoP)

A theme that has emerged in this discussion of leadership is the importance of the whole school environment in supporting interventions for SARs. The whole school environment is complex and difficult to define but a central component is the interactions that occur between the members of the school community-students, teachers, support staff, leaders and parents. These interactions create a culture over time that may or may not support SARs. Data presented in Section 1.3 showing the poor performance of SARs in the secondary school context would indicate that systemically, whole school environments do not support SARs. However, schools successful with SARs must be different in some respects and research into the nature of the interactions between the community members in these schools may provide some insight as to why they are successful with SARs. The concept and theory of community of practice may provide such insight.

A community of practice is described by Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 98) as 'a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice'. This definition is refined by Wenger (1998, pp. 125–126) where he describes a community of practice as 'a group that coheres through mutual engagement on an indigenous (or appropriated) enterprise and creating a common repertoire'.

This could describe the case study schools where the school communities have mutually engaged on the enterprise of improving the performance of their SARs and have created a common repertoire of practices to this end. Wenger's simplified definition of community of practice as 'groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise'. (2000, p. 226) could also describe the members of the school communities in the case study schools although how they are 'bound' could not be described as informal.

The theory of community of practice and its place in providing possible explanations for the success the case study schools have had with SARs is further explored in Section 2.7 where its relationship to socio-cultural theory is discussed. It is also considered in Section 6.2 in the discussion and analysis of findings.

2.8 Learning Theory and the Struggling Adolescent Reader

As noted above learning will be viewed from a socio-cultural perspective as developed by Vygotsky and other neo-Vygotskians such as Lave (1988; 1991), Lemke (1990), Rogoff (1990, 2003) and Wertsch (1991). This social constructivist paradigm considers knowledge is constructed socially through interaction and shared by individuals (Bryman, 2001) and that learning development is embedded within social events and occurs as a learner interacts with other people, objects, and events in the collaborative environment (Vygotsky, 1978). The body of theory that has evolved from this paradigm, generally referred to as socio-cultural theory, provides the theoretical framework for this thesis.

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory has become one of the most influential theories in education in the last 20 years. According to Wang, Bruce and Hughes (2011) 'Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory has been discussed in relation to four aspects of human cognitive development (mind, tools, Zone of Proximal Development [ZPD] and community of practice) (Mantero, 2002; Nuthall, 1997; Palincsar, 1998; Wertsch, 1991, p. 198). Each of these four components of Vygotsky's theory of learning are important constructs which can help explain why the case study schools achieve the results they do with SARs: each requires some elucidation.

Vygotsky's theories on the mind were and still are quite radical (Vygotsky, 1978). He believed the mind extends beyond a person and people and is socially distributed. Consequently, 'our mental habits and functioning are dependent upon our interaction and communication with others, which are also affected by our environment, context, and history' (Wang et al., p. 298). Vygotsky emphasised the primacy of social interaction in human cognitive development in which human mental abilities emerge twice, 'first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the learner (intrapsychological)' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). From this perspective, learning and development occur on two planes: first on the social plane (interactions with others) and then on the psychological plane (within the learner or researcher). This describes a process of human cognitive development, which is situated in, but not limited to, social interaction (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Based on this conception of 'mind' and learning, interactions with others that take place in the school environment are critical to the learning process for all who work in that environment: leaders, teachers, support staff and students.

The second component of Vygotsky's theory refers to 'tools.' Vygotsky considered language to be the most important tool (Vygotsky, 1962). 'The cultural-historical line is internalized through the use of psychological tools, the most important of which is language' (Wertsch, 1985, p. 9). 'Tools' also include the almost limitless creations of the human mind that can stimulate cognition such as: systems of counting; algebraic symbol systems; works of art; writing; diagrams, maps, games, social media and the almost infinite range of software and hardware that has invaded the 21st century. According to Vygotsky these 'tools', assist the developing communicative and cognitive functions in moving from the social plane to the psychological plane. Applying this to reading and the SAR would first involve the 'social plane', with students working with appropriate texts and reading materials in a collaborative process with their teacher. This would facilitate the SARs development of reading skills on the 'psychological plane'. The idea of reading skills initially developing at a social level may provide some direction for learning environment sthat assists all readers, including those who struggle.

The third aspect of cognitive development, ZPD, was defined by Vygotsky as:

> The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (1978, p. 85)

Vygotsky argued that to understand the relationship between development and learning, we must distinguish between two developmental levels: the actual and the potential levels of development. The actual level refers to those accomplishments a learner can demonstrate alone or perform independently. Wells (1999) argues that, 'In the ZPD, Vygotsky has gone to the heart of the relationship between learning, teaching and development, and that his ideas are still of vital relevance today' (p. xix). The relevance of the ZPD to current educational practice will be discussed in more detail in this review but first the concept, as defined by Vygotsky, needs to be clearly understood. Vygotsky provided two definitions in his writings, the first quoted above and the second version which occurred in Vygotsky's last major work, *Thinking and Speech* (1934/1987). Here he discusses the ZPD in relation to instruction and the development of higher mental functions,

> In this context, the significance of the ZPD is that it determines the lower and upper bounds of the zone within which instruction should be pitched. Instruction is only useful when it moves ahead of development leading the child to carry out activities that force him to rise above himself. (pp. 212–213)

These, two versions provide the idea of adult guidance, commonly referred to as the 'more significant other' (MSO) and 'instruction ahead of development', the two central constructs of the ZPD.

The ZPD does however, need to be situated in socio-cultural theory as it has evolved, if its full import and usefulness as part of a theoretical framework for this study is to be realised. There are myriad references to socio-cultural theory in the literature, with a Google search of 'sociocultural theory of learning' eliciting 11,800,000 responses. In addition, there is considerable debate about aspects of the theory but there is some agreement on the central themes in Vygotsky's work. Researchers in the field agree that there are three key aspects of the socio-cultural approach to learning. Steiner and Mahn (1996), provide a summary of these key points,

> We focussed on three central tenets from Vygotsky's complex legacy—social sources of individual development, semiotic mediation, and genetic analysis—and presented an argument for viewing learning as distributed, interactive, contextual, and the result of the learners' participation in a community of practice. (p. 204)

These 'central tenets' are repeated succinctly by Packer and Goicoechea (2000), 'learning and cognition … are fundamentally situated in activity, context, and culture' (p. 204). These three dominant themes in Vygotsky's learning theory of, activity, context and culture provide the ZPD with context and they have been developed and expanded by numerous sources in the four decades since their publication. A sample of these will be introduced to this discussion as they may provide insights into the case study schools and why they achieve positive outcomes for SARs. Gee's (1992) work on 'discourse'; Steiner and Mahn's (1996) broad overview; Well's (1999) focus on dialogic inquiry; Warford (2010) on teachers' ZPDs; Hausfather (1996) on 'schooling' and Wang, Bruce & Hughes (2013) on the application of socio-cultural theories, each apply Vygotsky's theories directly to teaching and learning. Wells (1999) provides a particularly useful 'expanded conception' of the ZPD. This 'expanded conception' which is included in Appendix B and the perspectives of the researchers noted above, will provide valuable tools for further analysis of the case study data in Chapter 5.

Gee (1992) provides a discussion of socio-cultural approaches to literacy drawing directly on a 'Vygotskian approach to development' (p. 37). He discusses 'cultural tools' previously discussed above and contends, 'How a tool is used is always determined by the 'discourse' in which it is embedded—it has no generalized meaning or function apart from specific social activities which render it "useful" and which it in turn shapes' (p. 37). Gee's discussion on discourses provides insight into why some students fail in school, which has direct relevance to the SAR, and makes two key points. The first is encapsulated in this quote,

> One central issue that has energized a good deal of work on socio-cultural approaches to literacies is the fact that a disproportionate number of children from certain social groups—lower socio-economic and certain minority groups—fail in school. (Gee, 1992 p. 39)

He argues that these students fail because they are not versed in the discourses that predominate in schools. These students' homes do not provide them with the 'tools' to be successful in the school system. This contention is supported by Bristol Language Project in Great Britain (Wells, 1986) which found that, 'If children's early home-based preparedness for literacy is still strongly predicting their success in school at age ten, then school itself is not having much of an impact, save to make the rich richer and the poor poorer' (Gee, 1992 p. 39). This comment resonates with Stanovich's Matthew Effect in reading discussed in 2.2 and consideration of how a school approaches the idea of discourses, may provide insight into why the four schools studied are successful with SARs.

The second point in Gee's (1992) work, pertinent to this research, lies in the contention that 'If the apprentices do not trust the teachers who will socialize them into new discourses, no real development can take place (Delpit 1986; 1988, Erickson 1987)' (Gee, 1992 p. 40). This has direct relevance, for how the SAR (apprentice) is treated in the school environment and may be critical for their development. This work by Gee provides rich avenues of thought that can be used to reflect on the findings from the case study schools.

An overview of a socio-cultural approach to learning and development is provided by Steiner and Mahn (1996) and they discuss the implications of this approach for classroom learning and teaching. They focus on Vygotsky's (1978) reflection on learning environments, that,

> Teaching should be organized in such a way that reading and writing are necessary for something. That writing should be meaningful. That writing be taught naturally and that the natural methods of teaching reading and writing involve appropriate operations on the child's environment. (pp. 117–118)

These ideas are discussed with specific reference to students' cultural experiences in everyday life and how teachers need to understand these if they are 'to provide the learning opportunities to facilitate literacy acquisition for all students' (Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 203). This observation may provide a useful perspective from which to view the data from the case study schools.

The issue of teaching English to speakers of other languages, a subgroup of SARs is addressed by Steiner and Mahn (1996),

> Sociocultural theory recognizes the need for cultural, cognitive, and attitudinal bridges between English as a Second Language (ESL,) students and their new environment. The use of dialogue journals with elementary and secondary students, as well as with adults, has been found to be an effective technique to co-construct knowledge by allowing ESL students to draw on their own experiences and develop their own voices in meaningful, interactive, written communication (Mahn,1992; Staton, Shuy, Peyton, & Reed, 1988). (Steiner & Mahn, 1996 p. 204)

This idea of using the experiences of ESL (now replaced in Victorian schools with EAL) students to support their literacy skills resonates with the work of Lamping (2016) discussed in Section 2.2 and reinforces the idea that adolescent beginning readers, whatever the cause, bring a great deal of knowledge and life skills into the classroom.

Vygotsky's theories and research on the social basis of cognitive development are discussed by Hausfather (1996) who explores the implications of Vygotsky's theories for schooling and teacher education. He discusses the ZPD in detail and contends it may not always achieve positive outcomes where the social environment of schools is controlling and focussed on the individual. In such a social environment, the zone of proximal development is not always positive.

There can be a zone of prohibited actions and another of barely tolerated actions (Goodnow, 1990, p. 101), when the adult is more interested in restricting access to objects or knowledge. For the zone of proximal development to be effective, a teacher must be willing to support learning and a student must be willing to assent to learn. (p. 5)

This quote goes to the core of teaching, learning and the SAR with the final sentence providing a rather simple but profound description of what effective practice looks like.

A detailed overview of socio-cultural theory is provided by Wang et al. (2013) who focus on its application to information learning. The relevance to this study lies in its investigation of, 'How the sociocultural approach enabled the establishment of collaborative partnerships between information professionals and academic and teaching support staff in a community of practice for information literacy integration' (p. 1). While this study focussed at the tertiary level, the lessons learned have direct relevance for communities of practice at the secondary level. The 'experienced academics' in this case could just as easily be principals and leading teachers and the 'novices', could be inexperienced teachers in the place of researchers. This description of a community of practice easily applies to schools in the secondary context; information learning (IL) practice could be 'secondary school teacher practice':

> In this community of Information Learning (IL) integration practice, community members learnt from each other, shared their expertise, collaborated and co-constructed the best way for IL integration and IL curricular design; they worked collaboratively by building on each other's knowledge and developing scaffolding teaching material with which to assist students in their learning. In this community of IL practice, the researcher and participants became expert learners within the context of IL curricular design. (Wang et al., 2005 p. 305)

In an extensive thesis on dialogic enquiry, Wells (1999), provides sections on 'Discourse Learning and Teaching' and 'Teaching in the ZPD'. These chapters provide detailed discussion and application of Vygotsky's theories to learning environment and explore teacher professional development and

diagnostic assessment and the ZPD. Many of Wells' observations and contentions can be used to reflect on the data collected from the case study schools.

Some of the areas discussed by Wells above in relation to teachers' ZPDs are further developed by Warford (2010). His zone of proximal teacher development (ZPTD) model provides a developmental pathway from Self-Assistance to Expert Other Assistance to Internalisation to Recursion. This evolution of the ZPD for teachers shown in Table 2.6 provides a way to assess the professional learning practices in the four case study schools and make some judgements based on a socio-cultural perspective.

Table 2.7. The Zone of Proximal Teacher Development, Walford (2010)

ZPTD	Sample Interventionist DA	Sample Interactionist DA
I. Self-assistance [Stage II in ZPD (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990)]	Preparing learning autobiographies Responding to prompts about prior experiences	Discussion, sharing autobiographies, follow-up questions
II. Expert other assistance [Stage I in ZPD) (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990)]	Analysis of teaching practices (demos, videos, field observation) Role-taking/playing Forced choice quizzes (written) WebQuests Cubing exercises	Leading questions and follow-up discussion Processing role-plays Oral quizzes
III. Internalisation (automatisation)	Journaling Micro-teaching Candidate statement of teaching philosophy	Discussion, dialogic partners
IV. Recursion (De-automatisation)	Journaling Clinical reflective reports, collecting information and making warranted claims for change Online forum Role-taking/playing	Discussion, sharing autobiographies, follow-up questions, post-observation conferencing Processing role-plays

Community of practice is another feature of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1986). This idea has relevance for all participants in this study: principals, teachers and students. Socio-cultural theory proposes that learning is facilitated in a collaborative, sharing social environment. This applies to students in the classroom with Gallagher and Mason (2007) contending that subject knowledge is best attained when, 'Learning a subject domain is viewed as a process of becoming a member of a community of practice' (p. 2). Principals and teachers can also be part of communities that elevate their

knowledge and understanding of pedagogy and the strategies required to work with all students including SARs. The description of community of practice presented by Wang et al. (2013) in the previous paragraph is an example that can be used to consider the practices that exist in the four case study schools.

The evolution of Vygotsky's theories in the field of 'Defectology' (term used at the time for disability) provides insights of particular relevance to the SAR. Vygotsky describes 'Defectology' in these terms:

> Defectology is now contending for a fundamental thesis, the defense of which is its sole justification for existence as a science. The thesis holds that a child whose development is impeded by a defect is not simply a child less developed than his peers but is a child who has developed differently. (Vygotsky, 1930–1931/1998, Part 1, p. 30)

The significance of this thesis will be discussed in Chapter 5, but Vygotsky also directly addresses the nature of the adolescent and the issue of disability in *The Fundamentals of Defectology* (Vygotsky, 1930–1931/1998b, p. 81). He argues that adolescents are fundamentally different from the younger child as they are beginning to think conceptually,

> This shift in the relationship between memory and thinking depends on the adolescent developing a "higher form of intellectual activity—to thinking in concepts" (Vygotsky 1930–1931/1998b, p. 38). However, this capability is "a young and unstable acquisition of the intellect" and will not become a dominant intellectual function until the very end of adolescence (p. 51). Forming true concepts in adolescence also "is the principal and central link in all the changes that occur in adolescence". (Vygotsky, 1930–1931/1998b, p. 81)

This observation has clear relevance to the SAR as does his belief that there are two groups of disabled children, physically or biologically retarded and socially retarded. He believed most cases belong to the second category and 'although their means of development may be different, the fundamental laws of development are the same for both normal and abnormal children and that the educational content must be the same for both' (Vygotsky, 1930–1931/1998b, p. 16).

Vygotsky also identified a range of disabilities from severely handicapped, physically or mentally through to the 'difficult-to-handle child' or the child socially or culturally deprived, as mentioned above. It could be argued that most SARs fall into this latter category and as such Vygotsky's ideas about how this group of children learn is of particular relevance. He believed that higher mental functions develop from interaction with the object-oriented and socio-cultural world. Therefore, a child who comes from a socially or culturally deprived environment may not be exposed to more complicated forms of experience and as a result may be diagnosed as mentally retarded or as a difficult-to-handle

child (Vygotsky, 1993). Vygotsky (1993) believed that most mentally retarded children were socially retarded and,

> Such children are retarded and underdeveloped because of difficult or adverse conditions in their lives and at school. In these cases, if circumstances are changed, many a formerly "uneducable" or "unmanageable" retarded child may start to thrive, exhibiting an unrecognizable giftedness (p. 18).

The crux here is 'if circumstances are changed'. If a young adolescent enters secondary school as a SAR, circumstances must change from previous experience, if 'thriving' is to be a possibility. It should also be noted that the terms mentally retarded and socially retarded were the vernacular of the era in which Vygotsky was writing. In today's parlance intellectual disability and social disability would be used to describe these children.

These observations on the SAR and learning, provided by Vygotsky, will be revisited in the discussion Chapter 5 and will provide valuable theoretical perspectives from which to view the findings from the four case study schools.

2.9 Research and Theory Framing the Study

The terms conceptual framework and theoretical framework are used interchangeably in the literature as acknowledged by Anfara and Mertz in their 2015 publication, *Theoretical Frameworks in Qualitative Research*. They state, 'the term (theoretical framework) does not have a clear and consistent definition' (p. 14). Moreover, Ravitch and Riggan (2012) reject the idea that conceptual and theoretical frameworks are essentially the same thing, contending that conceptual frameworks (their focus) are composed of three elements, 'personal interests, topical research and theoretical frameworks' (p. 10), the latter defined as 'formal theories that have been used in the empirical world' (p. 12). These authors see the conceptual framework as affecting every aspect of the study but state quite specifically that it 'also guides the way in which you think about, collect, analyse, describe and interpret your data' (p. 14). These views align with Sanders and Egbert's model shown in Figure 2.2 and with their definition of a conceptual framework as, 'a person's overall world view produced by their life experiences' (p. 21).

Figure 2.2. Conceptual Framework to Method: Egbert and Sanders (2014)
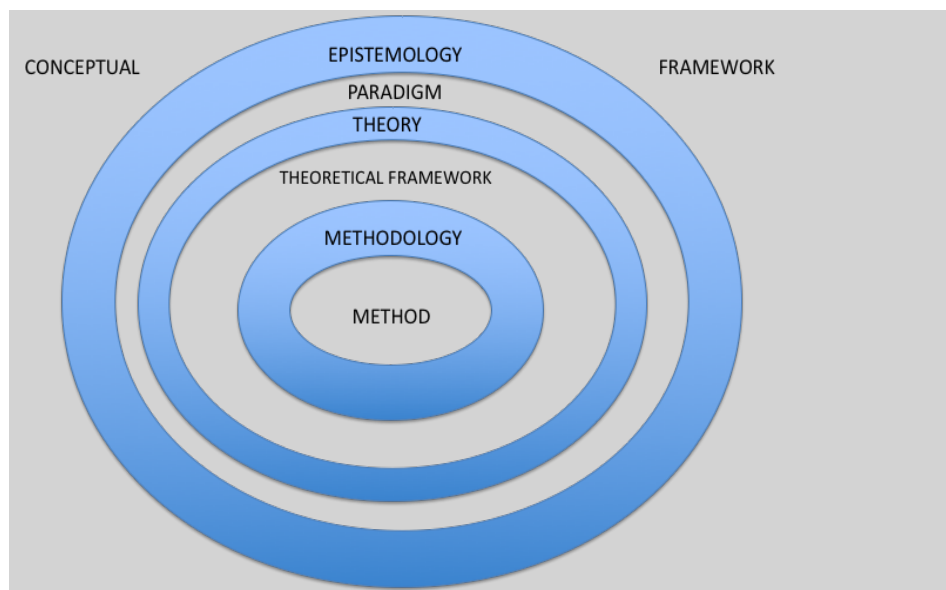
For the purposes of this research the first two components of Ravitch and Riggan's definition, 'personal interests' and topical research' have provided the broad methodological direction for the study. Forty years as a teacher, principal, literacy consultant/coach and researcher mean that I come to this study with experience and views on what effective teaching practice and whole-school interventions, especially for SARs, looks like. This view is also informed by 'topical research' at the school level and by the material presented to master's students in units on literacy and learning environments. This experience has reinforced the realisation that the education system is profoundly complex, as is the reading process and adolescents who struggle to master it. Accordingly, there are no simple solutions or interventions for SARs that will provide 'a silver bullet' as Davis (2007) notes,

> Silver bullets are extremely rare in the education business, practitioners must rely on modest experiments and incremental "wins." They must understand that making progress in the education of children is rarely linear and more often recursive, episodic, and even idiosyncratic. Practitioners must develop a "nose" for possibilities, imaginative strategies, and potential pathways that may lead to improved educational practice. (Davis, 2007, p. 63)

This study is a search for one of those 'potential pathways' that can assist schools with SARs and its methodology is directly influenced by the literature reviewed and by certain beliefs held about 'school systems', the reading process and teaching and learning. School systems are 'chaotic' but there are practices that can create order; there are teaching/instructional practices that can assist the reading development with SARs and there are teachers and principals who are more effective than others. Student performance can be objectively measured using pre and post standardised tests, critical analysis of work samples and expert analysis of reading performance but the factors that have created the knowledge, skill or performance have been constructed by the student from myriad inputs (community,

home, school, teachers, peers) and because of this complexity it is enormously difficult to attribute causality in the educational context.

Due to the paucity of definitive direction, regarding effective interventions for SARs, provided by quantitative studies (as demonstrated in the comprehensive review, Section 2.3), the value of quantitative studies in informing the educational community is questioned. Davis (2007) supports this idea and 'laments the gap between research and the people to whom it can make a difference' (p. 141) and argues that surveys and statistical analyses fail 'to capture the fine-grained qualities of schooling' (p. 569). One pathway to effective research, that can make a difference for school leaders and teachers, may lie in rigorous qualitative studies that follow a 'constructivist' paradigm. Wang, Bruce and Hughes (2013) comment that,

> Studies that use surveys (Neely, 2000), Delphi studies (Saunders, 2009) or testing (Dunn, 2002) are usually quantitative in orientation. Such quantitative and behaviourally oriented methods are useful for the collection of objective measurable or patterned data from a large sample. However, different methods are required to understand the dialogic nature of human experience in the social sciences. Cognitive constructivism, and social constructivism or sociocultural approaches usually draw on the constructivist paradigm. However, while cognitive constructivism focusses on individuals, social constructivist theories and the associated sociocultural approach outlined in this paper take much greater account of the roles that social relations, community, and culture play in learning and development (Rogoff, 1990). (Wang et al., 2013, p. 297)

This idea resonates and leads comfortably to a rigorous, qualitative, multiple case study, methodology viewed through the socio-cultural prism. However, theories that inform my thinking and a subsequent theoretical framework require some discussion prior to considering methodology in detail.

The six main bodies of research, detailed in the Literature Review Sections 2, inform this study and from them a theoretical framework has emerged. The five areas are:

- Reading Theory, particularly how it relates to SARs
- Comprehensive review of reading interventions for SARs
- School Leadership and Culture
- Motivation and Engagement
- School Effectiveness literature and research
- Learning Theory from a Socio-Cultural perspective

Reading theory is the first body of literature informing the study and is detailed in Section 2.2. This exploration led to reading being viewed as a complex metacognitive process as proclaimed by Block (1992). Reading as a metacognitive process is also explored further in Luke and Freebody's four

resources model (1997, 1999) which places reading in a socio-cultural context with the reader seen as code breaker, text participant, text user and text analyst, with a particular focus on struggling readers. This provides a broad perspective on the reading process.

The second body of literature helping frame the study was the comprehensive review of interventions for SARs. This review identified eight themes or categories that influence the performance of SARs: leadership, interventions, literacy experts/coaching, individualised attention, learning environments that support SARs, testing and data, engagement and motivation and the whole school environment. These eight areas identified became the initial categories used in the qualitative content analysis of the data collected from the four case study schools.

The third body of literature informing the study is Michael Fullan's framework for leadership model (2006) with its five themes: moral purpose, change, relationships, knowledge and coherence. These themes build upon his treatise on *Leaders in a Culture of Change* (Fullan, 2002) and along with his extensive publications (1999, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2019) provides a comprehensive theory of leadership which provides part of the lens, through which we can view the focus of this study, which is to understand more about schools that achieve the best results for SARs. The relevance of his theory to this study is encapsulated in the following quote, 'This same model (Leaders in a Culture of Change) has been extended to the work of entire districts in achieving large scale turnarounds in literacy and numeracy' (Fullan, 2002, p. 1).

The fourth body of literature informing the study involves motivation and engagement. While there is little research specifically aimed at the SAR, that which exists provides important insights into practices that may have direct relevance to improving the performance of SARs. Work by Cantrell (2014); Conradi et al. (2014); Klauda and Guthrie (2015); Melekoglu (2011); Neugebauer (2014) and Wolters (2014), explore the relationships between motivation and engagement with SARs and illustrate how complex an area it is. Conradi's (2014) Hierarchy of Motivation-Related Constructs, shown in Figure 2.1, provides a useful tool framing this complex area.

The fifth body of literature on effective schools was introduced in Section 2.4. This work has identified seven generally accepted correlates or characteristics demonstrated by effective schools. These correlates provide a framework for assessing the general characteristics of the case study schools that promote effective teaching and learning. They do not however provide a specific focus on students with disabilities such as the SAR and how schools best address their needs.

The 'lens' gains resolution with a focus on Learning Theory. Vygotsky's four central themes: mind, tools, the ZPD and community of practice and his ideas on disability and response to environment, provide a way to view and analyse the roles the protagonists in this research, school leaders, teachers

and students play in producing positive outcomes for SARs: it becomes the overarching frame and has been discussed in detail in section 2.6.

A final note on the theoretical framework of this study. Nolan and Raban (2015) contend that 'theories do not simply arise and replace one another, theories overlap, merging in places' (p. 56). This statement describes the five bodies of theory discussed above as each is based on solid research and they have endured and have clear relevance in the current educational research world. In addition, they do overlap and merge in places with socio-cultural theory providing the common thread. Socio-cultural theory evolved from Vygotsky's work. Luke and Freebody's 'Four Resource Model' draws heavily on socio-cultural theory as does Fullan's 'Framework for Leadership Model'. Egbert and Sanden (2014, p. 59) define a theoretical framework as an 'integration of the theoretical concepts that apply to the problem under investigation'. The four bodies of theory discussed above will provide the framework to better understand schools that achieve the best results for SAR. This may involve becoming a bricoleur according to Denzin and Lincoln (2003b) as they contend 'the qualitative researcher needs to become a bricoleur (2003b, p. 6), taking on pieces of representations (paradigms, methods) to fit the situation and then 'incorporating multiple perspectives' (2013, p. 207).

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction and Overview

In their discussion of qualitative inquiry Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005), contend that the use of terms such as, epistemology, theory, approaches, methods, methodology and strategies is often confusing, and they call for their careful treatment. Of relevance to this study is their discussion of 'social constructivism as an epistemological framework that underlies many theoretical perspectives' (p. 21). Social constructivism underlies the theoretical perspectives on leadership, reading, engagement and learning which inform this study. Acknowledging the need for careful treatment of qualitative terminology, the methodology used is a 'qualitative, multiple case study' and the data collection methods employed are interviews and observations and one analytical method used is 'qualitative content analysis'. These theoretical perspectives noted above, provide the focus for analysing the data produced by the interview and observation, collection methods.

The purpose of this multi-case study is to gain insight into why four schools achieve positive results with SARs. In line with this purpose, the research question, 'Why do four schools with high numbers

of SARs achieve positive gains in student reading in years 7–9?', is designed to investigate factors that can provide possible explanations for the phenomena.

This chapter explains why the multiple case study methodology was adopted and how it aligns with the purpose of this study and the theoretical framework. Explanation of the case selection process, selection of participants, method of data collection and a discussion of qualitative data analysis follows in Section 3.5. Sections 3.6–3.10 provide a summary of the process used for analysis and synthesis of the data; a brief discussion of ethical issues encountered; and an outline of the limitations, delimitations and trustworthiness of the qualitative research. This section concludes with a concise summary highlighting the salient points covered in the chapter.

3.2 Methodology

The qualitative, multiple case study methodology adopted in this study aligns with socio-cultural theory and the theoretical framework discussed in Section 2.6. This evolved from the literature when the quantitative studies reviewed in the literature did not seem to provide clear direction for schools trying to improve the performance of SARs. Davis (2007) supports this observation,

> In essence over the past quarter century, education scholars came to the realization that most surveys and statistical analyses failed to capture the fine-grained qualities of schooling. Yes, well-designed quantitative studies allowed for generalizing findings to larger populations, but legitimate concerns arose regarding the ability of such research to effectively capture the nuances of human interactions and program effects, differences in environmental contexts, and depth of understanding. (p. 569)

The methodology for this research was also significantly influenced by a quote from Freebody's work, *Literacy Education in School: Research Perspectives from the Past, for the Future* (2007),

> There is a limited body of research that has approached the question of effective literacy teaching and learning 'from the ground up', that is, by examining schools and classrooms that are performing more strongly than demographically predicted and by attempting to confirm hypotheses from some smaller scale research about the critical features of those sites. (p 50)

In response to Freebody's quote and review of the literature, five studies were identified that used the approach he advocated: Darling-Hammond (2010); Dinham (2007); Friedlander et al., 2007; McKinsey and Company (2007) and Zbar, Kimber and Marshall (2008). Each study identified areas of proven high performance, be they schools, principals or programs and then applied a range of quantitative and qualitative study methods to try and understand what created this high performance. This study employs

a similar methodology, with four Victorian government schools achieving positive results with SARs, being the focus of the study.

As a point of difference to the above studies, a purely qualitative methodology is employed. This decision was strongly influenced by the group of researchers who question the value of quantitative studies in capturing the complexity of schools and informing the educational community (Davis, 2007; Rogoff, 1990; Wang, Bruce & Hughes, 2013); this has been discussed in more detail in Section 2.7. In addition, the logistics of data collection led to the decision to focus on interview and observational data.

The qualitative processes the study employ is heavily influenced by Kohlbachere (2005); Maykut and Morehouse (1994) and Yin (2014). The four schools will be assessed using a constant comparative method of data analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) in an effort to identify those critical features that account for their success with their Year 7 cohorts which include a high percentage of SARs. This qualitative analysis of the data is in accord with the theoretical framework of the study outlined in 2.6.

As noted above the decision to employ a case study methodology initially arose from Freebody's (2007) statements on 'examining schools' and was reinforced by the results of the comprehensive review, Section 2.3 and literature reviewed. An important source was Yin (2014, p. 2) who argues that, 'a case study is the preferred method when the main research questions are "how" and "why" questions; a researcher has little or no control over behavioural events and the focus of the study is a contemporary phenomenon'. Moreover, Yin (2009) defines a case study as an,

> Empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident … where there are more variables than data points … the study relies on multiple sources of evidence and benefits from prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p. 18)

Yin has developed and refined his understanding of qualitative analysis and the use of case studies since 1981 and is widely cited in the literature. His definition of a case study above is the one employed in this study as it closely describes the type of empirical enquiry being pursued. The proposed study is investigating a contemporary phenomenon, schools that achieve the best results for SARs, but factors other than the school's literacy practices, might be creating the phenomena. The proposed study also has more variables than data points, will rely on multiple sources of evidence and will benefit from prior development of theoretical propositions, therefore it clearly fits Yin's definition above.

A multiple case study was being considered in the initial planning of this study and Yin's (2014) argument that the evidence from multiple case studies is more compelling and seen as more robust than single case studies reinforced this idea. The design will also involve 'literal replication'- studying cases

that predict similar results- as it is beyond the scope of this study to include 'theoretical replications' or cases predicting contrasting results. In addition, the study will involve an 'embedded' method whereby each school is studied as a separate entity, in effect four case studies, with the object to draw a single set of 'cross case' conclusions. Again, this aligns with Yin's description of multiple case study methodology where 'convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for each case; each cases' conclusions are then considered to be the information needing replication by other individual cases' (Yin 2014, p. 32).

3.3 Theoretical Propositions

This investigation began with an extensive review of the literature on factors that could influence the performance of SARs. Reading theory, literacy interventions, engagement motivation, leadership, socio-cultural learning theory, professional development and research methodology were all included. This broad review of the literature on quantitative, mixed methods and qualitative methodology lead to a decision to use a multiple case study methodology to investigate the complex social environment of the secondary school. This complex environment, made more so by the inclusion of SARs, required a focus and this was provided by the comprehensive review of interventions for SARs. This review was instrumental in understanding the current research on effective interventions and it identified major characteristics of interventions that were deemed to be effective. These characteristics and the literature from the other areas mentioned above became the basis for the five theoretical propositions and categories that have shaped the methodology. Yin (2014) contends that good research questions evolve from good theoretical propositions and 'good theoretical propositions also lay the groundwork for generalizing the findings from the case study to other situations by making analytical rather than statistical generalizations' (p. 26). In addition, Sutton and Shaw (1995) argue that theoretical propositions can represent key issues from the research literature and Rosenbaum (2002) believes these statements should elaborate a complex pattern of expected results. In line with this logic five propositions are presented:

1. The performance of the SARs will be the result of some specific literacy policy and practice.
2. The schools' leadership at principal level will have introduced whole-school literacy plans and will be knowledgeable of the literacy needs of SARs.
3. Schools that are achieving exemplary results with SARs, will have personnel who understand how students develop reading skills with a particular focus on engagement and collaborative learning.
4. Staff will be knowledgeable about the literacy needs of SARs through multiple data sources and this will influence their learning environment by focussing instruction in the ZPD.
5. The reading level of SARs in these schools will be known through testing and teacher judgement and they will receive some individualised or small group instruction.

These five theoretical propositions will be addressed through analysis of the data from the four case study schools with a focus on the research question: Why do four schools with high numbers of SARs achieve positive gains in student reading in years 7–9? The research questions in 52 papers were studied by Sandberg and Alversson (2011) and they identified that most are the product of 'gap-spotting' in the literature and they argue that more interesting research and theory development may come from problematisation; that is, confronting accepted theory and ideas at the questioning phase. This research is the response to the clearly identified problem of adolescents who struggle to read, and the question is designed to confront accepted theory and ideas as to how the problem can be addressed.

3.4 Case Selection

The process to select the case study schools involved four stages. Initially a request was made to the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) for NAPLAN data on students entering secondary schools with reading scores at or below Band 4. Below Band 4 means the students have achieved the reading skills expected of a grade three to four student and are two to three years below the required standard for Year 7. As discussed in Section 1.3 students entering secondary school at or below Band 4 NAPLAN is the definition of a SAR. ACARA would not provide individual student data but did supply two data sets. The first was percentage of students entering Year 7 below Band 4 in reading in all Australian schools, the second was 'student gain' in reading from years 7 to 9 for all Australian schools.

This led to the second stage in case selection which involved using the data to identify Victorian government schools with the highest percentage of SARs entering Year 7 below Band 4. This data is shown in Figure 3.1 and shows that 38 schools have more than 10% of students entering at Band 4 level or below. This data does not show multi-campus schools but three of these schools had 11%,16% and 20% of students at Band 4 or below.

This led to the third stage in the case selection process which involved identifying the number of SARs entering Year 7 in the 41 schools identified above. To determine this figure, the Year 7 enrolments of these schools was used to calculate the number of students, at or below Band 4, entering Year 7. Some schools had as high as 15% of students entering as SARs but as they were small schools with a Year 7 enrolment of 50, they only had five SARs and this figure varied considerably each year. In all 15 schools were identified with more than 20 SARs entering Year 7 each year from 2008–2015.

The fourth stage involved analysing the years 7–9 'student gain' results in NAPLAN reading data from 2008–2015 for the 15 schools mentioned above. 'Student gain' is determined by comparing matched cohorts results on the NAPLAN reading test for the students from years 7 and 9: the test is carried out for years 3, 5, 7, 9 each year. An example for Case three is the change in their mean cohort score for

reading from 2013 to 2015. In Year 7 in 2013 the cohort score was 507 points. In Year 9, in 2015, this cohort's score had risen to 550 points, a 'student gain' of 43 points when the state mean was 39.3. Each school's 'student gain' data were used to identifying those schools with the highest 'student gain' over the study period. Eight schools were identified with 'student gains' consistently higher than the state average gains over the 2008–2015 period.

The 2015 NAPLAN Annual Report details the mean gain in reading achievement 2013–2015 for all Victorian schools at 39.3. The eight schools identified consistently exceeded this benchmark while having more than 20 SARs in their cohort over the period of the study. The school with the most SARs had 70 such students but overall had 50% of their Year 7 intake, assessed by NAPLAN, as below Year 7 level in reading: this school became Case one in this study.

Figure 3.1. Percentage of Students Entering Year Seven at NAPLAN Band 4 or Below in 2014 (Victorian Government Secondary Schools)

Victorian Government Secondary Schools-each line represents one school
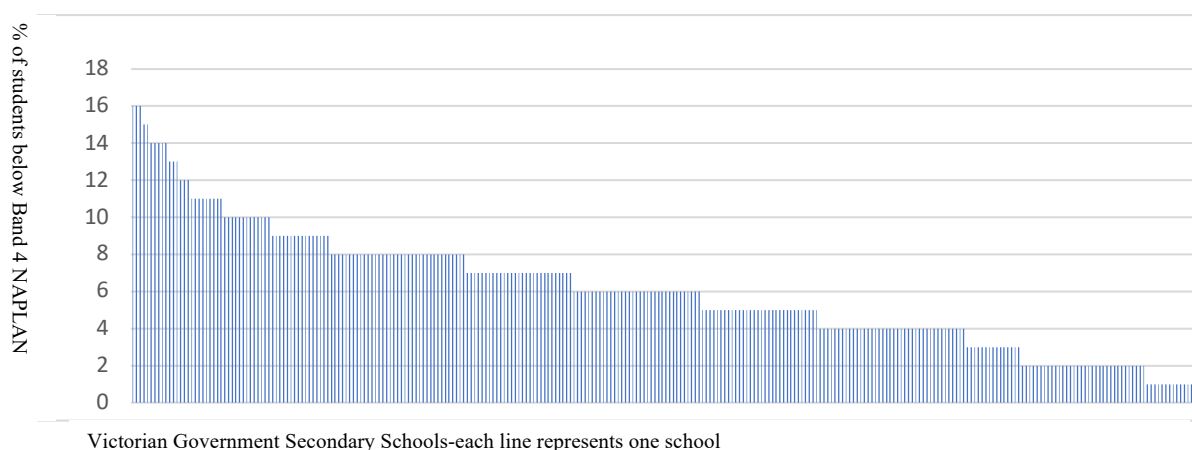
Details of the selected schools' 'student gain', years 7–9, is shown in Table 3.1 below. No other schools with more than 10% of SARs achieved consistent results, above the 'state mean', for student gain years 7–9. One school achieved a student gain of 73 for their 2013–2015 cohort but were below the 'state mean' from 2008–2013, another achieved 70 for their 2011–13 cohort but not for other years. One can speculate on the reasons for these performances as exceptional cohorts but that would need to be the focus of a future research project.

Table 3.1. Student Gain, Years 7–9 and Percentage of SARs Over Multiple Cohorts

School	2008–2010	2009–2011	2010–2012	2011–2013	2012–2014	2013–2015
State Mean	**39.1**	**37.9**	**28.3**	**39.8**	**37.2**	**39.3**
Case one	57 (19)	39 (21)	38 (18)	46 (20)	51(17)	42 (20)
Case two	40 (14)	45(15)	58(12)	55 (11)	58 (10(	50 (11)
Case three	57 (13)	45 (15)	45 (13)	48 (14)	70 (14)	55 (12)
Case four	53 (12)	38 (14)	54 (11)	55 (10)	58 (10)	46 (8)

Percentage of SARs shown in brackets.

As discussed above, NAPLAN data were used initially to identify schools with a high percentage of SARs. Student gain data in reading was then used to identify which of these schools achieved the highest gain from Year 7 to 9.

Schools were identified with student gains from years 7 to 9 consistently above Victorian state averages from 2008–2016. Of these, four of the top five agreed to participate in the study.

The NAPLAN program across Australia has its critics, most of which are aimed at the stress placed on schools, students and parents and its questionable impact on educational outcomes (Wu, 2010; Wu & Hornsby, 2014; Simpson, 2010). The My School website publishes NAPLAN data and the subsequent 'League Tables' which rank schools on an annual basis and are prominent in the media. This website and the corresponding tables are another focus of criticism from many forums (Redden & Low, 2012). These criticisms of NAPLAN refer mostly to how the data is collected and used and its limitations when applied to individual students. Chisholm and Goss (2016) in a detailed paper on the statistical method used by NAPLAN and how it is used to measure student progress contend that it is a valid tool particularly when looking at cohort data.

> Many education systems use standardised tests. While these can be used to identify struggling students and compare the performance of schools, standardised tests are a particularly useful tool for policymakers and researchers. When aggregated over a cohort of students, test results help to identify the characteristics of schools and students that may require additional education funding and can also be used to test the effectiveness of policy interventions. (p. 1)

This use of NAPLAN data to track the progress of cohorts of students is also supported by Wu and Hornsby (2014). While they are critical of most aspects of the program, they do acknowledge that, 'At the system level, NAPLAN data can be used to provide useful information for comparing large groups' (p. 17), as is the case in this study.

Chisholm and Goss (2016) also directly address the use of student 'gain scores', the data used to identify the schools used in this case study.

> NAPLAN scale scores are developed from the Rasch model, an advanced psychometric model for estimating a student's skill level. The resulting estimates have a number of desirable properties, including being on an interval scale. This property suggests that student progress can be measured by 'gain scores': the difference between NAPLAN scale scores in two test-taking years. (p. 4)

This provides support for the use of student gains scores although the observation is made that a, 'pattern of higher gain scores from lower starting scores should be taken into account when comparing the relative progress of different sub-groups of students' (p. 5). This is one factor that could account for the high student gain scores that led to the selection of the case study schools, however there were schools with similar profiles to the selected schools that made very limited student gains not approaching state averages. While acknowledging concerns with how NAPLAN data is used, it is a valid statistical tool to measure cohort performance as used in this study.

3.5 Participant Selection

As a researcher with 'inside' experience of secondary schools and as a teacher, principal and consultant, I was aware of who in the schools could provide data relevant to the focus of this study. The principal was essential, as their leadership focus and understanding of the importance of reading, were two themes identified in the literature that could influence the school's performance with SARs. The literacy leader(s) were also critical, as understanding their level of knowledge of reading and any interventions or programs and practices, was also important data relevant to the purpose of this study These leaders were also asked to select 3–4 teachers who would be able to reflect on the school's reading practices over the 2008–2015 period. As previously noted, this may have provided participants who were not typical of the teaching cohort, but the data they provided went beyond their teaching practice to all of the themes being explored in this study. All prospective participants agreed to be interviewed after they were provided with the details of the research

3.6 Data

3.6.1 Data sources.

Following selection of the four case schools the decision was made to collect data from three sources. Yin (2014) contends case study evidence may come from six sources and three of these: interviews, direct observations and participant observations are used in this study.

These provide two levels of data collection described by Flyvbjerg (2006) as, 'broader', involving school data such as policies, curriculum and school culture and 'narrower', people's ideas and attitudes.

The interviews provide data which covers both broader and narrower levels while the observations focus more on school culture and the expression of curriculum and management policies in the school environment. The data from the focussed classroom observations are included in a summary table for each case. The field notes made during 'participant observations', have been aggregated into 'field note summaries' for each case and make up the third data set. These data sets have been analysed to provide insight into practices that resulted in positive increase in NAPLAN scores for SARs.

3.6.2 Interview data.

The interviews would be classified as 'shorter case study interviews' by Yin (2014, p. 118) as they were less than an hour and they fit into what Merriam (1998) described as the most common form of interview as they were semi-structured, in that they were guided by a set of questions which focussed on the issues to be explored but the conversational nature of the interviews did allow interviewees to move away from the specific questions and explore ideas they saw as relevant. This type of interview also fits Connell's (2007) description of a semi-structured interview. Jorgensen (2011) comments on this more formal interview structure,

> Formal interviews differ from informal interviews in that they employ a structured schedule of questions. Through use of this uniform schedule, you are able to ask specific questions in exactly the same way time after time with different insiders. Formal interviews, consequently, very comprehensively produce a highly uniform set of data. (p. 8)

While the interviews conducted fell between formal and informal, Jorgensen's comment on, formal interviews producing a highly uniform set of data, needs to be considered when analysing the data collected in this study.

As a past principal, school grounds, staffrooms and classrooms were familiar to the researcher. With an understanding of the dynamics and pressures of a school environment interviews were organised at times all participants were comfortable with. Two participants were interviewed over the phone during the holiday period as they felt it was more relaxed and conducive to thoughtful discourse. Each interview began informally with introductions and clarification of the study and its purpose. Notes were taken on each participant's background and any data relevant to the study. Participants were then informed, that the formal interview would commence, and a recording device was activated. As participants previously had copies of the questions most were well prepared with notes. This allowed the conversation to progress with many long explanations and detailed descriptions of programs and practices as evidenced in the transcripts, examples of which are in Appendix D. If participants diverged from the main question, they were gently directed back with follow up questions and if more information seemed possible follow up questions were asked. Many of these follow up questions

involved clarifying when an event or observation occurred so it could be placed in the 2008–2015 time frame: interviews ranged from 17 to 29 minutes.

Three sets of interview questions were derived from the research question and these provided a structure for the interviews. The questions chosen were all 'What' questions or 'How' questions as according to Spradley (1979, pp. 81–83), 'Why' questions and questions that ask people to explain what they mean should be avoided as questions of this sort tend to pressure people and convey an evaluative judgement. This may put insiders on the defensive.' In addition, the interview questions, were designed to provide an in-depth description, which according to Yin (2009) is a sound justification for the case study methodology. 'The more that your questions seek to explore some present circumstances, how or why some social phenomena works, the more the case study method will be relevant' (p. 4). The questions guiding the principal interviews and the questions for literacy leaders and teachers are in Appendix E.

According to Yin (2014) these are 'first order' questions, that is, questions to be asked of the interviewee. However, these should be asked with the interviewer's focus on the research question, which he refers to as a 'second order question'. In this study the second order question is, 'Why do four schools with high numbers of SARs achieve positive gains in student reading in years 7–9?' and it directed and focussed the dialogue in the interviews.

3.6.3 Observational data.

As previously noted, 'direct observations' and 'participant observations' were used to collect data in this study. The 'direct observations' according to Yin (2014), or 'classroom observations' according to Jorgensen (2011), usually employ an observational instrument that covers the case study context. In this case the 'Focussed Classroom Observation Record', Table 3.2 was used to provide data on the classroom environment, a critical feature in this study. (p. 113). The classroom set up, classroom environment, student focus and teacher position were all observed to establish if the mainstream classroom was supportive of SARs. Desks in table groupings would indicate more student-centred practice as would the teacher moving between groups rather than being at the front of the classroom. An orderly classroom with students focussed on task could be an indicator of high engagement levels. Well organized classroom environments with appropriate materials on walls and well-maintained furnishings would be more likely to support SARs than less ordered environments. Viewing of the classrooms was as unobtrusive as possible with notes made on the observation record sheet; other observations were recorded as field notes.

Table 3.2. Observations Record Sheets

Focussed Classroom Observation Record	Observations of School Environment
School:	School:

Time/Period				
Year level				
Classroom setup	Rows	U Pattern	Table	Other
Teacher position	Front	Moving	Talking	Other
Student focus	0			1 0 0
Classroom Env	Board	Walls	Desks	Other

Observation Point(s)/Time	People	Environs
E.g., Cafeteria, School Entrance, Office, Grounds	E.g., Junior Students Teachers Canteen staff Conversations	E.g., Rubbish free grounds Locker area tidy

The classroom observations or participant observations fit into what Merriam (1998) describes as 'observer as participant'. 'Observer as participant' is the third of four types of participant observation outlined by Merriam and is described below,

> Observer as participant: the researcher's observer activities are known to the group; participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer. Using this method, the researcher may have access to many people and a wide range of information, but the level of the information revealed is controlled by the group members being investigated. (loc. 1263)

This accurately describes what occurred in the case study schools. Access was provided to the school grounds with no constraints, with information gathering being the main focus. On each visit to each case school the 'Unfocussed Observation of School Environment' record sheet (Figure 3.2) was used to record field notes with the specific location, the time and the duration of the observation recorded. Locations such as the main office, exit and entry points at the beginning or end of day, the canteen at lunch and recess and the locker areas were all areas of focus.

These field notes were used to produce the 'field note summaries' for each case. In effect they are a distillation of the observation process and provide a data set that Merriam (1998) describes as analogous to interview transcripts.

> What is written down or mechanically recorded from a period of observation becomes the raw data from which a study's findings eventually emerge. This written account of the observation constitutes field notes, which are analogous to the interview transcript. (Merriam 1998, loc. 1301)

This observational data provides insight into the current classroom organisation and whole school environment of a school which has been successful with SARs over an eight-year period. How this data may help in addressing the research questions will be discussed in Chapter 6.

3.6.4 Data collection process.

Data were collected over a three-month period in 2018, after agreement to participate in the study had been obtained from the principal of each school and the principal permission letter signed. Prior to this signing an explanatory letter was provided which explained the project in detail (Appendix C). Organisation of the data collection was then delegated to literacy leaders who selected the classroom teachers they deemed most able to discuss the school's literacy programs over the 2008–2016 period. Liaison with these individuals allowed interview times and locations to be organised and arrangements made for observation of classes and the school grounds. All participants were provided with the explanatory statement, the questions and consent forms (Appendix C) in advance and were informed that the interview would be recorded and take approximately 30 minutes. All of this was in line with the ethical procedures required by the Victorian Department of Education and Training and Monash University.

3.7 Qualitative Content Analysis

Data collection was followed by the first stage in the analysis process. This involved transcription of the interview data, collation of the field work notes from classroom observations and summarising of the focussed observation record sheets. The interview data were then analysed further using the 'qualitative content analysis' method discussed in the next section.

When conducting qualitative analysis, a number of choices need to be made. Inductive or deductive processes or both at different stages. Refer to theory before data collection, after data collection or during data collection. Use coding or qualitative content analysis when analysing the data. Consideration of the type of coding most appropriate for the study. Focus on manifest or latent content or both. Even a preliminary perusal of the literature presents more questions than answers and even the main protagonists (Lincoln & Guber, 1985; Mayring, 2000, 2002, 2007; Schreier, 2002, 2012; Glaser & Laudel 2013; Yin, 2014) provide a range of approaches on how to approach qualitative analysis of case study data. This idea is supported by Yin (2014), who contends that, 'The analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed aspects of doing case studies' (Ch.5, para.1). This dissonance in the literature is also echoed in the following quotations on content analysis which, is the preferred option for this case study,

> Qualitative content analysis is a method to analyse qualitative data. It focusses on subject and context and emphasizes variation; e.g., similarities within and differences between parts of the text.

It offers opportunities to analyse manifest and descriptive content as well as latent and interpretative content (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Its roots in different scientific paradigms contribute to challenges concerning ontology, epistemology, and methodology in research using qualitative content analysis. (Graneheim, 2007, p. 29)

and

The various versions of qualitative content analysis that emerged since the 1980s grew slowly in the shadow of coding. As a consequence, no canon has been established yet. The only idea that seems to be common to most of the approaches is that a set of categories is developed ex ante and then applied to texts. (Glaser & Laudel, 2013, p. 57)

These quotes provide support for the assertion that qualitative content analysis is defined in many different ways but Glaser and Laudel do provide an analytical process that aligns with the methodology of this thesis. They discuss in detail the evolution of the qualitative content analytical process, in particular the contrasting views that they have on coding and category development, compared to those held by Mayring (2007) and Schreier (2012). Glaser and Laudel's model, shown in Figure 3.2 below, illustrates the analytical process this thesis has followed. The 'prior theory and research questions' shown on the right side of the model, are linked directly to categories and data collection. The 'categories' that link the raw data to the research questions have been used to create the 'data base for further analysis.' Patterns have then been identified in this four-case data base that have been analysed with reference to specific elements in the theoretical framework and research questions. This integration of theory and data in a multiple case study provides the possibility of explanatory, rather than just descriptive or exploratory outcomes, which is one aim of this thesis.

Figure 3.2. Steps Between Texts and Explanation Glaser and Laudel (2013)
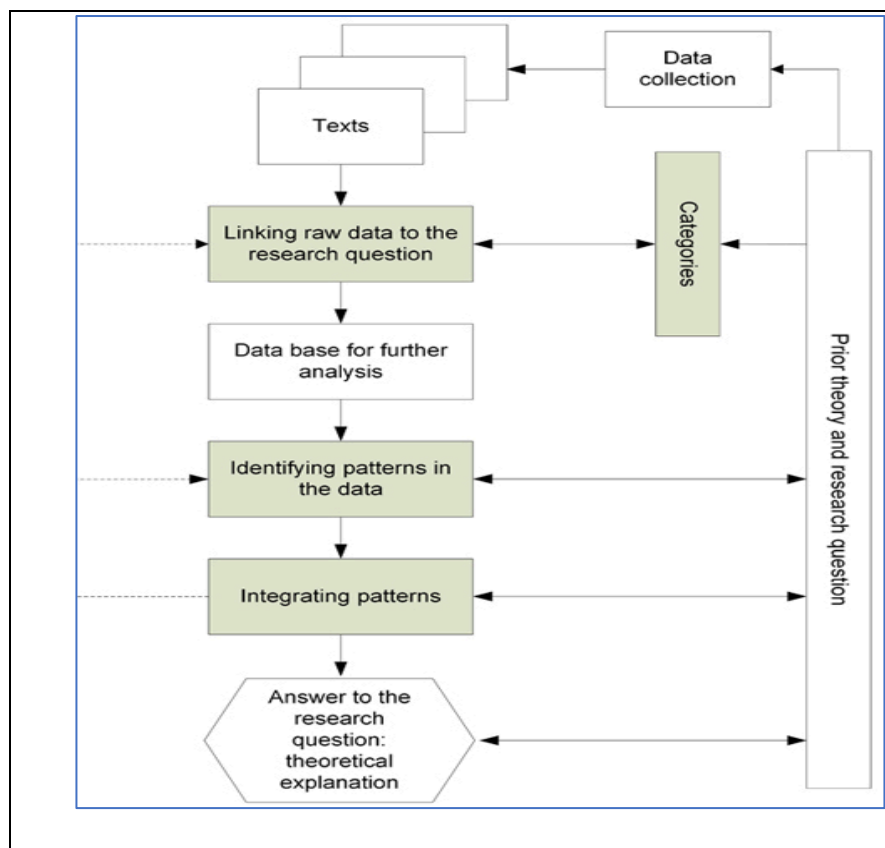
The other component of Glaser and Laudel's process, not demonstrated in Table 3.3, is their method of defining and operationalising a 'category'. This involves identifying a category from the theory, defining it and its material, time and causal dimensions and then providing indicators. 'These indicators for each category describe how statements belonging to the category are likely to look like and thus help to find the relevant information in the text.' (Glaser & Laudel, para. 75). The first step in this process involves 'identifying a category from the theory'. This was achieved in this study through the comprehensive review, Section 2.3, where eight categories were identified

- leadership
- interventions
- literacy experts/coaching
- individualised attention
- learning environments that support SARs
- testing and data
- engagement and motivation
- whole school environment

These categories were then defined with their material, time and causal dimensions and then indicators were provided to assist finding relevant information in the transcripts. Table 3.3 provides the example of the definition and dimensions of the Leadership category. It draws upon the first two propositions arising from the theory and literature: 'The performance of the SARs will be the result of some specific literacy policy and practice' and 'the schools' leadership at principal level will have introduced whole-school literacy plans and will be knowledgeable of the literacy needs of SARs'.

Table 3.3. Example of a Category: School Leaders. Based on Glaser and Laudel's Model

Category: Leadership

Definition: The leaders in the school will be knowledgeable about literacy and actively promote reading and literacy programs and knowledge with their staff.

Indicators: Whole-school focus on literacy/ reading practice

    Staff professional development on literacy/reading

       - Student testing for reading age

Dimension	Some empirical instances that are already known
Time	Specific literacy policy and programs implemented as a response to student data
Subject of the leadership focus	All staff SARs
Scope of the leadership focus	Whole-school focus on reading/literacy: all staff, students and community
Content of the leadership focus	Staff professional development in reading strategies: oral language, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary knowledge Student's reading levels established through testing Whole school reading programs
Reasons for the leadership focus	Low literacy levels of Year 7 students Low literacy knowledge of staff particularly in reading NAPLAN results

Effects of the leadership focus	Reading results well above state means
	Staff knowledge of reading enhanced
	Learning environment supporting SARs.

Table 3.3, above, was then used with the 'extraction table', Table 3.4 below, to create a data base for further analysis. This involved reviewing each interview and extracting 'data units' (defined in 3.8) and placing them in the appropriate dimension in the extraction table. Glaser and Laudel (2013) describe this process clearly,

> Extraction essentially means to identify relevant information, to identify the category to which the information belongs, to rephrase the information contained in the text as short concise statements about the value of each dimension, to assign these statements to the relevant dimensions of the category and to collect them separately from the text. A link to the original text is kept in order to enable the reconsideration of context if necessary. [para. 80]

Application of this process produced extraction tables for each of the eight categories previously described. Detail of how these tables have been used to create a data base is provided in the next section, 3.8.

3.8 Data Analysis and Synthesis

3.8.1 Analysis of interview data.

The interviews for each case were transcribed. Each interview was then read, and a number provided in the margin each time a 'data unit' changed. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) a 'data unit' must meet two criteria.

> First, it should be heuristic-that is, the unit should reveal information relevant to the study and stimulate the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information. Second, the unit should be the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself-that is, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out. (p. 345)

Applying, this criteria to the transcribed interviews, produced a range in the number of 'data units' identified in each interview. The shortest interview had 15 units of data that could be rephrased into concise statements that could be allocated to a dimension of a category: the longest interview had 34 such units. Clearly there is an element of subjectivity in deciding what constitutes an individual unit for analysis. However, qualitative content analysis as described above, requires the information to be

rephrased into 'short concise statements that can stand by themselves'. This direction imposes considerable discipline on the extraction process: if it could not be encapsulated in a short concise statement it was not a 'unit of data'.

In an attempt to test for 'coder reliability' as advocated by Schrier (2012) information from the same interview was 'extracted' twice, with a fourteen-day interlude, This resulted in very similar extraction tables with an estimated match of greater than 90% but as 'pieces of information' are 'concise statements' rather than codes, the concept of 'coder reliability' is difficult to use precisely with qualitative content analysis as advocated by Glaser and Laudel (2013).

A clear process was used to organise the interview data. Each interview transcript was divided into units of data as described above and each of these units were assigned a code.

An example is the principal at Case one who made the statement, 'I have been very involved in the Year 7 and 8 Literate Practices program since it started in 2008': this was the fifth data unit of the interview, so its code was C1PD5 (C1-Case one, P-principal, D5-Data Unit 5). This piece of data were then assigned to the leadership extraction sheet with '2008' placed in the Time dimension, 'years 7–8' in the Subject dimension, 'very involved' in the content dimension and C1PD5 in the Source: this is shown in tables 3.4 and 3.5. This coding allows ready reference back to the interview data.

Each data unit in an interview was assigned to a category using the category definition and indicator tables as a guide: Table 3.3 shows the example for school leaders. This process resulted in all the data from each interview being allocated to category extraction tables (the significance of which will be discussed in Chapter 6). These tables were then sorted and summarised. This involved placing all of the data from a case's interviews into appropriate categories and then sorting it into the appropriate time on the extraction table. An example of an extraction sheet sorted and summarised for the category, school leaders for Case one, is shown in Table 3.4 below.

Table 3.4. Extraction Table for the Category School Leaders

Time	Scope	Subject	Content	Causes	Effects	Source
2008	Whole School	Literate Practice intervention from leadership	Students in four ability-based groups 36 minutes four days a week Very involved with Lit Prac.			C1LMCTD1
	Year seven-8	College principal's input				C1PD5
2010–	Supportive Campus and College Prin.	Time provided to share literacy knowledge.	Leading teacher in literacy.		Prin. Challenges and encourages.	C1PD23
		Employment of three Literacy coaches	Time to work with coaches	Classes covered	Amazing. Help other teachers	C1PD27
	Whole School	Equity money		Low SFOE	$1,000s on Barrington-Stoke novels	C1PD9
Current	Whole School	Investment in Time, PD, Coaching	Small groups. Employing Lit. experts		Helps me get better.	C1PD13
	Admin support Literacy		Very big focus. Taken very seriously	No. of SARs in Year 7	Number of Literacy Programs Literacy culturally a College focus.	C1PD18/19
	All Staff	Mandated reading and writing goals in PDPs			Provides time and materials	C1PD23
	Whole School					C1PD10

	Financial support for literacy			Very significant		
				dollars		C1PD7
						C1PD10

These tables constitute a data base that allows analysis on the basis of the six dimensions: time, scope, subject, contents, causes and effects. The time dimension was used to 'map' each dimension of each category over the course of the study 2008–2015 and provided the structure for the case summaries. These case summaries provide a picture of each case over the study period.

The case summaries were used with the extraction tables, to identify 'attributes' within each 'conceptual category'. Bruner et al. (1956) describe 'attributes' as one of five elements of a concept and argue they are 'the common and essential features leading us to the decision to subsume examples within the same category' (p. 256). In addition, they argue that a concept is 'a name given to a category or class of experiences, objects, event or processes' (p. 256). For the remainder of this study categories will be referring to 'conceptual categories' and their essential features will be referred to as 'attributes'.

The attributes for each category were identified. This involved using the category tables (example Table 3.4) to assist in the identification of common terms or phrases, such as: equity money, 'phonics programs', 'reading conferences' and 'small group instruction', all mentioned in the Case one summaries as attributes. These attributes were then grouped under the appropriate category. This process was completed for Case one, the outcome of which is shown in Table 3.5 below. Case two was subject to the same process and the attributes identified compared to Case one. This was repeated for the final two cases and attributes common to all four cases were identified.

Table 3.5. Case one: Categories and Attributes

Categories	Attributes Described in Interview Data Case one
Leadership	- College principal supports literacy PD with time and money - Use of equity money to fund programs and teacher PD - Literacy experts and leaders employed - Literacy goals written into AIPs and PDPs
Professional Learning	- Literacy coaches work with professional learning teams (PLTs) and individual staff - Literacy PD session twice a term - Training in comprehension strategies - Peer coaching
Learning Environment	- Data driven practice - Reading conferencing - PD on reading strategies - Differentiating and scaffolding of curriculum - Classrooms set up in table groups or similar format - High level of student focus in the classroom
Literacy Interventions and Programs	- Literacy Practices program 7–8 - Year nine intervention - Premier's Reading Challenge - EAL programs with links to English and other disciplines - Decoding groups phonics program
Student Motivation	- Availability of appropriate books (skinny reads) - Teachers as reading role models. - Reading conferencing. - Decoding and reading strategies programs delivered to small groups
Testing and data	- NAPLAN, PATr used to allocate students to reading groups - Data interpretation PD
Individualised Attention	- Decoding groups 6–8 - Reading conferencing one-to-one. - Appropriate book selection.
The Whole School Environment	
Other (rival explanations)	

The second stage of the analysis involves the categories and attributes common to all four cases identified in Chapter 4. These common categories and attributes were then analysed by returning to the transcripts. Each of the eight categories had between two and six attributes. Evidence for each of these attributes was then extracted from the data sources and presented as summaries. In every comprehensive description data is presented from all four cases. The attributes common to each case and their descriptions are the findings that will be the focus of Chapter 6.

3.8.2 Analysis of observational data.

The focussed classroom observations and observer as participant observations have been treated as interview transcripts (Merriam, 1998) and have been analysed using the qualitative content method of analysis described in Section 3.7. Each case was analysed separately with the data being used along with the interview data to construct the case summaries and the summaries in Chapter 5.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This study meets the ethics requirements of Monash University and the Victorian Department of Education and Training. The schools involved and those interviewed all viewed and signed the appropriate documentation (Appendix C). The structure of the study, a recognition of exemplary practice, mitigates against possible negative outcomes for the schools. Despite this the schools, nor any participants involved, will be directly identified. An agreement was made with the principals that a summary of the research would be provided and further use of the material in their schools, subject to their direction.

3.10 Trustworthiness

Credibility, dependability and transferability are expected features of high-quality quantitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1998) provide some criteria for assessing these dimensions, some of which will be addressed in relation to this thesis. In regard to credibility, the interview data collected are believed to be an accurate representation of the participant's beliefs and perceptions. Some context may assist in making this judgement. All the participants were provided with an outline of the research and volunteered to participate. They were aware that the research was investigating a successful outcome for the school and the results could assist other schools. They were also aware of my personal history as a teacher, principal and researcher and my experience with SARs. They were provided with questions prior to the interviews that were based on research and demonstrated an understanding of the processes and practices in schools.

In the interviews the principals and literacy leaders were direct, forthright and knowledgeable, the teachers passionate and willing to describe their practice and relationships with students. As noted

before these teachers were suggested by the literacy leaders and this may provide an enhanced view of the teaching practices in the school. Besides this concern, I consider the interviews to have been frank and respectful conversations.

Dependability in qualitative research refers to whether the research data and method of analysis could be replicated. The 'audit trail' from case selection to interview process to qualitative content analysis is outlined above and has been designed to ensure replication of the process is possible. Case selection is based on NAPLAN data and qualitative content analysis a defined process, however the actual interviews and the identification of units of analysis from the transcripts is not. The individual experience and skills brought to these two elements of the data collection and analysis complicate the picture. A clear description of 'the researcher' in Section 1.7 provides a context for understanding what 'was brought to' the collection and analysis of data but does not necessarily make it able to be replicated.

The third feature of the research to be addressed here is transferability. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012, p. 114) assert that transferability is assessed by the richness of the descriptions and the establishing of a clear context and they ask the question 'How do we know that the qualitative study is believable, accurate and plausible'? The descriptions of the cases are based on responses from principals, literacy leaders and teachers, who volunteered to be involved in the research. From observations and from the interactions with the participants before and after the interviews there is a strong belief that the information they provided, is believable, plausible and accurate and honestly reflect how they see their school. Moreover, the observational data is an attempt at objective recording of 'what was seen' in the moment. Obviously experience and circumstances dictate 'what we see' and it is considered that the experience directing these observation gives them credence. In addition, the discussion of credibility and dependability above provide some basis supporting these three criteria. Of equal importance is the detailed review of the literature and theory in Chapters 2 and 3 and the positioning of the research findings in the theory. As discussed in Chapter 2 socio-cultural learning theory brings the leadership, engagement, reading components of the literature into focus and situates the findings in a dynamic and evolving body of theory This provides plausibility and the potential for the generalizability to other settings.

3.11 Limitations and Delimitations

As previously mentioned, ideally this study would have been able to identify and track SARs who enter secondary school at Year 7 and then track their individual progress through to Year 9. However, individual student NAPLAN data is not available and no other data at the system level is available. This has required the analysis of whole student cohort data for individual schools and student gain for these cohorts from years 7 to 9. An assumption has been made that if a school has a high percentage of SARs and achieves gains in whole cohort reading performance 7–9, significantly above state averages, then

something is happening in those schools that is worth investigating. The eight schools initially identified, achieved far higher student gain in reading than schools with few SARs.

Another possible limitation refers to the interview data. This main data source is the product of questions arising from the theory and literature reviewed. This theory and literature only focussed on 'in-school' factors that may account for the case schools' success with SARs. This may be a limiting factor in the study as the interview questions focussed on 'in-school' factors that could influence the performance of SARs. External factors such as: socio-economic status, migrant status, community, and regional differences in schools were not considered in the literature reviewed and therefore were not explicitly included in the interview questions. These contextual factors, and the rival explanations they may afford for the performance of the exemplar schools, will be considered in Section 6 even though they did not emerge from the data collected. It may have been expected that the final question asked of each interviewee, 'How do you, account for the success your school has had with SARs?', would have elicited responses that could not be allocated to one of the eight categories identified from the theory and literature: no alternative explanations were forthcoming. The possibility that the interview process and the structure of the questions inadvertently limited the interviewees ability to consider alternative explanations will be considered in Chapter 6.

Another possible limitation is the lack of 'student voice'. Due to ethics requirements and time constraints it was not deemed possible to include students in the interview process or in other methods of data collection. Student perceptions of why they were achieving significant gains in reading achievement between years 7 and 9 would have added a dimension to this study and could be the focus of future research.

The cases chosen were schools successfully working with SARs. This delimiting choice was made as access to schools is a difficult process. The school that agreed to participate did so on the basis of the recognition of their success. To ask schools to participate in research that recognised their lack of success would be problematic. There were schools identified with high numbers of SARs that had low student gain in reading from years 7 to 9. Using these schools would have added another dimension to this study but it was not practicable.

Another delimitation and possible limitation was the choice to only interview three to four teachers chosen by the literacy leaders. Obviously, the teachers chosen would be those deemed to be most able to 'tell their, and the school's story' and it is likely that they are not typical of the staff as a whole. Consequently, the data gained from the staff interviews may create an enhanced picture of the teaching and learning environment in the schools. This is mitigated to some degree by the observational data and the perspective provided by the principals and literacy leaders which was a broad perspective on the current teaching and learning environment across the school.

3.12 Summary

Qualitative multiple case study methodology was chosen as the method considered best able to answer the research question, 'What are the characteristics of schools, with high numbers of SARs, that leads them to achieve positive gains in student reading years 7-9?' This methodology aligns with a constructivist framework and Vygotsky's socio-cultural perspective and employed Glaser and Laudel's method of qualitative content analysis to analyse the interview and observational data collected from the four case study schools. This analysis used a deductive method based on categories identified from the review of literature and theory and the positing of five theoretical propositions. These propositions provide the groundwork for generalizing the findings from the cases studied to other situations by making analytical rather than statistical generalisations and thereby provide schools with evidence-based strategies to support SARs. Limitations and delimitations have also been discussed and every effort has been made to make the study replicable and an accurate representation of the practices in the four case study schools.

4. Data Analysis: Individual and Cross Case

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of 21 interviews, classroom observations and participant observation data from four case study schools. The qualitative content analysis method was used to analyse the data and to identify attributes common to all four cases. These common attributes were allocated to the eight categories identified from the comprehensive review and literature in Chapter 2.

This chapter provides a brief background of each case and a summary of the interview and observational data. It also illustrates how the data for each case was compared to identify the common attributes. The observational data were analysed in the same way as the interview data with attributes common to all four cases being identified.

4.2 Analysis of Interview Data

4.2.1 Comparative method outlined.

This synthesis of the interview data into the form of extraction tables for each of the eight categories, was used to produce the summary descriptions for each case. This data were then used to identify attributes within each category for Case one. These were identified using the category description tables to help identify repeated words and phrases that could be attributed to a particular category. This process resulted in between two and six attributes being identified for each category. The same process was applied to Case two and the attributes identified compared with Case one. The attributes common to both cases were then compared with Case three and the attributes common to these three cases compared to Case four. This resulted in the identification of attributes common to each of the eight categories for the four cases.

4.3 Case one Introduction

Six interviews were carried out at this large multi-campus school situated in Melbourne's urban fringe which has a diverse multicultural student population. The college principal, the principal in charge of literacy, the leading teacher in charge of literacy interventions and three classroom teachers, chosen by the leading teacher were interviewed. Three half days were spent in the school interviewing and observing the aforesaid staff, years 7–9 classrooms and the school's external environment.

4.3.1 Case one interview data summary.

Case one introduced a Literate Practice Intervention in 2008. This was a response to NAPLAN and PATr data that showed 66% of students entering Year 7 below the required level, with more than 20%,

three to four years behind in reading comprehension. The intervention involved all Year 7 and 8 students. Students were tested for reading comprehension levels and then allocated to one of four groups: Decoding, Transition, Comprehension and Critical Literacies. The students worked in these groups for 36 minutes four days a week and then returned to mainstream classes. Decoding groups had six to eight students, Transition up to 12 and the last two the normal class size of 25. The programs for these sessions were developed by staff with literacy expertise gained from EAL experience, with decoding groups using a phonics program. These staff members were provided with significant time for program development, mentoring of staff and running PD sessions twice a term. The college principal supported the program using equity money to provide very significant dollars, time and materials for the program. Thousands were spent on Barrington-Stoke novels and other high interest 'Skinny Reads'. A Leading Teacher was allocated to run the program actively supported by the principal.

In 2010 three literacy Coaches were employed and staff were given time to work with these coaches in their professional learning teams with a focus on reading. Staff were trained in the Cars and Stars reading comprehension program (Hawker Brownlow Education, 2013) and in other strategies such as Reciprocal Teaching which were seen to be used in classes such as Art. Teaching staff reported positive effects of working with consultants, felt 100% supported in their PD needs and acknowledged that access to reading research provided a shared language when teaching reading. The Literacy leader attributed the success of the intervention to getting kids engaged and passionate about reading to 'committed, passionate, enthusiastic staff with an improvement focus.'

In 2012 the Literacy intervention was extended to Year 9 with students still three to four years behind being able to opt into an intensive program for two lesson a week. A teacher reported reading gains of up to four years gain in 10 months. PD was provided by the literacy experts in the school who now included expert staff members as well as the consultant/coaches, focussing on skills to interpret data. Training in the Fountas and Pinnell testing and reading comprehension resource was also provided to staff working with the Year 9 intervention. Teachers reading young adult fiction and acting as very enthusiastic role models was reported to have a massive impact on reading culture as did the Premier's Reading Challenge.

In 2014 three consultants focussed on reading and data analysis in the PLTs. In addition, the school leaders and staff expert in literacy ran peer coaching with reported positive impact from teaching staff. The three classroom teachers described practice based on data, knowing the kids' ZPD, teacher judgements, differentiation, manageable goals and feedback. Knowing the students, students working at their own pace and reading conferences were also stressed as being powerful tools to help students grow. The Year 9 intervention was reported as engaging the students.

Currently the Literate Practices program and Year 9 intervention still operate. The principal described literacy as part of the college culture, 'with investment in time, PD and coaching'. The College has mandated reading and writing goals in staff professional development plans and the strong financial support for literacy has continued. The four teachers, which includes the Literacy Leader, all mention the importance of recognising the difficulties SARs face with motivation, negative views of self and confidence. The need to 'support', 'encourage', 'show interest in', 'conference with', 'set goals', 'safety in small groups' and 'working at their own pace', are all repeated. These teachers all mention data as critical in their practice with 'working the data', 'data used to match kids needs', 'student plans based on data', 'look at data together with students', 'using data to know progress' and 'targeted teaching based on data leading to 'improved habits and attitudes to reading', all mentioned. Other themes repeated are the importance of small groups, one-to-one interactions with reading conferences, looking at student's data and just right book selection. The school's purchase of $1,000s of 'Skinny Reads' and Barrington-Stoke novels is mentioned by all interviewed.

4.3.2 Case one categories and attributes.

Categories and attributes identified from the interview data for Case one, are shown in Table 4.1 below. This data will be compared to the findings from Case two.

Table 4.1. Case one Categories and Attributes

Categories	Attributes Described in Interview Data Case one
Leadership	• College principal supports literacy PD with time and money • Use of equity money to fund programs and teacher PD • Literacy experts and leaders employed • Literacy goals written into AIPs and PDPs
Professional Learning	• Literacy coaches work with PLTs and individual staff • Literacy PD session twice a term • Training in comprehension strategies • Peer coaching
Learning Environment	• Data driven practice • Reading conferencing • PD on reading strategies • Differentiating and scaffolding of curriculum • Classrooms set up in table groups or similar format • High level of student focus in the classroom
Literacy Interventions and Programs	• Literacy Practices program 7–8 • Year nine intervention • Premier's Reading Challenge • EAL programs with links to English and other disciplines • Decoding groups phonics program

Student Motivation	• Availability of appropriate books (skinny reads) • Teachers as reading role models. • Reading conferencing. • Decoding and reading strategies programs delivered to small groups
Testing and data	• NAPLAN, PATr used to allocate students to reading groups • Data interpretation PD
Individualised Attention	• Decoding groups 6–8 • Reading conferencing one-to-one • Appropriate book selection
The Whole School Environment	• Literacy culturally a College focus
Other (rival explanations)	

4.4 Case two

4.4.1 Introduction.

Case two is a large multi-campus school in an outer Melbourne suburb with a diverse multicultural student population. Four interviews were conducted including the current principal, who commenced in 2014, a long-term past assistant principal who now taught, a current long-term literacy leader and a teacher who commenced in 2006 as a classroom teacher, became a literacy leader and is currently a classroom teacher. This provided knowledge of the school over the period 2008–2016 when the student gain data, years 7–9, showing very high performance, was collected. As with Case one, the extraction table data from the interviews has been used to provide a thin description of Case two. This description is used to compare Case two results with Case one.

4.4.2 Case two interview data summary.

From 2007 the College leadership has supported literacy and reading programs with time, resources and the philosophy that 'every teacher is responsible for literacy'. There have always been several literacy leadership roles with time release, that have been used to support a team that has had the 'freedom to try new things.' Funding for PATr and Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) testing to test reading levels and for very small group, low-level literacy classes. EAL and primary trained teachers were employed to provide intensive support to very low-level literacy classes. All

classes used reading journals and focussed on subject content vocabulary with a with a focus on reading mindset.

In 2008 there was a policy change with a lot of equity funding being used to provide time to four, highly motivated and capable 'literacy champions' (for some reason the principal did not like the term coach) who provided in-school literacy PD and support. This took the form of providing reading strategies and support to all staff with the hope they would 'self-generate' and drove the literacy initiative which was written into the AIP and Strategic Plan. The involvement by so many teachers and students and explicit focus on the importance of reading was seen to account for its success in this period.

In 2010 the core literacy team continued to provide coaching, trained in Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS), a program that has a phonics component and continued the focus on core content vocabulary. Equity funding continued to provide time releases for literacy champions.

2012 saw a renewed 'leadership push' to make literacy everyone's responsibility and the importance of teachers being 'open to help low literacy kids.' The large amount of equity funding continued and was used to train 20 staff in the 'Reading to Learn' program who trained the rest of the staff. This program provided detailed and intensive comprehension reading strategies that were employed in English, Humanities, other classrooms and focussed on skilling EAL teachers and aides working with low-level groups. One leader did the 14-day Bastow Leading Literacy Program affiliated with Melbourne University which resulted in reading strategies action planning in the school. New staff were hired 'because of literacy experience'. There was a focus on in-school PD, provided by the literacy champions and other staff with a requirement that all staff do PD five times a term. This was seen to create 'team bonding'. 'Literacy not just the English teachers' responsibility' continued to be a focus with all subject teachers open to literacy PD. Silent reading was introduced for 10 minutes four times a week and low-level kids were give individual support to choose appropriate books.

In 2014 a new principal employed a literacy coordinator to document and review the program, as the loss of key personnel demanded change. Staff were required to have literacy improvement goals in their PDPs and were provided with strategies and evidence to meet these goals which encouraged staff to use literacy strategies. A Literacy intervention was introduced where all students were tested on PATr and On Demand and allocated to one of five streamed groups which met for two classroom periods each week. Staff were provided with data from PATr and the SA Spelling test and introduced paragraph writing and reading conferences. 2015 saw the employment of four primary trained staff to support the literacy program.

Currently the whole-school focus on literacy and reading and reading comprehension skills has continued, with teachers supported by coaches and accessing literacy PD to help low literacy kids in all subjects. New teachers are 'fantastic at accepting and understanding literacy is a whole-school problem

to solve.' Junior school literacy classes focus on spelling, vocabulary, Reader's Notebook, setting reading goals, reading journals and comprehension skills: students are tested three times yearly to monitor progress. Librarians invest 'huge time in coding books' and helping students choose books. The importance of reading conferences, book selection, individual attention and the school's literacy culture were also stressed. The teacher who had been at the school since 2007 attributes the success the school has had in literacy to a 'feeling of camaraderie' and the 'teaching cohort having a strong sense of purpose and an understanding of the importance of the school's place in the community' with 'students and parents valuing the learning.'

4.4.3 Common attributes: cases 1 and 2.

Table 4.2. Cases 1 and 2 Categories and Attributes

Categories	Attributes Described in Interview Data Case one	Attributes Described in Interview Data Case two
Leadership	• Supports literacy PD with time and money • Use of equity money to fund programs and teacher PD • Literacy experts and leaders employed • Literacy goals written into AIPs and PDPs	Support literacy and reading with time and money Equity money funding experts and PD Literacy Champions Literacy initiative in AIPs and SPs. Literacy improvement goals in PDPs
Professional Learning	• Literacy coaches work with PLTs and individual staff • Literacy PD session twice a term • Training in comprehension strategies • Peer coaching	Literacy champions provide literacy support and PD to all staff In-school literacy PD five times a term Training in comprehension strategies Reading Champions as coaches
Learning Environment	• Data driven practice • Reading conferencing • PD on reading strategies • Differentiating and scaffolding • High level of student focus in the classroom.	Use of NAPLAN and PATr Reading journals and conferencing Intensive PD on reading strategies Junior school literacy teachers use wide range of differentiating and scaffolding strategies Every teacher responsible for literacy

Literacy Interventions and Programs	• Literate Practices program 7–8 • Year nine intervention • Premier's Reading Challenge • EAL experience used to develop programs • Decoding groups phonics program	Two period a week literacy intervention 7–10 Premier's Reading Challenge EAL teachers employed to work with low literacy groups THRASS with phonics component used with low groups Silent reading 10 minutes four times a week Reading strategies action planning
Student Motivation	• Availability of appropriate books (skinny reads) • Teachers as reading role models. • Reading conferencing. • Decoding delivered to small groups	Librarians spend huge time coding books School's literacy culture Reading conferencing THRASS decoding used with small low-level groups
Testing and data	• NAPLAN, PATr used to allocate students to reading groups • Data interpretation PD	NAPLAN and PATr for reading levels Tested three times a year Staff provided with PATr and SA spelling test data
Individualised Attention	• Decoding groups of 6–8 • Reading conferencing one-to-one • Appropriate book selection	Low-level literacy groups of 6–8 Reading conferencing one-to-one Importance of book selection Individual support to choose books Importance of individual attention
The Whole School Environment	• Literacy culturally a College focus	School's literacy culture Sense of camaraderie and purpose in staff School's place in the community
Other (rival explanations)		

4.5 Case three

4.5.1 Introduction.

Case three is a large, single campus school, the product of a three-school amalgamation in 2009. It is located in an outer Melbourne suburb and it has an ethnically diverse student population and accepts many students from the nearby Language Centre for new arrivals with poor English skills. The associate principal in charge of student learning, a leading teacher in charge of literacy, two classroom teachers and the Learning Resource Centre leader, were interviewed. All have been at the school since 2008, the period covered in this study. As with the first two cases the interview data have been used to construct a summary of Case three.

4.5.2 Case three interview data summary.

In 2009, following a three-year amalgamation process with two other schools, a whole-school learning structure was put in place. This involved seven vertically structured 7-to-12 teams based on the Swiss House Model. Students learn within the 'House' in a collaborative team-teaching model that has three hundred students with 25 staff. Year seven to nine teacher PLTs operated across the 'houses' and students were 'deeply connected' in a smaller school inside a very large school.

Principal and leadership support for literacy was noted by all those interviewed. The principal interviewed commented that 'without a strong focus on literacy we won't get the achievement we hope for.' The support was evident in funding for leadership positions supporting literacy, including the Librarian, availability of extensive PD and support for the seven to eight reading program and Premier's Reading Challenge. Students have fortnightly library lessons matching SARs with texts that interest them. In addition, Literacy targets have been and are evident in Whole School Implementation Plans and staff Individual Assessment Plans (IAPs). This 'whole-school approach to literacy' was funded from equity funding resulting from the school's low socio-economic profile.

Since 2009 literacy PD has been increasingly delivered in-school by reading coaches and literacy experts. Five teachers trained as reading coaches and work as a team delivering reading lessons to year seven and eight English classes. An ongoing EAL in-service skills program has been seen as effective for teachers working with SARs as have partnerships with feeder primary schools in the 'Best of Both Worlds' program.

The school identifies students with high and medium needs through NAPLAN, PATr and teacher judgements and then provides support through extra teachers, resources and targeted literacy approaches. These include: a 'parallel (EAL) path' for up to a year for students with very high needs; a small group decoding program; reading lessons and individual support for reluctant readers and extensive support in mainstream class time. All Year 7–10 English classes have had silent reading,

reading conferences and reading logs as part of the curriculum with literacy the focus and at the forefront of every lesson. Small groupings, targeted and differentiated learning and 'knowing our students well' have been seen as reasons for the school's success with low-level readers.

In 2012 the PD focus changed to almost all in-school PD delivered by trained coaches and other experts working with the school. A whole-school literacy program incorporating Design for Learning focussed on coordinating the different literacy programs and incorporating literacy into all subjects 7 to 12 with 'every domain area or subject having a literacy-skills focus and links across disciplines.' Extensive use of data to create differentiated teaching and personalised interventions became a clear focus with the expectation of 'one year's growth in one year' for all students. Decoding groups of six to seven students and extra teachers in the groups of students with high literacy needs continued to use the equity funding.

Currently the 'Learning Intervention Whole School Approach to Literacy' has been a major focus of the leadership. This has resulted in an extended reading program seven to eight; continued availability of extensive in-school literacy PD; continuation of a strong EAL training program for all staff; experts/coaches running workshops and supporting staff working with high needs literacy students and a focus on personalised learning. Each of these features are extensions of programs/interventions that have been part of the school since 2009 and before.

4.5.3 Common attributes: cases 1, 2 and 3.

Table 4.3. Cases 1, 2 and 3 Categories and Attributes

Categories	Attributes Common to Interview Data Cases 1 and 2	Attributes Described in Interview Data Case three
Leadership	- Supports literacy PD with time and money. - Use of equity money to fund experts, programs and teacher PD - Literacy experts and leaders employed - Literacy goals written into AIPs and PDPs	Support for literacy leadership positions and PD funded with equity money Reading coaches and literacy experts employed Literacy targets in SIP and IAPs
Professional Learning	- Literacy coaches work with PLTs and individual staff - Literacy PD sessions each term - Training in comprehension strategies - Peer coaching	Delivered by reading coaches and literacy experts EAL in-service skill program for all staff Targeted literacy approaches In-school PD
Learning Environment	- Data driven practice: NAPLAN and PATr - Reading conferencing and journals	Data used to establish needs Reading conferencing and reading logs Targeted and differentiated learning

	• Use of wide range of reading strategies • Differentiating and scaffolding • High level of student focus in the classroom	Extensive scaffolding support in mainstream classes Literacy focus in every lesson
Literacy Interventions and Programs	• Literacy Intervention 7–9 • Premier's Reading Challenge • Low-level groups use phonics program • EAL experience used to develop programs	Reading lessons for years 7–8 Premier's Reading Challenge A small decoding program EAL PD for teachers working with SARs Extra teachers in low-level groups
Student Motivation	• Availability of appropriate books and assistance choosing • Teachers focus on reading • Reading conferencing • Decoding delivered to small group	SARs have texts that interest them and assistance choosing in library lessons Whole school reading focus Reading conferencing 7–10 Decoding groups of 6–7
Testing and data	• NAPLAN, PATr used to allocate students to reading groups • Reading data provided and used to inform learning environment	NAPLAN PATr and teacher judgements used to establish needs Use of data for differentiating and personalised intervention
Individualized Attention	• Decoding groups of 6–8 • Reading conferencing one-to-one • Individual support to choose appropriate books	Small decoding groups of 6–7 7–10 reading conferences Librarians assist with book selection
The Whole School Environment	• Literacy culturally a College/School focus	Students deeply connected through House structure Whole-school approach to literacy
Other (rival explanations)		Partnerships with feeder primary schools

4.6 Case four

4.6.1 Introduction.

Case four is a large single campus school with 105 teaching staff and over a thousand multicultural students: it is located in an outer Melbourne suburb. The long- term principal, literacy coordinator and three classroom teachers, one of whom was a student from 2008–2011, were interviewed, providing data over the time of the study period 2008–2016.

4.6.2 Case four interview data summary.

Since 2006 the school has had the same principal and a very established. stable staff. One long-term teacher saw the school as 'very grounded' and 'a strong connected school'. In 2006 the new principal brought in strict uniform policy and 'improved the school culture'. The leadership has constantly promoted a whole-school focus on literacy and supported it with resources and PD through Equity funding. The reading and coaching programs are very costly but are valued and written into the school's AIPs. The Literacy committee comprises the principal, an AP, the literacy coordinator and the Librarian who meet two to three times a term. A culture of high expectations is promoted by this committee.

By 2008 the school was seen to have a focus on reading and had adopted the Literate Practices Program in years 7 and 8. This program involved testing of all Year 7 and 8 students (TORC3) and allocating them to one of four groups based on reading ability. The lowest group, Decoding had groups of six to eight students while the critical literacy classes were normal size of 25. Teachers from all disciplines taught successfully in this program. Students were taught in these groups for four periods a week. Weekly reading classes for years 7–9 and reading conferences were also an important feature of the program, seen to build rapport with students and continue to the present day. A Language Support Program also operates with students, two years below required reading levels, supported in small groups using EAL strategies. An Individual Needs Department used SPELD (a phonics program) for very struggling readers, delivered by a speech pathologist.

The library has been seen to have big impact on the school's success with SARs and has been fully supported by the leadership. The continually upgraded resources and a 'beautiful, warm, colourful space' inhabited by passionate teacher librarians have been a constant over the study period and have been seen to raise the profile of reading in the school and motivate students to read. The Premier's Reading Challenge ran until 2016 with an ex-student 2006–12, now a staff member, considering it to be a major stimulus for reading as 'it was this big thing' and 'everybody wanted to be involved.'

The school had a Literacy Leading teacher in the 1990s 'positioning and privileging' literacy as a whole-school focus. All teachers were expected to help students with reading through teaching subject specific vocabulary and the modification of work for SARs; this is written into the school's policies. Modification using visuals, word lists and 'breaking things down to the students' level', have been a strongly emphasised and supported by PD. In addition, a very structured teaching model has operated and 'students aren't going into class being taught in different ways.' This has resulted in responsible students aware of the school's expectations.

The literacy focus has been supported by coaches working in classes with teachers and 'continual whole-school PD sessions on reading strategies.' In addition, every discipline area, has been required to participate in literacy PD sessions specific to their subjects.

The success the school has achieved with SARs is attributed to multiple factors although common themes are the leaderships support and direct involvement in literacy education-reading in particular; the multiple programs supporting SARs and; the stable and highly organised teaching and learning environment which has literacy as every teachers' responsibility. Comments supporting these themes by the principal, literacy leader and classroom teachers, include: 'very structured processes in three sub-schools'; 'high expectations on staff and students'; 'a well-organized learning environment'; 'small reading classes'; 'few discipline problems'; 'looking after the students as a whole'; 'student-teacher relationships'; 'knowing your kids' and 'a strong connected school'.

4.6.3 Common attributes, cases 1 to 4

Table 4.4. Case four Attributes Common with Cases 1 to 3

Categories	Attributes Common to Interview Data Cases 2 to 3	Attributes Described in Interview Data Case four
Leadership	- Supports literacy PD with time and money. - Use of equity money to fund experts, programs and teacher PD - Literacy experts and leaders employed - Literacy goals written into AIPs and PDPs	Whole-school focus on literacy Equity funding provided resources for experts and PD Coaching programs written into AIPs Reading programs written into AIPs
Professional Learning	- Literacy coaches work with PLTs and individual staff - Literacy PD sessions each term - Training in reading comprehension strategies - Peer coaching	Delivered by reading coaches and literacy experts. Continual whole-school PD on reading strategies Coaches working in classes with teachers
Learning Environment	- Data driven practice: NAPLAN and PATr - Reading conferencing and journals - Use of wide range of reading strategies - Differentiation and scaffolding - High level of student focus in the classroom	Data used to establish needs Reading conferencing and reading logs Targeted and differentiated learning applying reading strategies Modification and scaffolding of work for SARs Structured teaching model

Literacy Interventions and Programs	• Literacy Intervention 7–9 • Premier's Reading Challenge • Low-level groups use phonics program • EAL experience used to develop programs	Literacy intervention 7–8 Premier's Reading Challenge SPELD (phonics program) used with small low-level groups EAL strategies used in small groups of low readers
Student Motivation	• Availability of appropriate books and assistance choosing • Teachers focus on reading • Reading conferencing • Decoding delivered to small group	SARs have texts that interest them and assistance choosing them in library lessons Whole school reading focus Reading conferencing 7–9 build rapport Decoding groups of 6–7
Testing and data	• NAPLAN, PATr used to allocate students to reading groups • Reading Data provided and used to inform learning environment	NAPLAN PATr and teacher judgements used to establish needs Use of data for differentiating and personalised intervention
Individualized Attention	• Decoding groups of 6–8 • Reading conferencing one-to-one • Individual support to choose appropriate books	Small decoding groups of 6–7 7–9 reading conferences build rapport Librarians assist with book selection
The Whole School Environment	• Literacy culturally a College/School focus	Literacy as a whole-school focus Stable and highly organised teaching and learning environment. High expectations of all
Other (rival explanations)		

4.7 Attributes Common to the Four Cases

Attributes common to each of the cases interview data has been identified through the constant comparative method demonstrated above and summarised in Table 4.5. below. This provides a data set that allows the research questions and propositions, developed from the literature and theory, to be addressed in Chapter 6.

Table 4.5. Interview Data: Attributes Common to the Four Cases

Categories	Interview Data: Attributes Common to the Four Cases
Leadership	- Supports literacy PD and programs with time and money - Equity money to fund experts, programs and teacher PD - Literacy experts and leaders employed - Literacy goals written into AIPs and PDPs
Professional Learning	- Literacy coaches work with PLTs and individual staff - In-school literacy PD sessions each term - Training in reading comprehension strategies - Peer and expert coaching
Learning Environment	- Data used to establish needs - Reading conferencing and journals - Differentiation and scaffolding strategies - Use of wide range of reading strategies
Literacy Interventions and Programs	- Literacy Interventions 7–9 - Premier's Reading Challenge - Low-level groups use phonics program - EAL experience used to develop programs and provide PD
Student Motivation	- Availability of appropriate books - Assistance choosing books - Whole-school and teachers' focus on reading - Reading conferencing - Decoding delivered to small group
Testing and Data	- NAPLAN, PATr used to allocate students to reading groups - Reading Data used to inform learning environment.
Individualized Attention	- Decoding groups of 6–8 - Reading conferencing one-to-one - Individual support to choose appropriate books
The Whole School Environment	Literacy culturally a College/School focus
Other (rival explanations	

4.8 Analysis of Observational Data

4.8.1 Introduction.

As discussed in 3.6.3 these data sets were collected in 2018. They provide insights into the current Learning environments and the whole-school environments of schools that have had an extended period of success with SARs. The findings from this data will be discussed in this context in Chapter 6.

The two data sets focussed classroom observations and field note summaries are the product of two to three visits to each school. The data collected are from the perspective of one very familiar with schools and this provided knowledge of activities and processes that provide insight into the teaching and learning practices and overall school culture. One example is classroom organisation, which is an indicator of prevailing pedagogies, another is the observed behaviours between staff and students, both inside and outside the classroom.

The observational data has been treated like interview data (Merriam, 1998) with data units being identified and assigned to categories using the qualitative content analysis method. This process has been carried out for each case and categories and concepts identified. As with the interview data a constant comparative method was used to identify concepts common to the four cases.

The classroom observations of classroom data are presented in tabular form while the data collected from participant observations are presented as field note summaries: these are prefaced by a brief description of the case.

4.8.2 Observational data Case one.

4.8.2.1 Classroom Observations.

A summary of classroom observations from Case one is shown in Table 4.6 below. Thirteen classes were observed during periods two and three. Each class was observed for approximately 10 minutes from outside the classroom. Student focus was determined by observing students' line of vision, posture and actions. These are followed by the site observations summary.

Table 4.6. Direct Observations of Classrooms: Case one

Classroom Setup	Nine classrooms were set up in table groups, two in a U format and one in a square.
Teacher	In four classes the teacher was at the front talking to the whole class. In seven classes the teacher was moving among the students and in the small group of seven the teacher was sitting with the group.

Student Focus	The level of focus on task was very high in all classes with all students focussed in seven classes while two to three students were not obviously focussed in the other five classes.
Classroom Environment	Three classes had the learning intention on the board. All classes were calm and orderly. The Year 7 and 8 classes are in purpose-built team buildings with five classrooms and a staffroom. The Year 9s are in a 9–10 team area, again with a staffroom.

4.8.2.2 Site Observations Summary Case one.

At the school entrance at 8:30 students, all in uniform, walk in quietly, in small groups and individually, greeting other students with occasional hugs and touching of hands in choreographed moves. They walk past garden beds planted with native species and sit under large shady trees. The grounds around the entrance are litter free. Students gather around a phone laughing. At the breakfast club more than 50 students create a hum of sound as they drink orange juice and eat toasted sandwiches. One teacher is making the sandwiches helped by two students. One teacher is teasing a student about how many sandwiches he has eaten. Three girls are in a group with another teacher quietly talking. A buzz erupts as a student enters and laughter follows. A student arrives just as the club is closing and a teacher says he can't come in as he is always late but gives him a sandwich and tells him to run with a smile on his face.

At recess there are students moving past the office laughing and ask if I needed help as I enter. Three students are standing silently in a queue at a window. The office staff member refer to them by name as they sign papers or ask if teachers are away in quiet voices. Around the corner two students sit in chairs opposite the campus principal's office, heads down. The principal comes out of her office and hands each student a piece of paper and asks them to write down what had happened in a quiet voice. A tissue is provided for one student with, 'it will be alright', spoken quietly. Two students enter through main door to the office area and start to walk down the corridor. An office staff member coughs and points at the corridor and a sign that says No Student Access. The students retreat with heads down. The staff members laugh, 'Cheeky little…' is heard.

At lunchtime students are sitting and walking in orderly groups and a boy in a wheelchair is pushed past and students quietly speak to him. He leaves with six students laughing as he spins the chair. Groups of students are playing a ball game in a covered in area. Students move in and out of the court as the ball hits or misses its mark according to agreed rules which are not obvious to the observer. Laughter and comments follow points lost and won.

In the library at the start of lunchtime 15 students are playing chess and 74 students enter quietly and settled down with books and screens. Librarian notes that 40–70 students use the library every lunchtime. A student approaches the librarian and they walk to the 'New Books' section. Over five

minutes of conversation books are picked up, returned until one is chosen and borrowed. A teacher is playing chess with a student on a table sized board surrounded by 10 or more students. Laughter and comments are made as each move is made. Prior to the warning bell five students line up to borrow books with the librarian calling their names and commenting on their selections. Students leave quietly and quickly, apart from the chess players who moan and groan when they are required to finish.

At the canteen students lined up in an orderly manner under the supervision of a teacher who engaged in continual conversation with different students. The canteen workers address all the students by name with comments on a changed order or other options if something has run out. Pleases and thankyous are heard from almost all students. A student tries to quietly push into the queue but is told to go to the end by the supervising teacher who engages in a friendly but firm discussion about his behaviour.

In the staffroom aides discuss their students' needs and the welfare coordinator offers advice, obviously knowing the students. Staff enter, prepare food and a group in the centre play a newspaper quiz game with questions asked of specific staff members: gentle banter follows correct and incorrect answers. Small groups sit in conversation or reading papers.

Before the five-minute warning music starts, staff begin to move. An ordered exodus occurs as the music begins.

Table 4.7. Observational Data Summary Case one

Categories	Attributes Identified Case one
Leadership	• Principal calm and reassuring
Professional Learning	
Learning Environment	• Table groups • Student focus very high • Classes calm and orderly
Literacy Interventions and Programs	
Student Motivation	
Testing and data	
Individualized Attention	• Librarian helping student select book
The Whole School Environment	• Students in uniform • Grounds cared for • Litter free • Office staff calm and helpful • Canteen orderly • Respectful teacher–student interactions

	• Respectful teacher–teacher interactions
	• Laughter
	• Students addressed by name
Other (rival explanations)	

4.8.2.3 Case Study 1 Summary of Interview and Observational Data.

The performance of SARs is a major focus in this school promoted by a Principal and staff knowledgeable of the literacy needs of their students. The high percentage of students, 66%, entering Year 7 below the required level in reading has promoted a major focus on literacy and reading in particular. The school has responded with leadership using equity funds to restructure the 7-8 curriculum to incorporate targeted interventions for different levels of SARs. This has involved SARs in small groups for four sessions a week where they receive focussed instruction which includes phonics instruction for very low-level readers. The students are also supported in the mainstream classes with differentiation and scaffolding of curriculum materials and access to a wide range of age appropriate reading materials. The classrooms setup in table groups indicates a student focus and the opportunity for differentiated learning. In addition, the calm and orderly classroom environment with high levels of student focus is an environment that maximizes the possibility of SARs improving their reading skills. These classroom practices have been supported by extensive professional development of the whole staff in reading strategies. Staff also have access to reading coaches in their professional learning teams and resources for the four weekly sessions are provided by a team of expert literacy staff. Student performance is also closely monitored through testing regimes and staff judgements which allows modification and targeting of resources. The wider school environment was seen to be calm, with students behaving respectfully to staff and other students in the grounds and moving into classes in an orderly fashion.

4.8.3 Classroom Observational Data Case two.

4.8.3.1 Classroom Observations.

Thirteen classes were observed during periods two and three. Each class observed for approximately 10 minutes from outside the classroom. Student focus was determined by observing students' line of vision, posture and actions.

Table 4.8. Direct Observations of Classrooms: Case two

Classroom Setup	Twelve classes were observed during periods one and two (75 min periods), seven at Year 8, four at Year 7 and one at Year 9. Six

	were 'conventional classes' with one teacher and approximately 25 students. The other 'six' classes involved 75 students and five staff. The students were initially addressed as one group in a large multi-function space, then spread out into multiple groups. In all the conventional classes the students worked in table groups while a variety of configurations operated in the multi-function space- some in table groups, some in larger groups, some in pairs and others in rows watching a screen.
Teacher	In four classes the teacher was at the front talking to the whole class. In two classes the teacher was moving among the students and in the multi-function space there was a great deal of teacher movement between groups.
Student Focus	The level of focus on task was very high in all classes with the exception of two groups of three students in the multi-function space who were not on task.
Classroom Environment	The conventional classrooms were typical secondary school environments with the exception of the EAL room which was awash with colour and different languages covering the walls. All classes were quiet and orderly. The multi-function space was full of action and movement with students following a well-rehearsed set of procedures directed at intervals, by one teacher through the PA system.

4.8.3.2 Site Observations Summary Case two.

At 8:30 a.m. an ethnically diverse student population enters through the main entrance quietly talking and holding the door open for each other and for any staff member who enter. On approaching the office, I am welcomed and have been expected. Teachers are conversing with the office personnel as they enter with clearly heard comments about the health of family or the performance of a sports team. A student arrives late and agitated but she is calmly questioned by a staff member (assistant principal) and provided with a note when she hears the reason for her lateness. As the bell goes for period one no students could be seen.

At recess groups of students move quickly towards the canteen area. As a teacher passes a group of students, one student jokes with him about his haircut. The teacher turns and makes comments about the student that result in laughter and many animated comments from both sides. A number of students make way for a teacher with a trolley and one asks if he could help. At the entrance to the building the doors are held open by the students who were thanked by the teacher. There were three instances of teachers acknowledging each other with smiles and positive comments as they pass in the grounds. As the music starts for the end of recess students move quickly and by the time it had stopped only one student can be seen in the central courtyard area and he is running.

In the canteen at lunchtime students line up without direction, converse in groups, play a variety of games, use please, thank you and banter with the canteen staff. Of 49 students in the canteen,18 were on phones! The supervising staff are in constant conversation with student, as they move along the queues, referring to student by name. When the music starts student move quickly and the area empties in minutes. The area is virtually rubbish free with students using the bins provided.

Table 4.9. Observational Data Comparison Cases 1 and 2

Categories	Attributes Identified Case one	Attributes Identified Case two
Leadership	• Principal calm and reassuring	• Assistant principal calm and reassuring
Professional Learning		
Learning Environment	• Table groups • Student focus very high • Classes calm and orderly	• Table groups • Student focus very high • Quiet and orderly classes • Team teaching
Literacy Interventions and Programs		
Student Motivation		
Testing and data		
Individualized Attention	• Librarian helping student select book	
The Whole School Environment	• Students in uniform • Litter free • Office staff calm and helpful • Canteen orderly • Respectful teacher–student interactions • Respectful teacher–teacher interactions	• Students in uniform • Litter free Office staff welcoming—conversing and laughing • Canteen orderly • Respectful staff–student conversation • Helpful student–staff action • Smiles

	• Laughter • Students addressed by name • Grounds cared for • Staffroom calm, sociable	• Students addressed by name • Punctual student behaviour
Other (rival explanations)		

4.8.3.3 Case Study 2 Summary of Interview and Observational Data.

This school has had a long-term commitment to improving the performance of SARs with the leadership using equity funds to employ literacy experts, provide small group interventions and resources, such as age appropriate texts, required by SARs. A focus has been extensive and focussed professional development of staff mainly through mandated in-school programs and coaching provided by 'Reading Champions'. These 'Champions' work in classrooms from years 7-10 and provide curriculum materials when required. This in-school professional development focus has also focussed on data analysis and has provided staff with the ability to scaffold and differentiate curriculum to meet the needs of the SARs. Classrooms were set up in table group formats and their was evidence of team teaching and differentiated curriculum materials. The level of student focus was very high and the classroom observed were very calm and orderly. Students with very low literacy skills were provided with phonics instruction in small groups in their two lesson a week, literacy intervention. A constant theme in this school was the focus on the individual student and meeting their literacy needs. Students behved respectfully to other students and staff in the school grounds and moved quickly to their classrooms when the music played. The overall impression of the school was one of order, respect and a focus on students as individuals.

4.8.4 Observational Data Case three.

4.8.4.1 Classroom Observations.

Eight classes were observed during period two. Each class was observed for approximately 10 minutes from outside the classroom. Student focus was determined by observing students' line of vision, posture and action.

Table 4.10. Direct Observations of Classrooms: Case three

Classroom Setup	Eight classrooms observed. Six had 25–35 students working at table groups of 4–6 students. One had five students around one table with two teachers in a large classroom space. The other was

	in an open space with 11 students sitting in a round table format with one teacher reading with a student while the rest read.
Teacher	In four of the classes the teacher(s) were moving around the table groups. In the science class the teacher was at the front discussing a diagram on the screen. In another the teacher was at the front while students were doing a test in pairs. The last two were small groups with teacher(s) sitting with students.
Student Focus	From observing students' line of vision, posture and actions all students in all classes were close to 100% focussed on task apart from one group of three students who were talking and laughing in a silent reading session while the teacher was reading with another student.
Classroom Environment	Refer to comments above where I describe the whole learning environment. This purpose-built space allows considerable flexibility in grouping students. It is also light, warm and quiet. Students can be spread across 'spaces' while the teachers have line of sight to these space from the main teaching space.

4.8.4.2 Site Observations Summary Case three.

At the start of the school day many students pass through the entrances behind the formal main entrance. They are of different racial origins and dress, all conforming to the school uniform code. Students greet each other, some with hugs and handshakes. Lines of students disappear into the large modern structures in a calm and orderly manner.

A formal well-maintained garden leads to the school's main entrance. The early twentieth century brick building's solid panel doors lead into the foyer with wood panelled doorways proclaiming the principal and AP's offices. The principal's PA, aware of my reason for visiting has the day's program organised. Through this very traditional building is a very large open area with seven ultra-modern buildings spaced in the well-tended garden areas. Students' smile and nod as I walk through the grounds.

The 'House' I have been allocated to has an entrance with an office which all the students have to pass through. A 'House Administration Officer' sits in the office welcoming all the students who enter by name. After the bell a student enters and is gently reminded to be on time in future and is allocated a late pass. A student moves from inside the building and asks for an excursion form: she is welcomed

by name. The officer and student discuss the upcoming excursion in an animated way. Teachers enter and are acknowledged by name from the office.

The 'House' building is a very modern structure with carpets, sound deadening devices in the ceilings and varied spaces. Two teachers enter deep in conversation about a student. A group of students sit in a 'stage like' area and are spoken to by two teachers. The students then move to adjacent spaces, most into a classroom-like area but with little 'alcoves' that small groups of students move into. The teachers can see these alcoves from the main space and move between them. The two teachers operate as a team with one directing the lesson and the other working with individuals or groups: the roles reverse as the lesson progresses. Near the end of the seventy-five-minute period, the group moves back to the stage and a debrief occurs with questions being asked of students and student questions answered. As the bell sounds students move off quietly to their locker area which is also very calm and orderly. In the next lesson nine students sit around a large table while a teacher reads with one student. Another group watches a video in a soundproof structure in the middle of the space. The stage is used again for discussion with a student group.

At lunchtime students line up at the canteen without direction and move in a calm and orderly manner. Over a twenty-minute period, students are seen playing ball games, sharing food, sitting and talking and again, many smiling as I walk past. Teachers walking through acknowledge students by name. The warning bell sounds and students move quickly to their 'Houses' and at lesson start time only two students can be seen.

Table 4.11. Observational Data: Common Concepts Cases 1 to 3

Categories	Common Attributes Cases 1 & 2	Attributes Identified Case three
Leadership	• Leaders calm and reassuring	• Highly organised
Professional Learning		
Learning Environment	• Table groups • Student focus very high • Classes calm and orderly	• Table groups • Focus very high • Learning spaces warm bright and quiet • Team teaching • Questioning
Literacy Interventions and Programs		
Student Motivation		
Testing and data		

Individualized Attention		• Teacher–student reading
The Whole School Environment	• Students in uniform • Litter free • Office staff calm and helpful • Canteen orderly • Respectful teacher–student interactions • Respectful teacher–teacher interactions • Laughter/smiles • Students addressed by name	• Students in uniform • Litter free • Office staff formal and organised • Canteen orderly • Respectful teacher–student interactions • Respectful teacher–teacher interactions • Laughter/smiles • Students addressed by name • Students punctual
Other (rival explanations)		

4.8.4.3 Case Study 3 Summary of Interview and Observational Data.

This large multi-cultural school has a very focussed approach to reading and the literacy needs of all of their students and SARs in particular. This is led by a highly organized and knowledgeable leadership team. The leadership has used its equity funding to create literacy leadership positions and employ literacy experts to provide professional development programs and support staff in their classrooms. There has been extensive professional development of staff in data analysis and a focus on teacher judgements to inform differentiation and scaffolding of the curriculum. The classrooms are modern and innovative in design with table groupings and quiet spaces for students to work in. There was evidence of team teaching and differentiation of curriculum materials and a variety of scaffolding techniques used with different groups of students. The level of student focus was very high and all classrooms observed were calm learning environments. A particular focus has been the use of EAL experts to provide whole-school professional development on reading strategies. Students with very low reading skills are provided with decoding instruction in small groups and there was evidence of individual student tuition. All interviewed expressed a very strong focus on meeting the needs of SARs in the mainstream classroom. There was a consensus with all interviewed that the 'House' structure of the school created connectedness and a focus on the needs of the individual student. Within the 'houses' students moved quietly and respectfully acknowledging the 'house manager' at the entrance and moving quickly to classroom spaces after breaks. The school grounds were ordered with students behaving respectfully to other students and staff.

4.8.5 Case four.

4.8.5.1 Classroom Observations.

Twelve classes were observed during periods one and two. The school has 50-minute periods with many doubles.

Table 4.12. Direct Observations of Classroom: Case four

Classroom Setup	Of the 12 classes observed, eight in Year 7, and two in years 8 and 9 all had the same classroom setup, which was a cross between rows and table groups (two E configurations facing).
Teacher	In six classes the teacher was talking from the front while in the other six they were moving between students.
Student Focus	Six classes had all students focussed while in the other six, 3–4 students were not on task. These students were either using computers inappropriately, quietly talking or just sitting. All classes very quiet with focus on the teacher when requested.
Classroom Environment	All 12 teachers had written the Learning intentions for the lesson on the board. All classrooms had the LATAR acronym (Learning Intention Applying Knowledge, Teaching, Application, Reflection) prominent and student work was displayed in all classrooms as well as in the corridors with students' names and photographs.

4.8.5.2 Site Observations Summary Case four.

The school presents from the road as modern, well-maintained with tended gardens and litter free grounds. At 8:30–45, 89 students walk past, all in uniform talking quietly in groups of two to three. At the main entrance office, four students enter at different times and quietly say thank you to the office staff when their need is met. An adult and student enter the office. The parent raises voice slightly in discussion with student. The office person addresses the parent by name and a discussion follows. The parent leaves smiling. Six teachers pass through asking questions of the office. First names are used, and the conversations contain personal references and banter. Questions and queries are answered quickly with thankyous following. More students enter and all use 'excuse me' or 'please miss', and in turn are addressed by name.

The canteen has approximately 50 students who enter and line up quietly ordering with please and thank you in nearly every case. Two groups are playing cards at tables, two girls are hugging while others are talking quietly. The two teachers on duty talk constantly with the students addressing them by name

alluding to classroom or sporting activities. As the music starts students move off quickly acknowledging the two teachers on duty. By the time the music stops only two students can be seen and they are running.

At the locker bays at the end of lunch two teachers are monitoring. The students acknowledge the teachers with 'hi miss', and 'hi sir'. The teachers joke and laugh with students and refer to them by name. As the warning music finishes all students have left for class. Two students arrive running and the teachers monitoring change their tone of voice. They comment quite sternly on the consequences of continual lateness and the students apologise while rapidly accessing their lockers; the students run to the classroom entrance.

At the start of the day four teachers acknowledge each other and the students as they pass in the grounds and corridors. The corridors are lined with students' work with their names and photos prominent. Every classroom has the LATAR acronym (Learning Intention Applying Knowledge, Teaching, Application, Reflection) clearly displayed. Students line up outside six classrooms in view and wait quietly for their teachers. As teachers arrive, they are acknowledged by the students and students file in quietly. In one class students move to designated seats, unpack bags and all focus on the teacher as she asks for attention.

At the end of the last visit the principal wanted me to see the library. She walked me across to a newly modified building with a wide glass entrance covered with posters and information. Books greet the eye on stands at the entrance. The space is bright and colourful. It is after school, but the area has 40 or more students sitting on the range of furniture or working at computer stations. New books are advertised on stands and I am shown the range of books from classics to 'skinny reads.'

Table 4.13. Observational Data: Common Attributes Cases 1 to 4

Categories	Common Attributes Cases 1, 2 and 3	Attributes Identified Case four
Leadership		• Importance of library
Professional Learning		
Classroom Practices	• Table groups • Student focus very high • Classes calm and orderly	• Desks in Table Group like format • Student focus high • Classes all calm and orderly • Learning intentions in all classes
Literacy Interventions and Programs		

Student Motivation		
Testing and data		
Individualized Attention		
The Whole School Environment	• Students in uniform • Litter free • Office staff calm and helpful • Canteen orderly • Respectful teacher–student interactions • Respectful teacher–teacher interactions • Laughter/smiles • Students addressed by name	• Students in uniform • Litter free • Office staff calm and helpful • Canteen orderly • Respectful teacher–student interactions • Respectful teacher–teacher interactions • Laughter/smiles • Students addressed by name
Other (rival explanations)		

4.8.5.3 Summary of Case four Interview and Observational Data.

This school has a very structured approach to teaching and learning with an instructional model all staff are required to follow and a whole school focus on reading and literacy. The school equity funding has been used to provide small group instruction in reading for different groups of students depending on their reading level and to employ literacy experts for coaching and provision of professional development. All staff receive professional development in data analysis and are required to scaffold and differentiate curriculum materials with a particular focus on the needs of SARs. Students with very low reading skills are provided with decoding instruction in small groups. The classrooms observed were set up in a format allowing group work with the learning intentions prominent and visual literacy resources displayed. Student focus was high and there were many respectful interactions observed between teachers and students. The interview data from this school emphasised the very stable and structured features of this school and the high expectations the staff have of their students including SARs. This was reflected in the school grounds where students behaved respectfully to other students and teachers and moved into their classrooms in a calm and orderly manner at the end of breaks.

4.8.6 Observational Data: Attributes Common to all Cases.

Table 4.13 shows the attributes identified in the observational data common to all cases.

Table 4.14. Observational Data: Attributes Common to All Cases

Categories	Common Attributes All Cases

Classroom Practices	• Table groups • Student focus high • Classes calm and orderly
The Whole School Environment	• Students in uniform • Litter free • Office staff calm and helpful • Canteen orderly • Respectful teacher–student interactions • Respectful teacher–teacher interactions • Laughter/smiles • Students addressed by name

The classroom environments in each of the case study schools were calm and orderly with a high level of student focus. The table format allows for group work which is supported by the interview data with teachers describing differentiation of curriculum and scaffolding of individual student's learning. This type of mainstream classroom is most likely to support the SAR and the tuition they receive in the interventions. The whole school environment in each school was also ordered, calm and respectful, providing a safe environment, maximizing the possibility of the SAR developing their reading skills.

4.9 Summary of Interview and Observational Data for the Four Cases

Table 4.15 combines the attributes found to be common to the four cases in the interview and observational data. This table shows that the four schools had many common attributes. The leadership at each school used both policy and resources to support reading skill development. Whole-school plans (AIPs) had literacy goals and each teacher had literacy goals written into their PDPs. Significant finances were used to support programs, buy resources and employ literacy experts. These experts provided focussed in-school professional development on reading comprehension strategies and provided literacy coaching to individual staff.

The learning environment in each school's classrooms showed clear socio-cultural features with table groupings supporting discussion and social interaction. The same data sets, NAPLAN, PATr and data from conferencing and teacher judgement were used in each school to differentiate and scaffold learning, again practice in accord with socio-cultural principles. Reading conferencing provided individual support for students in each of the schools with the conversations around reading mediating learning. A wide range of reading strategies were employed in each school along with the Premier's Reading Challenge being a significant feature.

The literature reviewed on interventions identified multi-component interventions as most effective and this is what is apparent in these four schools. Phonics instruction combined with a wide range of reading strategies delivered to small groups of SARs was evident in each school. Age appropriate reading materials, assistance in text selection combined with reading conferences and the inclusive learning environment described above, combine to create the multi-component intervention most likely to meet the needs of SARs.

The Whole School Environment in each of the schools was very similar. Behaviour in the classrooms and grounds was seen to be very ordered and calm and the interactions observed between staff and students and between staff were respectful and indicative of an inclusive and focussed culture. These features of the four schools and the whole-school commitment to improving students' reading skills indicate the existence of a community of practice, an observation that will be explored in the following chapters.

Table 4.15. Interview and Observational Data: Attributes Common to the Four Cases

Categories	Interview Data: Attributes Common to the Four Cases
Leadership	- Supports literacy PD and programs with time and money - Equity money to fund experts, programs and PD - Literacy experts and leaders employed - Literacy goals written into AIPs and PDPs
Professional Learning	- Literacy coaches work with PLTs and individual staff - In-school literacy PD sessions each term - Training in reading comprehension strategies - Peer and expert coaching
Learning Environments	- Data used to establish needs - Reading conferencing and journals - Differentiation and scaffolding strategies - Use of wide range of reading strategies - Table groups - Student focus high - Classes calm and orderly
Literacy Interventions and Programs	- Literacy Interventions 7–9 - Premier's Reading Challenge - Low-level groups use phonics program - EAL experience used to develop programs and PD
Student Motivation	- Availability of appropriate books - Assistance choosing books - Whole school and teachers' focus on reading - Reading conferencing

	• Decoding delivered to small group
Testing and Data	• NAPLAN, PATr used to allocate students to reading groups • Reading Data used to inform learning environment.
Individualized Attention	• Decoding groups of 6–8 • Reading conferencing one-to-one • Individual support to choose appropriate books
The Whole School Environment	• Students in uniform • Litter free • Office staff calm and helpful • Canteen orderly • Respectful teacher–student interactions • Respectful teacher–teacher interactions • Laughter/smiles • Students addressed by name
Other (rival explanations)	

This chapter has presented the data from the four case study schools and linked it to categories identified in the literature review. In addition, the process through which the common attributes were identified has been illustrated. The next stage in the study involves providing further evidence for these findings. This takes the form of summaries that bring the voices of those interviewed into the narrative, providing situational, relational and interactional features to the data.

5. Analysis of Interview Material

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presented the interview and observational data from each of the four cases and identified features common to all four. These common features align with the categories identified in the literature review and they will be used to describe and analyse each category. These summaries provide insight into the people, processes and relationships in these case study schools. It is these processes and relationships that will build evidence to address the research question, 'What are the characteristics of schools, with high numbers of SARs, that leads them to achieve positive gains in student reading years 7-9?'

5.2 Leadership

5.2.1 Analysis of Interviews

A consistent finding across the cases was the principals' personal knowledge and commitment to the school's literacy programs and their acknowledgement of the importance of being actively involved and providing necessary resources.

> I was very involved with the Literate Practices program … from 2008 … supporting it financially and resourcing it. (C1ASPD5)

> 'I actually delivered some professional learning on literacy.' (C2JBPD10)

Similarly, the principal at Case four articulated the importance of literacy focussed leadership, acknowledging the efforts of principals at the school over a long period of time. This focus on literacy leadership is also articulated by the principal of Case three who sees the importance of personal literacy knowledge as well as establishing teams with a literacy focus.

> I have taken a strong leadership role in it (literacy) … we have got a history of principal class people being … and not just me … being committed to literacy development and literacy education in the school' (C4KDPD15).

> I have been very privileged in that I have been able to lead that (whole-school literacy approach), immerse myself in the learning that I needed to have and then create and establish teams and approaches. (C3KWPD21)

The principals in cases 2 and 4 believe that the school leader's role in supporting literacy is critical. Moreover, they believe that if the principal does not play a role in literacy leadership it may be an area overlooked.

> My research says that if the school's leaders don't play a role in that (literacy) and a significant role not much happens in the school. (C2JBPD11)

> 'I also think that literacy is one of those tricky areas in a school which can, unless somebody in leadership picks it up and supports leaders, it can very easily go unnoticed.' (C4KDPD12)

This theme of principals supporting literacy is described by the principals in cases 1 and 3 as the development of a culture that supports literacy. This involves very clear planning and goal setting processes around literacy, as well as high expectations for their students.

> We have mandated literacy goals … each teacher has a literacy goal in their PDP … it is culturally a college focus (C1ASPD10).

> As a leadership team, we have established a culture of the highest expectations. No excuses. In fact, these children here deserve the very best, and they deserve the very best teachers, and we will do everything possible to make sure that they achieve that success, in fact exceed their possible potential. (C3KWPD35)

These principals believe that a strong literacy culture is one reason why they have been successful with SARs. Other reasons provided by the principals of cases 1, 3 and 4 are: the existence of literacy strategies and programs that are supported financially; the training of teachers in targeted literacy approaches; coaching; and the provision of time for teachers to develop skills in teaching literacy.

> Across all that time we have had programs in place … so we have had a strategy. It's involved commitment on the timetable, financial commitment, training of teachers … and leadership … of the work. (C4KDP2D3)

> I believe that we have, through some very targeted literacy approaches supported our students. (C3KWP3D5)

> It is investment in staff in terms of the time that we give them to deal with literacy but there is also the investment and support in terms of professional learning and coaching. (C1PGPD10).

A comment about libraries came from the principal of Case four who personally organised a visit with me to see the result of their significant investment in bricks and mortar and in books. She saw the library as a critical factor in raising the profile of reading in the school and as a significant reason why they have had success with SARs over time.

I think we should not underestimate the impact of the library … the last the current and the previous librarians have been passionate teacher librarians … it's a space … that celebrates readers and it celebrates writers … it has raised the profile of readers in the school … and what it means to be a reader and the enjoyment of reading (C4KDPD26).

All the schools received 'equity funding' which is additional funding provided by the Victorian Government for schools with large numbers of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. These funds are seen by all the principals as an important resource that allows them to buy expensive reading resources; provide extra teachers at all levels; employ coaches; run smaller classes and provide teachers with the training they need to work with SARs.

Very fortunate to have what is called equity money because of our SFO (Student Family Occupation) with it being used buying thousands of dollars-worth of what are called Barrington-Stoke novels, that both willing and unwilling readers love to read (C1PGPD9).

How is your literacy program funded? Mainly through the equity funding … we were able to run extra teachers at every level. (C2JBPD16)

I think (we are) the school in the state that receives the most equity funding (C3KWPD22).

We funded that (Literate Practices and coaches) through use of equity money … I think it is money well spent, but it is a lot of money and you have to have the money to do it. So, the smaller class sizes, teacher training, leadership, that is where we have used a piece of our equity money. (C4KDPD25)

The literacy leaders provide additional information on the leadership of these four schools. They all acknowledged the support their principals provide for their literacy programs. This is evidenced by the number of literacy programs and the finances required to support them and by the principals' personal involvement and knowledge.

There is a lot of support (from administration) and you can see by the number of literacy programs that are running. (C1LGLLD19)

Literacy has been extremely well supported by management and by the teachers themselves. (C2JLL1D2)

It's (literacy) embraced by the majority of the teachers and the majority of the students and certainly financially I think it's been pretty well supported … not just by (current principal) but certainly by him and others. (C2JLL2D0)

I mean I really like the leadership here … Yeah … I mean it's probably just a matter of (principal) is highly involved … she just kind of knows what is going on at a kind of granular level, yeah, yeah. (C4LFLLD12)

We have a leadership team which affords staff time, time allowances to do it, budget, the ability to attend extensive professional learning. (C3TLLD27)

Two specific initiatives devised and supported by the leadership in the four schools are the provision of literacy coaches and the requirement to have literacy goals in teachers' personal development plans. Classroom teachers and literacy leaders specifically note the value of these initiatives.

I think we are pretty lucky in that we have access to three highly skilled consultants … and I have it built into my allotment to meet with those consultants which I think is just invaluable to have that time … it really shows that the school really takes literacy seriously and wants to upskill not just English teachers because you know our literacy focus is across the school. (C1ACTD7)

All my PDPs by the way reflect all the frameworks and routines that I have learned through the work of Jen, John and Jill' (pseudonyms for three coaches). (C1LCT2D4)

PDPs are also seen as important by a classroom teacher at Case two (C2ACTD34),

It's the making sure that our literacy focus has been embedded into our PDP structure … so not that it forces staff to focus on it, but it ensures staff are making it part of their teaching focus.

This teacher also notes,

We've always had several support literacy teachers as well so even back when we had the literacy champions (coaches) we had one person in the junior school on each campus who was a support teacher and they were usually primary trained so they could come in and really be intensive workers in our struggling literacy classes. (C2ACTD26)

Well we have had a number of specialised teachers coming in to teach us how to teach reading and it has been extremely beneficial. (C4RCTD1)

At the moment the reading coaches are a working group for the students and other literacy experts … what that does though, it empowers and upskills and builds the capacity of other staff to be able to handle it.' (literacy needs of students). This same literacy leader also comments on the school's planning processes, 'From an administrative perspective it (literacy) also goes into the school's strategic plan or it is an identified part of the school's AIP, so it's highlighted not just symbolically but structurally as a school priority. (C3TLLD28)

Literacy coaches supporting staff to meet literacy goals, required in their PDPs, linked to AIPs and Strategic Plans, are a feature in these four schools. These coaches work in the classrooms, demonstrating literacy strategies. They also observe teachers in their classrooms, provide feedback and participate in planning sessions.

These excerpts from the interviews provide a perspective on leadership in these schools from the principals, literacy leaders and teachers. Each of the main attributes identified for the leadership category: personal support, financial and policy support, planning and goalsetting and employment of experts are addressed. These attributes align with features identified in the literature reviewed on leadership (Section 2.5) that are most likely to support effective teaching and learning. The research indicated that to be truly effective the school organisation—staff, principals, parents and council—need to have: moral purpose; awareness of the complexity of the organisation; an understanding of the different dimensions of leadership; an understanding of change management; real distributed leadership; effective teams; a clear teaching and learning focus and constant evaluation of all aspects of the organisation. Of these eight features, the detailed descriptions provide evidence that the leaders of these schools understand the complexity of their organisations and have shared the responsibility for literacy leadership. They have also promoted effective teams, have a clear learning focus on literacy and constantly evaluate the effectiveness of their literacy programs with their staff. Data from the principals, who used terms such as, 'very involved', 'strong leadership role in literacy', 'a culture of highest expectations', 'commitment', 'involvement' all point towards a clear moral purpose, focussed on meeting the literacy needs of their students.

Finding 1. All the principals provided long-term personal and financial support for literacy, set literacy goals in school planning and employed literacy experts.

5.3 Literacy Interventions and Programs

5.3.1 Analysis of Interviews

This second finding is highlighted by all those interviewed with the literacy leaders having detailed knowledge of their schools' intervention programs. Each school runs specific reading programs, which include a phonics component for 'low-level readers' from years 7 to 9. In Case one a classroom teacher explains their literacy intervention, describing how it operates for all Year 7 and 8 students who are allocated to different sized groups depending on their reading ability.

> We have our Literate Practices Program which targets our years 7–8 students. It involves all the
> students at years 7–8, it runs four days a week for approx. 36 minutes a day in the morning. Students

are put into levels that are appropriate to where their test results say they are currently sitting in relation to their reading ability. They are put into levelled groups and there are four levels for the program from decoding to transition to comprehension and critical literacy. And then the size of those groups varies according to their level because students who are reading potentially from grade one-we have even had kids who are at prep level not even knowing basic sounds. So those groups in decoding are quite small maximum of six in a group (C1LMCTD1).

In Case two students are streamed into literacy classes for two lessons a week with primary trained support teachers while EAL classes use the THRASS program with its phonics component.

In the junior school (7–9) we have streamed literacy classes (twice a week) which have more of a focus on skill-based content and support teachers and they were usually primary trained, so they could come in and really be intensive workers in our struggling literacy classes. (C2ACTD2/26)

So, in EAL and at least in the EAL classes we do the THRASS system which has … decoding … phonics taught in it. (C2ACTD33)

Case three also has a decoding component in its intervention delivered to 6–7 students in each year level who have very low reading skills. This school identifies two levels or tiers of intervention with level one operating at the classroom level and level two involving targeted withdrawal in small groups.

As part of the learning interventions, we have several programs. So, obviously, we have Tier 1 or Level I where all teachers intervene where necessary, based on their, particular cohort in class, they've understood, they've engaged with the literacy data. They understand where every single one of their students is at, and they would differentiate the learning accordingly. That is what our expectation is. Level II or Tier 2 is our more intensive interventions and the ones that relate to literacy are we have decoding program for students, in some respects, like reading recovery but it is different, and it's a targeted and a withdrawal program, very intensive. Group size I think around about 6 or 7 students. Time intensive, but the impact is significant on those students. The problem for us is that, I suspect, there are far more than 6 or 7 students within each year level that need that sort of thing, the best decoding program. (C3KPD29)

These programs described above all have low-level students spending some time in small groups with a decoding program for those very low-level students. Of interest is the use of the terms Tier 1 and Tier 2 by the principal at Case three. This terminology is used in the RTI initiative in the USA and Tier 1 refers to reading support within the classroom while Tier 2 refers to small group interventions outside the mainstream classroom.

Case four, which adopted the same Literate Practices program as described in Case one above also has small groups and a phonics program.

So, we introduced Literate Practices, Carol Christensen's program at Year 7 about 10 years ago. The decoding component of this program continued until 2019. (C4KDPD4/19)

In years 8 and 9 there are small groups that run, who had kids who are identified as benefiting from extra support in reading and writing, and they have three periods a week.' and 'we've got the Individual Needs Department and yeah, you could talk to someone there … G, who is there does a really good job … She is running like a phonics program for very struggling readers… the SPELD (Specific Learning Difficulties) program. (C4LFLLD3/12)

Both the Literate Practices program and the SPELD program mentioned here involve a specific focus on phonics instruction.

The Premier's Reading Challenge (PRC) is another common program across the four cases. All four cases ran the program through their libraries during the course of the study.

The kids go into the library getting books out. The Premier's Reading Challenge. I think there is more of a culture now. Teachers are reading. (C1LBCTD28).

The PRC has a very large participation rate supported by the very enthusiastic librarian. (C2RLLD25)

I (past student now a teacher) do remember within my English class it was not … I wouldn't say mandatory but my teacher from what I remember, encouraged all of us to do the PRC … and it was this big thing, and everybody wanted to get involved in it because at the end of the year you got like little kind of certificate saying that you had completed it and the government had recognised your involvement in it. So, I remember that being a really big thing when I was growing up doing the Premier's Reading Challenge (C4ECTD5).

Last year we were told we were the school that had the most secondary students signed up for the PRC (C3MCTD5).

This PRC program focusses on Year 7–8 students although many in Year 9 participate. It involves students reading books from an extensive list and recording their progress. Certificates and prizes are presented to students who complete a designated number of books.

Many English teachers encourage students to participate with support from library staff. Adoption of this program in the manner described above indicates a strong commitment to promoting reading in the schools.

Another consistent theme across the cases is the link between EAL programs, teachers with EAL knowledge and the content and structure of the interventions. In Case three an experienced EAL teacher

runs workshops for all staff.

> There are … there have been literacy workshops as well that have been run throughout the school in terms of reading data, there are regular workshops around say reading and the PATr reading data (C3ACTD12).

In Case one, another experienced EAL teacher describes how the EAL teachers' role has changed from classroom support to a small group focus using EAL strategies.

> Teachers (EAL) used to work in the English classes years ago but now they work in smaller groups about 15. They work on the EAL continuum but with an English focus'(C1LGLLD29).

At Case two, the literacy leader describes how EAL students are taught separately in the literacy block while the other students are divided into three literacy levels with literacy teachers focussing on specific levels.

> We stream them (EAL students) into one group with one teacher who focusses on that skill set, and then we have low literacy, middle literacy, high literacy, and each of the literacy teachers are focussed on a particular level' (C2RLLD22).

Case four also provides instruction for low-level students in small groups, employing EAL strategies.

> For the kids who are, you know around two years below … so small groups for those students … looking at reading instruction coming through the English and EAL programs (C4KDPD7).

EAL teachers are trained in evaluating a student's literacy needs and then using strategies that address these needs. It is this capacity that is critical when working with SARs.

These excerpts from the interviews provide details of the interventions in each case. All have small groups, all operate from years 7 to 9, all employ EAL strategies and programs, all have a phonics component, and all are data driven as described in detail in Section 5.7. These characteristics of the interventions align with the multi-component features of effective interventions for SARs identified in the comprehensive review Section 2.3 and EAL strategies such as those described by Baker (2018) are clearly multi-component in nature. She argues that a common roadblock for EAL students when encountering a new text. is 'cognitive overload' (p. 38) and she suggests the use of visuals, images, summaries, verbal summation, scaffolding and explicit use of grammatical knowledge such as colour coding parts of speech in a text, to promote reading and writing skills.

Finding 2. All of the schools had ongoing interventions, years 7–9, that involved use of data, small groups, EAL strategies and a phonics component.

5.4 Professional Learning

5.4.1 Analysis of Interviews

Details of the employment and use of literacy coaches and experts has been discussed in the Leadership description above. A slightly different perspective comes from the principal at Case one who values the support of the coaches in providing literacy knowledge she does not possess.

> So that they have been very valuable in that (coaches support for reading). Cause I do not have the skill or knowledge to encourage people in how to teach kids how to read. (C1PGPD8)

This willingness of a leader to identify lack of knowledge in an area and employ experts to provide that knowledge, indicates an understanding of the importance of literacy and reading professional development. This focus on ongoing, in-school literacy PD has been a feature in each school. This is different from the common practice where teachers predominately go out of school to professional development programs and bring the information and ideas back into the school. While this does still occur, the model described in these schools involves coaches and expert staff working with teachers in classrooms and in PLTs. Reference to this is detailed in the description of Leadership features, above.

PD is a constant feature in the conversations voiced by all those interviewed. The principal at Case four describes a change in teacher literacy support to a coaching model which builds teacher capacity across the school.

> The extent to which the school has supported improved teacher practice in relation to the implementation of the policy (literacy) has changed, so through coaching for example. And so, in essence, really what we have done is we've just used it (equity money) to build our own capacity across the school rather than bring in one single approach. (C4KDPD2)

The principal from Case three also discusses capacity-building describing how they have employed literacy experts and provided time allowances for teachers in the school to become coaches and experts in literacy instruction.

> Bring in teachers, bring in expertise and giving teachers time allowances for instance to become reading coaches, to become our literacy coaches, to become our instructional coaches. (C3KWPD25/24)

The importance of coaching is also mentioned by a classroom teacher at Case two who understands the value of professional learning and coaches in developing staff confidence across disciplines.

And its staff confidence too you know. Once they attend a PLT (Professional Learning Team) they know that they have that extra help from the coaches to try these teaching strategies in their classes regardless of what their teaching method is. (C2ACTD34)

This theme of in-school PD is repeated in cases 1 and 2. Case two has a very clear PD policy which requires all teachers to complete at least 20 hours of in-school PD a term; most of which is literacy focussed.

We were required as a classroom teacher to participate in PD that was school-run, school-based, at least five times a term. So that would give you 20 hours of PD without having to step out of the school. (C2RCTD9)

In Case one a classroom teacher reflects on professional development since 2008 with planning time, regular meetings and in-school PD providing support in literacy.

Obviously, we have regular meetings, so they're sort of learning from other people and questioning at our Lit Prac. Meetings. I have done PD—school PD linked to vocabulary and writing and so on also when I was first here (2008) we had planning time in English—we had a lot of good discussions around issues linked with English but obviously it linked with literacy as well (C1LMCTD5).

Another classroom teacher at Case one vividly describes the transformative power of in-school PD in the form of coaching. This teacher moved from teaching at the senior level and had to adjust her mindset about the importance of teaching reading to 12–13, year-olds. The coach in the classroom and the in-school PD transformed this teacher's approach, when teaching SARs and all junior school students.

And it's quite amazing … I thought that independent reading this was just a way to get them to be quiet for 15 minutes at the time. And they were like – feel a bit guilty. Isn't it a bit lazy just to get them to shut up for 15, 20 minutes? I was so wrong. And then, started working with (coach) and she came into my classrooms and that just completely changed my approach and mindset, really looking at the importance of reading, why it is important. And we've had in-school sessions with that literacy team, so why is it important to start with? What is the research behind it? But then, looking at choose a role model with reading conferencing and, yeah, that was a massive game changer because I was coming into Year 7, dealing with oh, there doesn't seem like as many CATS but what am I meant to be teaching? How do I, actually teach reading? How the hell do I teach reading and writing? So that really broke it down, how do I do classroom management with 12, 13-year-olds? (C1LBCTD14).

A variation on the coaching model used in Case one was adopted at Case two. Case two used a train-the-trainer model for their development of reading skills in all their teachers. A large group of staff were trained in a specific reading program and were then allocated other staff members to work with.

This provided the reading information and strategies to every teacher in the school. So we trained a core group of staff. There were about 20 of us who did the eight-day training (Reading to Learn) program. And then we trained the rest of the school. (C2ACTD8)

The theme of the importance of in-school PD and the use of experts is repeated by a long-term teacher at Case four and by an experienced EAL teacher at Case three who runs literacy workshops in EAL reading strategies and data interpretation for all staff.

> The literacy programs have been the ones that people … have been here at school and they have all been by particular experts that come to the school. (C4RCTD6)

> There are … there have been literacy workshops as well that have been run throughout the school in terms of reading data, there are regular workshops around say reading and the PATr reading data. (C3ACTD12)

The literacy leader at Case three places these literacy workshops in context. They are part of a range of literacy initiatives, many involving collaboration with primary schools, that have shaped school practice. This literacy focussed school practice has been the result of professional learning over many years.

> … throughout the years there's been a significant amount of literacy, professional learning, whether it be through the number of TESOL (Teaching English To Speakers of Other Languages) courses or whether it be through a literacy program or 'The Best Of Both Worlds', which is looking at primary schools and collaborating with primary schools about how literacy is supported in a senior primary context and how they can be used in a junior secondary context … there's probably about 6 or 7 initiatives that the school has been participating in, and I guess what … that's all been then sort of in some way, shape or form, been filtered back to school practice. (C3TLLD30)

The data presented here indicates how those interviewed view professional learning in their schools. It is focussed, largely in-school, supported by experts/coaches in PLTs with direct links to AIPs and Whole-School Plans. This type of practice has support from two extensive reports, the first by Biancarosa and Snow's (2004) on middle and high school literacy and the second by Darling-Hammond (2017) on effective professional development practices. These reports are discussed in Section 6.4.2 and help explain why the case study schools have developed effective practices that support SARs.

Finding 3. All of the schools employed literacy experts and coaches and literacy professional development was predominantly in-school and ongoing.

5.5 Learning Environment

5.5.1 Analysis of Interviews

Participants in each of the four cases provided explicit explanations on use of data, reading conferencing, a focus on reading strategies and differentiating and scaffolding curriculum in their classrooms. Principals, literacy leaders and teachers were very specific on their attitude to and use of data to inform their practice. A classroom teacher at Case one comments on the importance of both statistical data such as ACER's PATr tests and her own judgements as a teacher. She also stresses the importance of being in control of the data.

> I'm a huge fan of ACER so my practices all begin with looking at data, so it is really embedded in my practice. When I look at data I say we work the data, we need teacher judgement. Don't let the data work you. (C1LBCTD3)

The importance of data is also commented on by a literacy leader and teacher at Case two. They comment on the availability of data through the school's data management system and how data is used to allocate students to skill-based literacy classes.

> You know they (the teachers) had data (PATR, ON Demand NAPLAN) which they could look at through the technology of the school system.' (C2RLLD13) and 'we stream (into skill-based literacy classes) the students according to that (PATr, SA Spelling). (C2ACTD3)

The PATr test and NAPLAN data is also used in Cases 3 where the literacy leader is trained in its use and uses it to diagnose students' needs with testing twice yearly.

> So, I have done the facts training around NAPLAN data and what it provides you so it can be very insightful. We use PATr for reading. We use their suite of diagnostic tests. Every student in the school does it twice a year. (C3TLLD14)

The same data is also provided to teachers at Case four, with the year level coordinators accessing and collating the data and providing it to all teachers.

> The Coords in each sub-school get the data and give it to the teachers- NAPLAN, PATr, On Demand. (C4LFLLD18)

A final simple comment summarises how the principal at Case three views the use of data.

> So, it is the use of student data to understand who your learners are both as people and as learners. (C3KPD9)

In this school, data refers to teacher judgements as well as the results of PATr and NAPLAN testing of the students. The principal sees multiple data sources as important in fully understanding students and their needs.

A feature in each of the case study schools was reading conferences. These involved the teacher working one-to-one with students listening to them read, discussing their understanding of the texts and making suggestions for future reading. Teachers in Case one were quite explicit about the importance of book selection, goal setting and running conferences with all their students.

> So, these are the things I explicitly teach: not to abandon texts; to find just right texts so that does not happen and read frequently and then they will conference with me and they have … every reading conference they leave with a reading goal. (C1ACTD4)

> I run ongoing conferences with my students in all English classes. (C1LBCTD6)

In Case two more detail is provided on conferencing. The teacher here sees the conference as an ongoing conversation with her students where she goes beyond just listening to them read. She is engaging them in the reading process and trying to understand why they might struggle to read.

> We do reading out aloud in class but then beyond that we have our reading conferences in our individual literacy classes and that's so that as individual teachers, we can monitor student progress, we could talk about what their interests are, what they like to read, what their struggles are with reading, and we can keep a track on how they're progressing (C2ACTD19).

Case three teachers also go beyond just listening to their students read. They focus on students' understanding what they read. They use reading logs to monitor comprehension and engage in conversations on what they need to do to improve

> …them actually reading to you and you try and get them to actually, you know, talk about their learning, talk about what they need to improve on. So, I suppose giving the kids more with their understanding of their reading' (C3KCTD5),

> So, what we do when we're conferencing, we're looking at the reading log, we're listening to the child read, so this is the reading coach when they go in, and we're looking at the reading log to see if the student is actually understanding what they are reading. (C3MCT8)

A Case four teacher acknowledges the pressure of conferencing with 25 students in a class.

> So, I ask the students after they have read, what goal they would like to concentrate on. The next time I hear a … I conference with them and I try to conference with them once a term because you have 25 students in the class. (C4RCT9)

The process used in this school involves teachers working on-to-one with a student for 10 minutes while the rest of the class is engaged in silent reading or some other self-directed task. Some teachers find this difficult to do regularly while others conference at least twice a term with all students with additional focus on SARs. All the teachers interviewed conducted reading conferences and acknowledged their importance when working with all students not just SARs.

Each school focusses on skilling staff in reading strategies with a focus on vocabulary and literacy training required to teach SARs. At Case one the material used in the literacy classes is produced by a group of literacy experts. Staff delivering the program have input into the materials development and support staff new to the program,

> Teachers who are in charge of Literate Practices, or that whole team, produce the programs and train other teachers, new staff and are there as mentors and guides for anyone who is new to the program. (C1LGLL21)

This program is highly structured with detailed lesson plans provided for each of the four levels. These plans include a wide range of literacy strategies ranging from decoding activities to visualisation to reciprocal teaching (Palinscar & Brown 1984) to higher order comprehension activities. Teachers have been provided with wheeled trolleys they leave at the literacy office at the end of each week. Lesson plans and support materials for the next week are placed in these trolleys and collected each Monday. Teachers then use this material in the intervention sessions. Regular planning and information sessions are also held with teachers from each level to gain feedback, discuss the materials and provide details on their delivery.

At Case two there has been an ongoing focus on literacy strategies such as reciprocal teaching and vocabulary development. THRASS (Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills) which has a strong phonics focus, is also used in their programs and informs teachers' learning environment:

> To start with (2008) we were focussing on reciprocal teaching and teaching and vocabulary strategies … THRASS as well, really focussing on core content vocab and the Reading to Learn program a few years later on. (C2ACT11)

Teachers at Case three are strongly influenced by EAL strategies as an experienced EAL teacher offers ongoing professional development for all teachers at the school.

> But what the school has provided through its EAL department and its traditional EAL department has been an ongoing sort of in-service skill program … that's more of an EAL based professional learning but it has been helpful to make some links to the students who have low literacy. (C3TLL6)

Professional development in literacy strategies is also seen as important at Case four where all teachers are trained in reading strategies and teaching subject specific vocabulary.

> So, what the school has done has asked all the teachers in all the methods to specifically help the students with their reading … making sure that they all understand the vocabulary that is specific for that particular subject. (C4RCT34)

Each of the four case schools has a focus on reading instruction, vocabulary building and a wide range of literacy activities across all subject areas. This aligns with the findings from the comprehensive review, Section 2.3, where multi-component interventions were identified as the most effective for SARs.

Differentiation and scaffolding of curriculum content to cater for SARs is a feature in each school. Every teacher, and some leaders, refer to the importance of starting from the level the student is at and one even mentions the ZPD. Case one teachers are very clear about their teaching practice. They know their students, they are flexible, they differentiate, they set goals with their students and promote a 'growth mind set',

> We are not really stuck in our ways so we are not afraid to try new things because at the end of the day it is about the kids and it is about maximising their outcomes and I think we as teachers have growth mind sets and we build that in to out teaching and we differentiate—we are highly skilled at differentiating for our kids and helping them to goal set and to improve. It doesn't matter what they come in with—what the most important thing is that they are growing. (C1AZCT9)

'Growth mind set' as it is used by the teacher here, refers to a focus on how far the student's skills and knowledge have developed, rather than a focus on their performance against a standard such as NAPLAN or the Australian Curriculum. The teacher is still aware of where the student 'sits' in relation to these standards but it is not a focus in the learning environment.

Classroom teachers from Case one are very clear on how they differentiate in their classrooms with different groups of students having different learning goals,

> On strategies- it is about like getting a picture of kids and then working out—is it that you need to break down task so that you can give them goals for what is reasonable to expect them to do—like the sequence of things—it is no use asking them to do six things at a level that they haven't learnt these steps to get them there-like having a little bit of more understanding of how you can go back to where they are at—that ZPD … So some of that is just like knowing how to group kids or knowing when to support kids or setting the classroom up so kids can be working at a certain pace while you are providing more assistance to others. (C1LMCT7)

> I think it is in incremental developmental, depending on where the students are at … I have got them in groups … could be six different groups … they've all got different goals now. (C1LBCT11/7)

Case two teachers have a team-teaching component in their practice which aids differentiation and allows time for teacher to modify work to meet students' needs.

This occurs in a program referred to as an Investigate Class where 70–80 students are taught in a large open plan area for four lessons a week with 3–4 staff. With low literacy groups additional staff are provided to modify work and provide individual assistance for low-level students.

> An Investigate Class that is then taught by three, as many as three or four teachers at one time, so we have a big open area. We teach sometimes as a group, a large group, and then at other times we break off into other breakout rooms where we actually teach as class sets. (C2RCT22)

In the Investigate classes work is modified to meet students' literacy needs.

> It would be the same core content, but it would be modified in several ways, so we would, modify the works so that it is more visual … the work expectation is less … the instructions are more simplified. (C2CTA31)

The Investigate Class model allows students to investigate subjects and ideas of personal interest. Many students work independently but those with low literacy are provided with support, often individually, to investigate their subject of choice. Observation of this program revealed four classes of students, at least 80 individuals, moving into many different groups, with some students in pairs or working alone. Five teachers worked across the groups. After the first few minutes a calm and orderly environment was created with teachers and students talking quietly in their groups.

Case three's leaders describe how their teachers have a student-centred approach and differentiate and adapt the material they present to students.

> But the success I think is definitely about the approach that our staff have is very much about making sure that you're reaching that student, and then very much differentiating or adapting what you do to get to that. (C3TLL43)

> The fact that we have a collaborative model where teachers can break the students up into smaller groups, and, dependent on the needs of the students and what they're trying to learn, they can really target and differentiate. (C3KP35)

These leaders' beliefs that their staff are individualising and differentiating their instruction are supported by a classroom teacher.

I think there is an awareness at the school that students are not all in the same place, and there's an acceptance of that, and a desire to move kids forward. In terms of understanding how to do that, I think teachers at the school have adopted strategies that help students to access the curriculum but then also then move, develop their literacy. The model is more and increasingly and we talked about this a lot over the last few weeks, one of, okay, where have you come in at? I'm absolutely responsible for moving you forward, and what needs to happen, and grapple then with that question. (C3ACT13)

This student focus and teachers taking a personal responsibility to develop their students is a constant theme across the four schools and is repeated by a Case four teacher who knows her students well and caters for their needs,

Naturally you know who is going to be struggling. You can just tell very quickly from what they are saying, from their work, and I'll try and give them a lot of individual attention so you can kind of group them I suppose. You can group students … I created a lot of my own worksheets … individual resources so I can see where to pitch things for them. (C4KCT6)

The importance of supporting students by understanding their levels of literacy and providing instruction at the students' level is clearly articulated by those interviewed in all cases. This feature of a learning environment means it is likely that students will be working at a level commensurate with their literacy and developmental levels. The importance of students working in their ZPD if they are to improve their literacy skills has been introduced in Section 2.6 and is discussed in detail in Section 6.4. and is an important consideration when trying to understand why these four schools have been successful with their SARs.

The second part of Finding 4 was that in 2018 each school had calm and ordered classrooms, set up in 'table group' like formats and a high level of student focus. This finding was the result of observing 9–12, Year 7–9 classes in each school, described in detail in Section 3.2. Principal, literacy leader and teacher interview statements corroborated these observations. Details of these observations for each school are included in the Focussed Classroom Observation Tables in Chapter 4. In all classes, students were sitting or moving in a controlled manner with a high level of student focus on task. These classroom observations also identified that classrooms in three schools were all in a 'table group' configuration, with 4–6 students around each table. The fourth school had a mandated set up which was a cross between table groups and rows with students in loose groups of four. The significance of table groupings and a calm and controlled environment will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6, but the table groupings do indicate the likelihood of a more student-centred practice, with learning being seen as a social process with talk mediating learning: this is in line with a socio-cultural view of learning.

Finding 4a. All of the teachers interviewed discussed a student focus; used data to identify SARs; used reading conferencing; and used scaffolding and differentiation strategies.

Finding 4b. In 2018 each school had calm and ordered classrooms, set up in 'table group' like formats and a high level of student focus.

5.6 Student Engagement

5.6.1 Analysis of Interviews

Links are made between reading conferences, book selection, programs delivered to small groups and engaging SARs. The reading conference process described above involves regular one-to-one interactions with students where their struggles with reading are directly addressed.

> Talking about what their interest are, what they like to read, what their struggles are with reading and we can keep a track of how they are progressing. (C2ACT19)

Similar comments are made by others interviewed with individual attention, relationships and knowing the students accounting for the success the schools have with SARs. At Case one the literacy leader demonstrates a deep understanding of the SAR and the need to develop an understanding of their needs and to constantly reward and encourage their efforts.

> So, the first thing you need to understand is that these students have very low confidence. They often have very well-established strategies to try and avoid doing the work. It's important that you establish a rapport with them, and that they have an understanding that you are committed to trying to help them. They also need someone who is interested in helping them find books that they're interested in, and trying to reengage them with books, and that whole idea of reading for pleasure. Rewarding them when they have finished a program and making sure that you're encouraging them the whole time. (C1LGLL13)

The literacy leader also notes the importance of SARs being in small groups where they can feel safe and take risks. However, the teacher's enthusiasm and passion for the task of engaging kids in reading is possibly of greater importance for student engagement and motivation.

> The important thing about working with groups of students with low literacy skills is that they're in a group – they're in small groups where they feel safe, where they can take risks. They often will be in classrooms of 25 students where they are not willing to do that. They don't want to be ridiculed or humiliated because they are well … they're behind and they know they're behind. I guess that that enthusiasm and passion that we all share and that idea that we have to … we continue improving

on what we're doing, we won't stop, [Laughter], finding ways of getting kids engaged and passionate about reading. (C1LGLL13/28)

In Case two pressure is constantly applied on students to get them to read. The team of teachers all repeat the same mantra that reading is important, but it is not just words. Students are individually helped to select appropriate books and constantly monitored in their reading.

So, from Year 7, the students come in and we tell them, you know, regularly, reading is important. You've got to read. Here you go, 10 minutes' reading. Come on, you're not reading. Why aren't you reading? Where is your book? Why don't you go and get a book? Let's go and get a book? So, it's not simply left as, you know, an expectation that you will read and therefore we leave it alone. The fact is that we've got a team – yeah, we give them the push. (C2RLL21)

The theme of knowing students well is repeated in Case three with the literacy leader believing their success with SARs, is largely due to the relationships the staff have with their students.

The success I think is definitely about the approach that our staff have is very much about making sure that you're reaching that student, and then very much differentiating or adapting what you do to get to that. And then, our teachers know our students really, really, well, really, well, and I think that then once you have that that's the first step. I'd probably say it's one of the major reasons for the success that we have. (C3TLL43)

Relationships again emerge in Case four, where a classroom teacher calms and puts her students at ease when reading.

We were also looking at how to conference but also not to make the student feel that I don't know I've been called up to read to the teacher and feel anxious about it but then but the first few things are just have a casual chat with the student about anything just so the student is calm. and I always try and make sure I know how the student is feeling and making sure the student is comfortable. (C4RCT8/24)

A classroom teacher at Case one places 'mindset and habits and attitudes' as a critical to SARs success. This teacher sees a student's mind set as a critical determinate of possible success and works to develop a positive mind set, then immerses them in the strategies they need to become better readers. The words motivation and engagement are not mentioned but they are implicit in her response.

So I guess the most important thing with kids who have low literacy is by the time we have reached them they have already made up their minds that they are not strong at literacy and they can speak meta cognitively about their inability to succeed in English which is the first thing we have got to do is a really strong focus on growth mindset here. All my kids own their data. I conference with

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them frequently and we look at their PATr data together. We talk about the most important thing-before you can get to reading strategies is habits and attitudes. That's where I start with my whole class habits and attitudes and make sure they are reading every night for half an hour that they are talking about their reading with people at home they are talking about their reading with students at class and that they are reading a just right text. (C1AZCT4)

This data categorised under the Engagement category, clearly includes references to relationships and motivation. Accordingly, this complex area and its influence on the performance of SARs, is carefully considered in Chapter 6.

Finding 5. Each school identified and focussed on SARs through specific interventions, individual attention, appropriate reading resources and scaffolding and differentiation in mainstream classes.

5.7 Testing and Data

5.7.1 Analysis of Interviews

Data on this category has been discussed in Learning Environment above. Each case uses at least three data sources to assess their students and plan their programs with all teachers aware of their students' level of achievement as indicated by the testing regimes (C1LBCTD3), (C2RLLLD13), (C3KPD9) and (C4LFLLD18). Teacher judgement is also mentioned as an important data source (C1BCTD3).

Finding 6. NAPLAN, PATr and other data sources were used in all four schools to test and allocate students to intervention groups and inform learning environment.

5.8 Individualized Attention

5.8.1 Analysis of Interviews

Data on this category has been considered in the discussion of individualized attention in the Engagement and Learning Environments categories above. All cases run small group classes for very low SARs and individualized attention in the form of reading conferences as described by teachers and leaders in each school.

The teachers quoted in the Engagement and Learning Environment sections specifically mention the importance of knowing the individual student. Having conversations with them about what they like to read is a common theme as is encouraging and rewarding students when they meet their reading goals.

Matching students to appropriate texts is also repeated and this requires focussed individualized attention. The importance of small groups where students can feel safe is another common theme. The creation of these small groups and introduction of reading conferencing also illustrates the leadership support for programs and resources that facilitate individualized attention.

Finding 7. All of the schools provide small group instruction for SARs and individual reading conferencing.

5.9 The Whole School Environment

5.9.1 Analysis of Interviews

Data for this category is derived from both the interview data and the observational data. While there were no specific questions on the whole school environment some relevant data did emerge from the interviews. Case four is seen as an established school with positive student-teacher relationships with few discipline problems.

> There's are a lot of staff who have been there for quite a while, so it is very grounded I suppose. You know it is not a new school. They're not up and coming. It's an established, strong network, a strong connected school. (C4KCT15)

An ex-student, now teacher at Case four commented on the school's culture from the perspective of a student at the school during the period of the study. She saw student-teacher relationships as a very important feature of the school and she also noted the lack of discipline issues.

> So, I think when I was in school this culture of developing a relationship with the kids has been massive. (C4ECT14)

Another teacher notes,

> We certainly don't have the discipline problems that the other schools have, so that makes a big difference. (C4KCT14)

The Case three principal sees the 'House' model, where 200–250 students from years 7–12 work in a single building, as a critical feature in connecting the students to the school and describes a culture of continual improvement and the highest possible expectations for their students.

> I think it's in our very construct of this school, I think it's the schools within school's model or the house model where, at a very large school, every child is deeply connected and understood both as

a learner and as a person, and it's that focus on every child as an individual. No matter where they start, we will ensure they flourish and achieve success. As a leadership team, we have established a culture of the highest expectations. No excuses. In fact, these children here deserve the very best, and they deserve the very best teachers, and we will do everything possible to make sure that they achieve that success, in fact exceed their possible potential … At this school we believe we can always do better, and we will continue to try. (C3KWP35)

Culture is also commented on in Case three along with camaraderie and teachers with a common sense of purpose. A literacy leader also sees the school as caring with an important place in the community

I guess we just—we've got a really great culture now where there is teacher support (for other teachers). (C2ACT35)

One of the things I would probably add is that I've worked in a number of different schools, and one of the things that has been enlightening for me is the feeling of camaraderie in the school. The teaching cohort here has a very strong sense of purpose. It has a sense of community. It's quite a caring community and, you know, it has a sense of its importance in the general community here of its role. (C2RLL23)

Enthusiasm, passion and diversity are commented on in Case one and the idea of continuous improvement is repeated. A particular focus here is the diversity of the student population and the need for the school to be progressive and try new things: 'growth mind set' is not just for students,

So, I guess – I guess that that enthusiasm and passion that we all share and that idea that we have to – we continue improving on what we're doing, we won't stop, [Laughter]. (C1LGLL28)

I think because we have such diverse kids, we have always been quite progressive in our teaching. We are not really stuck in our ways, so we are not afraid to try new things because at the end of the day it is about the kids and it is about maximising their outcomes and I think we as teachers have growth mind sets and we build that in to our teaching. (C1AZCT9)

Quotations from the field note summaries for each case describe a calm and ordered whole school environment.

Case one. 'This appears to be an ordered and calm environment'.

Case two. 'This initial impression of calm, order and a focus on relationships was reinforced at recess with a student joking with a teacher about his haircut, a number of students making way for a teacher with a trolley and three instances of teachers acknowledging each other as they passed in the grounds.'

Case three. 'Overall there is a feeling of purpose and order from the moment you enter the school's grounds. A long and evolving history of working with low literacy students has provided an environment in which they can flourish.'

Case four. 'Over three visits the school presented as very ordered and calm.'

These excerpts from field notes and the participant's descriptions of their schools provide a glimpse of the 'whole school environment' at each of these schools in 2018. The common attributes identified, in the whole school environments of all the cases, will be developed and explored in Chapter 6 along with the common attributes identified in the seven other conceptual categories.

Finding 8a. All those interviewed referred to a whole-school focus on literacy, the individual student and a calm and orderly environment in class and in the grounds.

Finding 8b. In 2018, students and staff in all four schools were seen to behave in a respectful, calm and orderly manner in well-maintained school grounds and showed a high level of focus in class.

5.10 Relationships Between the Findings

This section considers the possible relationships between the categories and divides the findings into two groups; those that are directly experienced by the SAR and those that influence the environment they experience. The SAR directly experiences five of the findings: the mainstream classroom, the intervention, testing and data, individual attention and the school environment they walk into each day. These are shown in green in Figure 5.1. Two of the other three findings, to do with leadership and professional learning, shown in blue in Figure 5.1, are not directly experienced by the SAR although their outcomes directly impact the SAR through the teachers' performance and attitudes and the overall environment produced by the leadership. Engagement is a complex area, as discussed in the literature review Section 2.4. It may or may not be achieved through a combination of the five findings students directly experience in the school and it is also almost definitely influenced by external factors such as community, family, relationships and the individual 'nature' of the SAR.

The relationship between these findings is explored through how they directly impact on the SAR. When the SAR enters the school each day, the 'Whole School Environment' in its physical and emotional reality, will influence how they approach learning. They are also directly impacted by each classroom they enter, the work they are required to do and the relationships they have with their peers and teacher(s). Any intervention where they are required to leave mainstream classes and work individually or in small groups is another direct experience as is the 'Individual Attention' received during reading conferences or when being assisted to choose and continue reading texts. In addition, all

students (unless exempted) are exposed to 'Testing and Data' in the form of NAPLAN and the other data sources used by all the classroom teachers interviewed.

The relationship between these five features is presented in Figure 5.1. This shows the Intervention, where SARs are spending up to 10% of their class time and receive some individual tuition or attention in small groups and the supportive learning environment where they spend 90% of their class time and receive some individual attention. The teaching and learning strategies in these forums are informed by data which is used by all the teachers and the leadership, to assess, monitor and promote student performance. This learning environment is supported by a calm, orderly and respectful whole school environment. These features were evident in each of the case study schools and in combination create an experience that is likely to be positive and desirable for the SAR.

Figure 5.1. Features of the Case Study Schools Successful with SARs
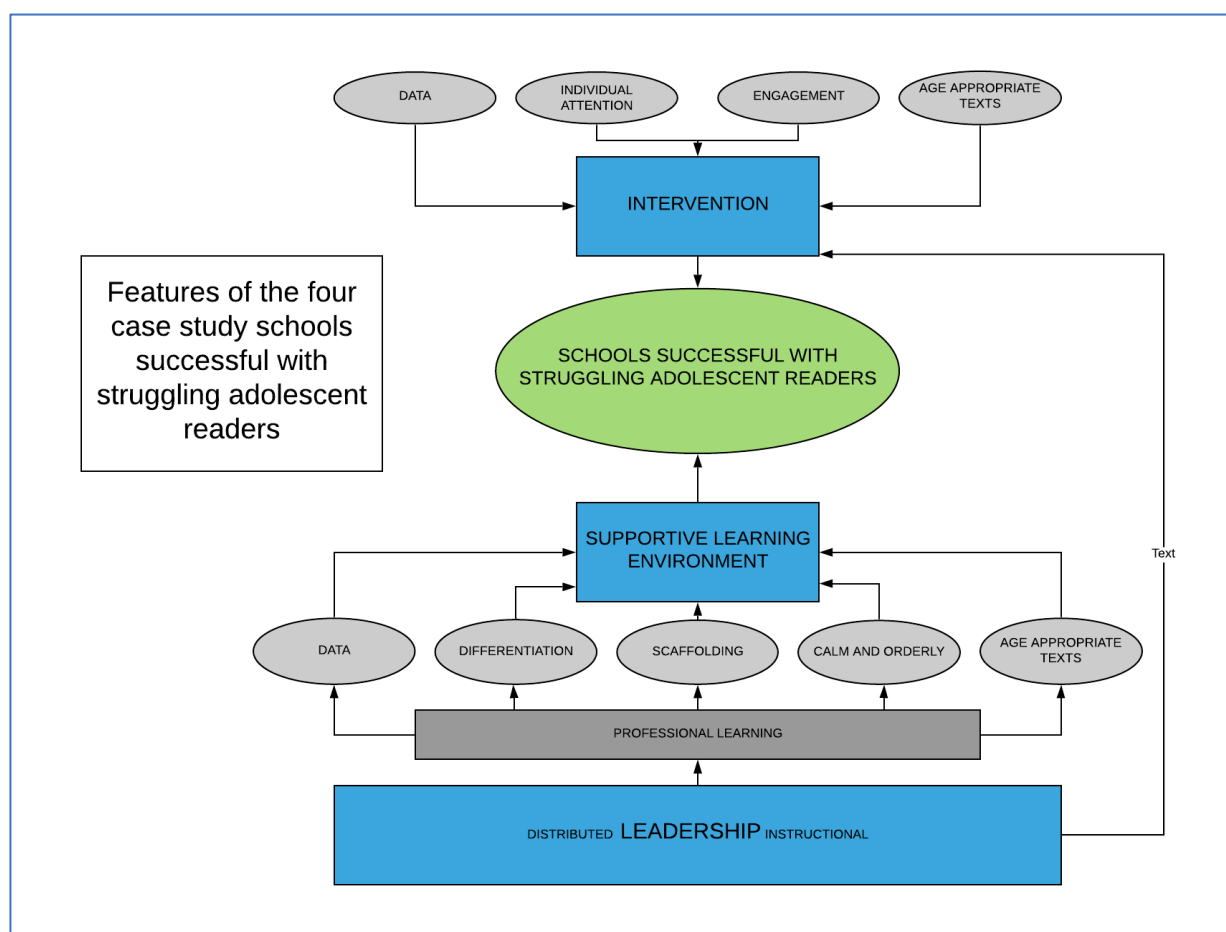
A possible explanation for why the case study schools have been successful with SARs is emerging from the eight findings. These findings have focussed on the SAR and what they experience in the schools. When the SAR enters one of these schools, they enter an inclusive, student focussed culture with the capacity to meet their literacy needs and an argument has been proposed that these schools have established a community of practice with a very high level of commitment from the school

community to improve the literacy outcomes for all students and SARs in particular. A consequence of this community of practice is that there is less likelihood that the SAR will reject the culture and will actively participate in learning, particularly in relation to reading. The concept of community of practice and its place in explaining the case study schools' success with SARs will be addressed in Chapter 6.

5.11 Chapter Summary

The eight findings of this study have been presented in this chapter. Each finding relates directly to a category although some data provides evidence for more than one category. A feature of these findings is the number of attributes common to all of the four case study schools: these are shown in Table 5.1 below. The insights that the findings give into each of these categories will help answer the research question, which is: What are the characteristics of schools, with high numbers of SARs, that lead them to achieve positive gains in student reading years 7-9?

Table 5.1. Research Question, Categories and Common Attributes (Findings)

Research Question	Categories	Common Attributes (Findings)
1.What are the characteristics of schools with high numbers of SARs, that leads them to achieve positive gains in student reading years 7-9?		
	Leadership	1. Personal and financial support -Goals -Coaches
	Literacy Interventions and Programs	2. 7–9 -Small groups -Decoding -EAL
	Professional Learning	3. Literacy Experts -In-school PD
	Individualized Attention	4. Small groups 7–9 -Reading conferencing -Book selection

	Learning Environment	5. Reading data
		-Reading conferencing
		-Differentiation & scaffolding
		-Table groups
	Testing and data	6. NAPLAN PATr
		-Provided and used
	Student Motivation	7. Age appropriate books
		-Reading conferencing
		-Small groups
		-Decoding
		-Reading strategies
	The Whole School Environment	8. Whole School literacy focus
		-Calm, orderly, respectful

Finding 1 showed that the leadership in all the schools provided direct support for reading interventions and a whole school focus on literacy, including goal setting, professional development and the employment of experts. This finding emerged from the interviews with all the principals being very specific about their roles in supporting literacy. All the literacy leaders and teachers corroborated the principals' claims.

The second finding identified very similar literacy interventions in all four schools. These involved use of data to identify student needs from years 7 to 9; tuition in small groups outside the main classroom and use of EAL and decoding strategies with some very low-level students. All those interviewed provided details of these interventions and all literacy leaders and most teachers participated in their delivery.

The third finding was that all of the schools employed literacy experts and conducted most professional learning in-school. The value of coaching in assisting teachers with addressing the needs of SARs was consistently mentioned by classroom teachers. In addition, principals promoted whole-school literacy professional learning, involving teachers from all disciplines.

The fourth finding was that there were very similar practices in the classrooms across the four schools. All the teachers used data to identify students' needs and monitor performance. All discussed a 'student focus' with reading conferencing, scaffolding and differentiation mentioned directly, along with a

variety of other literacy strategies. All classes in all of the schools currently use table-like groupings and were calm and orderly while being observed.

The fifth finding involves engagement and motivation of SARs. This finding makes assumptions that certain practices such as being in small groups, reading conferencing, scaffolding and differentiation in mainstream classrooms and direct attention with book selection will engage and motivate SARs. The term 'engagement' was only mentioned twice in the interviews and 'motivation' was not directly used by interviewees but terms such as 'student focus', 'growth mind set', 'rapport', 'feeling safe' and 'understanding SARs' needs' were constant themes. The assumptions underpinning this finding will be explored in Chapter 6.

The sixth finding was that all the schools use NAPLAN and PATr data, as well as additional data sources to identify students' needs and monitor performance. All teachers in the four schools were required to use data to inform their practice and the literacy leaders describe a deep understanding of data use.

The seventh finding is closely linked to the second finding on interventions and the fourth on learning environment. In both of these areas, SARs receive either individual attention in reading conferencing or specific tuition in small groups in the literacy interventions. Specific reference is made to the importance of small groups by teachers working in the interventions.

The final finding was that the whole school environment in all of the case schools was calm, orderly and respectful and had a long-term literacy focus. While this finding is largely based on recent observations there are many references in the interviews to long-term stability and focus on literacy in all of the schools.

Data has been provided showing that the learning environment and intervention are the two areas that are critical in explaining the case study school success with SARs. They are supported by testing and data, individual attention, a calm and orderly environment outside the classroom and by students who are engaged in their learning. However, the practices in the mainstream classrooms and in the interventions are directly influenced by the professional learning culture and expertise evident in the four schools. This has been identified as a culture of knowledge sharing around literacy and reading. This culture and practice has been supported and developed by literacy experts and coaches, but its very existence must be attributed to leadership: 'distributed', long-term with an instructional focus on reading. Each of the principals attested to their personal commitment to and direct involvement in improving the reading outcomes of the SARs in their schools.

This leadership style and focus has also contributed to the creation of the Whole School Environment which is much more than the physical space in the school grounds and the time students spend in it. It

is also the culture created by the myriad parts, people and processes, that make up a school. A case has been made that this involves a culture of sharing and a community of practice focussed on literacy and reading in particular, which provides foundational support for the Learning Environments and Interventions. The concept of community of practice has emerged from the data and is used in Chapter 6 along with the central tenets of Vygotsky's theory to further understand the four case-study schools' success with SARs.

The common attributes of the four case study schools have been identified in this chapter summary, but the relative importance of the attributes has not been addressed. To direct this discussion two questions are considered:

1. Are some attributes more important than others in explaining the success the case study schools have had with SARs?
2. Could the same results have been achieved if some attributes were not present?

These questions will be addressed from the perspective of the SAR and their daily experience of school life in the case study schools. It has already been noted that SARs spend less than 10% of their class time in Intervention: the other 90% being in mainstream classes. In addition, they spend at least 70 minutes in the school environment during recesses, lunch and before and after lesson time. An average school day is from 8:50 to 3:10—370 minutes—of which approximately 300 minutes is spent in class. More time is spent in the school grounds than in Intervention. On the basis of time spent it could be concluded that the mainstream classroom Learning Environment is the most important influence on SAR achievement, followed by 'the grounds' and then by participation in the intervention. The other categories, Individual Attention and Testing and Data would be directly experienced for relatively short periods of time. Data and Testing would involve the NAPLAN test over three days with some reference before the test and after the results and sitting for the PATr. Data from the schools did show teachers constantly using data and being quite explicit in how they used it with students, but it would still involve a relatively short period of time compared with the 300 minutes of class time each day. Individual attention was seen to be provided in reading conferencing and in the small groups in the intervention and possibly outside class time but again a small part of the SARs' experience in relation to time. Finally, the Whole School Environment. The 70 or more minutes SARs spend in the school grounds each day is only part of their experience of the Whole School Environment, an idea that will be expanded upon later in this section, but it is still a significant block of time where complex social interactions take place.

If time spent by the SAR in a school activity, is used as a measure of the importance of a category in contributing to the case study schools' success with SARs, then the classroom Learning Environment is by far the most important, followed by, time in grounds, Intervention, Individual Attention and

Testing and Data. However, the fallacy here is clear, particularly if a socio-cultural perspective on learning is focussed on the argument. According to Karpov (2003), Vygotsky (1978) 'viewed school instruction as the major avenue for mediated learning and therefore as the major contributor to children's development during the period of middle childhood' (p. 148) (the age of the SARs studied here). School instruction generally takes place in classrooms and is unlikely to occur in the informal, social environment of the school grounds. Students may learn many things in this social environment, but it is unlikely to involve direct development of their reading skills. However, time spent in a calm and orderly school grounds environment should make SARs more receptive to learning when they enter the classroom or intervention program.

If the SARs' experience in the school's grounds are relegated to having little influence on the case schools' reading performance with SARs, then Intervention, Testing and Data and Individual Attention move up the hierarchy, if one exists. Testing and Data and Individual Attention are experienced by the SAR, but it is usually within the context of the Classroom or Intervention. They contribute to the type of instruction provided and to the relationships developed between teacher and SAR but are just a part of the experience the SAR has in both these contexts. Therefore, Learning Environment and Intervention are seen as having the greatest potential impact on reading skill development for SARs. Leadership and Professional Learning however provide the foundation for the structures and practices in the Learning Environment and Intervention and are also seen as critical factors in explaining the schools' success with SARs.

6. Analysis and Discussion of Findings

6.1 Introduction

This study of schools achieving positive outcomes with SARs has followed the traditions of case study research. Bloomberg and Volpe contend that, 'data analysis strategies for case study research includes, analysing data through description of the case or cases, including themes and cross case themes and makes use of analytical categories to establish themes or patterns' (2012, p. 175). This describes the first stage of the analytical process used in this study.

This process has led to the identification of very similar patterns of practice, across the four case study schools with the type of intervention, learning environment and leadership, being identified as the critical features contributing to the schools' success with SARs. However, these critical features do not work in isolation and this study provides a holistic perspective on practices schools can consider if they are to enhance the prospects of their SARs.

In the comprehensive review of the literature Section 2.3 it was established that few instances of research exist on the SAR (Malmgren, 2009; Reutebuch, 2006; Roberts, 2013; Scammacca et al., 2007; Swanson, 1999; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012) and none of the 100 studies identified in the review focussed on the broad educational environments of the schools within which the interventions occurred. This research provides insights into this broad educational environment by analysing the relationship between, intervention, learning environment and leadership that make an intervention effective for SARs.

This relationship has been identified in the course of this research as constituting a community of practice, as defined by Wenger, McDermot and Snyder (2002).

> A community of practice is a unique combination of three fundamental elements: a domain of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a community or people who care about this domain; and the shared practice that they are developing to be effective in their domain. (p. 27)

Wenger's work has its origins in Vygotsky's earlier work (1978) and this chapter uses the three fundamental elements of a CoP, domain of knowledge, community and shared practices, to frame this discussion. In addition, the central tenets of Vygotsky's theory, described by Wang, Bruce and Hughes (2011) as mind, tools, zone of proximal development and community of practice are also used to explicate the findings. In turn these are supported by the theoretical work of Fullan on leadership, Luke and Freebody's on acquisition of reading skills and research into the seven correlates of effective schools, to better understand why the four case study schools have been successful in meeting the needs of their SARs.

6.2 Domain of Knowledge

6.2.1 Introduction.

According to Wenger (1998, p. 4) a community of practice incorporates the four components of learning: community, practice, meaning and identity and is based on four premises:

1. A central aspect of learning is that people are social beings.
2. Knowledge is about competence with respect to 'valued enterprises'.
3. Knowing is about active engagement in the world.
4. Meaning is ultimately what learning produces.

Wenger's second premise is that knowledge is about competence with respect to 'valued enterprises'. In the context of this study the 'valued enterprise' is supporting SARs and improving their performance and knowledge is about competence in providing this support. Wenger asserts that communities of practice can over time 'develop a unique perspective on their topic as well as a body of common knowledge, practices and approaches' (Wenger, 2000, p. 5). A unique perspective on the SAR has evolved in the case study schools combining an understanding of their needs with the knowledge, practices and approaches to meet them. Evidence for this assertion is found in the findings on leadership, interventions and the learning environment in the case study schools.

6.2.2 Knowledge and leadership.

Finding 1 showed that the leadership in all the schools provided direct support for reading interventions and a whole-school focus on literacy, including goal setting, professional development and the employment of experts. This support provided by the leadership produced environments whereby a domain of knowledge around the needs of the SAR evolved. The leadership also promoted shared practice which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Breen (2015, p. 15) argues that 'in developing a community of practice, the trainer or educator must let go of the reins and allow the creation to evolve in its own way, in its own direction, and at its own pace so that it can achieve a life of its own.' While it cannot be said that the four principals 'let go of the reins' they did loosen them and encouraged teachers to develop their knowledge of literacy and pursue their own interests, particularly in reference to SARs. All four principals in the case study schools communicated the need to improve the reading level of all students as critical. To this end they allocated personal time and extensive resources to address this need and created a literacy focussed culture, supported by staff. In doing so they assisted in the creation of the first pillar of a community of practice, a domain of knowledge around reading and literacy that addresses the needs of SARs.

Understanding the link between leadership, knowledge and the success these schools have had with SARs may lie in a socio-cultural perspective on how information becomes knowledge. Vygotsky argued that human cognitive development occurred through social interaction where human mental abilities emerge twice, 'first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the learner (intrapsychological)' (Vygotsky, 1978 p. 57). Brown and Duguid (2000) build on this idea and make the point that, 'Information becomes knowledge only through a social, i.e. interactive process'. Moreover, 'if social interaction converts information into knowledge then sustained interaction produces wisdom' (p. 47). The four case study schools have, under the leadership of 'instructional leaders', achieved a degree of wisdom in how they work with SARs. Each of the schools, assisted by the leadership, has acquired information on how to work with SARs. Over time, through complex social interactions, this has become knowledge across the school.

The interview data from the four principals identified their practice as both instructional and distributed. Instructional or educational leadership is defined by Fullan, Hill & Crevola (2006) as leadership which focusses on the use of assessment tools, data and personalised instruction combined with monitoring, managing and testing what works. In their discussion of school leadership, they observe that if schools are to progress towards creating expert instructional systems, certain systemic features need to be in place,

> To progress, especially in the early stages, the principal is key, along with at least one other internal change agent (…such as a literacy coordinator is essential for staying on focus.) Studies of effective schools have consistently drawn attention to the importance of strong educational leadership. (p. 95)

This closely describes the practice of the principals in the case study schools. They initially used data to identify SARs as a major issue and then worked with a literacy coordinator(s) to establish data driven practices to meet their needs. They were also very clear about the need to improve reading skills and supported staff in developing the literacy knowledge they required to work with SARs.

The strong educational leader, using the literacy coordinator as an internal change agent described above, is also an expression of distributed leadership. Fullan (2003) contends that you, 'can't get this (reform) from the center or from heroic leaders. You need energy and the fostering of energy all over the place-what is called distributed leadership' (p. 46). If energy and its fostering is a measure of distributed leadership, then that is the paradigm operating in the four case study schools. All of those interviewed, especially the literacy coordinators, exhibited energy and passion for the work they were doing with SARs and across the whole student body. They acknowledged the role of the principal in providing support in terms of resources and personal commitment to the literacy programs but also acknowledged the freedom they were given to explore and use their own initiative to acquire the

knowledge to address the needs of SARs. This freedom is a critical component in the evolution of a CoP in the case study schools.

The importance of leadership in creating an environment where knowledge develops and results in effective interventions for SARs is also supported by Biancarosa and Snow (2004) and Dempster et.al. (2017). Biancarosa and SnowfifteenDempster et.al. (2005) in their research on Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) in Australia, identified leadership practices that promote reading. In their discussion of the PALL program the concept of 'moral purpose' is discussed along with the characteristics of leadership that support literacy. The concept of moral purpose has been discussed in section 2.5 in relation to the PALLIC program and in Fullan's (2006) framework for leadership where it is one of the five themes in his leadership model. Dempster et al. (2005) define moral purpose as 'a focus on the improvement of children's reading' (p. 80) and argue that,

> Leadership work is not viewed as the role for a single leader but is instead viewed as work to be done by a collective, involving those in named positional roles as well as those with no formal leadership role. People are drawn to the collective through their interest in working to improve students' learning. (p. 80)

This discussion of leadership is describing the essential features of a community of practice where people collectively identify the 'work to be done', that is, the knowledge required to improve students' learning. Leaders who promote and support this type of practice in relation to literacy and reading in particular, have been found to be most effective. These two studies describe the type of leadership evident in the case study schools. The schools have developed a solid understanding of how to teach reading through the leadership provided by the principals, literacy leaders and teachers. A body of knowledge such as this is one of the features of a community of practice.

6.2.3 Knowledge and intervention.

The second finding identified very similar literacy interventions in all four schools. These involved use of data to identify student needs from years 7 to 9; tuition in small groups outside the main classroom and use of EAL and decoding strategies with some very low-level students. Intervention is one of the three areas identified as being critical in explaining the four schools' success with SARs. The case study schools all developed quite similar interventions independently, with programs delivered to small groupings of SARs, usually 6–8 students, for between 2 and 4 sessions a week. These sessions provided activities tailored to the needs of the students as determined by a range of diagnostic tests including NAPLAN and PATr. Students tested with very low reading skills were provided with decoding/ phonics instruction in small groups and activities focussed on fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, many

based on theory and practice from EAL programs. Each of these practices added to the knowledge base the schools developed to meet the needs of SARs.

Research into the RTI program in the USA provides some insight into the knowledge and practices that create effective interventions for SARs. Vaughn and Rogers (2007) in their discussion of the RTI contend that 'an essential component of successful RTI implementation is leadership that is knowledgeable and supportive of the development and implementation of secondary interventions.' (p. 42). They go on to define four features in schools that can support secondary interventions such as that required to improve the performance of SARs. They contend that the leadership needs to be: committed to prevention-oriented practices; they need to ensure that scientifically based research practices are implemented; ongoing professional development is promoted to assure knowledgeable personnel are implementing secondary interventions; and ongoing assessments need to be used to determine student progress and adjust instructional decisions. These features of successful secondary interventions identified in the USA are almost identical to those introduced by the leaders in the case study schools. The case study leaders showed commitment to prevention-oriented practices, in this case improving reading across the school. They used experts and data to inform practice. They committed significant resources to ongoing PD and used multiple forms of assessment to monitor and adjust instructional decisions. This type of practice aligns with a socio-cultural view of learning, in particular the concept of the ZPD. Vygotsky (1934/1987) discusses the significance of the ZPD in that it determines the lower and upper bounds of the zone within which instruction should be pitched. Using multiple forms of assessment to monitor and adjust instructional decisions, which is a feature in the case study schools, is aimed at determining these boundaries and is in line with Vygotsky's theory of the ZPD. Herein is another example of knowledge about teaching and learning, evident in the case study schools that support the SAR.

The features of the interventions: data driven, small group, use of decoding strategies and EAL practices will each be discussed with reference to research and theory. In addition, further consideration of the RTI program is a model that can provide insight into why the practices in the case study schools have been successful.

6.2.4 Knowledge and data.

The sixth finding was that knowledge gained from data is a critical component in the success of the interventions in the case study schools. Each of the schools described how the interventions evolved due to analysis of the reading data. In 2005, one case study school identified reading as the biggest impediment to VCE success, as 50% of students entering Year 7 were below the Year 7 level, as measured by NAPLAN. This data led to the intensive intervention that is still being employed at that school. Once identified as a problem, each of the schools developed a detailed process to identify

student reading levels when they entered the schools in Year 7. NAPLAN and PATr data were used by all of the schools but other testing tools such as TORC 3 and the South Australian Spelling Test were also employed. Teacher judgements based on classroom observations and reading conferences were also used to provide further information on student reading levels and rates of progress. This data were then used to allocate students to the appropriate level of intervention as well as to inform classroom teachers of the reading levels of their students. Ongoing testing regimes were employed by all of the schools to monitor student progress and adjust the level and type of intervention required.

Support for the summative and formative use of data as occurs in the case study schools is provided by Biancarosa and Snow (2004). They identified 15 elements of effective adolescent literacy programs and concluded that three of these, summative and formative assessments, along with professional learning, play a foundational role in any effective interventions for SARs. 'These elements should be seen as a non-negotiable foundation on which other elements should be built in order to address the wide range of problems that struggling middle and high school students experience' (p. 29). In addition, they argue substantial coordination of both formative and summative assessments is critical to the success of remediating adolescent literacy difficulties. They also argue that principals can promote this practice by setting clear expectations and ensuring that teachers are adequately trained in how to accurately select and administer appropriate assessments and to use such assessments to make data based instructional decisions. The principals in the four case study schools promoted this type of practice and it has contributed significantly to the knowledge base on the needs of SARs and how to address them.

6.2.5 Knowledge and individualized attention.

Finding 7 noted that SARs receive either individual attention in reading conferencing or specific tuition in small groups in the literacy interventions. The small groups in the interventions increase the likelihood of individual attention and there are one-to-one interactions provided in the process of reading conferencing. A socio-cultural view of learning provides insight into why these practices are effective for SARs and involves consideration of three of Vygotsky's constructs: mind, tools, the ZPD-including the 'more significant other' and instruction ahead of development. If it is accepted that knowledge is constructed socially through interaction and shared by individuals (Bryman, 2001) and that learning development is embedded within social events and occurs as a learner interacts with other people, objects, and events in the collaborative environment (Vygotsky, 1978), then an environment that provides this type of experience is most likely to facilitate learning. It is contended that the small groups and reading conferencing provide the SAR with an environment that is more likely to support their needs than the mainstream classroom. This occurs, as there is a greater possibility that the SAR will be working in an effective developmental zone if they are in small groups, have an expert teacher (more significant other) delivering a program that employs a range of 'tools' (expert instruction through language), that facilitate instruction, just ahead of the student's level of development (determined by

testing and teacher judgement).The teachers discussing these programs describe 'primary trained teachers working intensively' and 'teachers understanding every one of their students' needs', so not only is the content appropriate but the social environment is designed to support the SAR: while this does not ensure all students are working optimally, it greatly increases the chance of it occurring. Thus, the central tenets of Vygotsky's learning theory, supports the idea that small group interventions is important in explaining why the case study schools are successful with SARs.

The importance of individualized attention, working in the ZPD and the performance of SARs has been extended by Mercer (2008) into the Intermental Development Zone (IDZ). He describes it in these terms

> For a teacher to teach and a learner to learn, talk and joint activity must be used to create a shared communicative space, the IDZ, constructed from the resources of their common knowledge and shared purposes. In this intermental zone, which is reconstituted constantly as the dialogue continues, the teacher and learner(s) negotiate their way through the activity in which they are involved. My own metaphorical image of the IDZ is as a kind of bubble in which teacher and learner move through time. The IDZ thus represents the dynamic, reflexive maintenance of a purposeful, shared consciousness by a teacher and learner, focussed on the task at hand and dedicated to the objective of learning. (p. 38)

This definition describes a dynamic ZPD with the teacher focussed on the learner, modifying their language and tools to meet constantly changing 'understandings'. This process requires focussed dialogue between 'teacher and learner', implying a one-to-one conversation. Mercer also mentions 'teacher and learner(s)' which opens up the process to a group conversation but implicit is the idea of a 'shared communicative space'. It is contended that such a space is difficult to create in a mainstream classroom and is more likely to occur in the one-to-one or small group situations evident in the interventions in the case study schools. The questions, 'How often does a SAR need to be working in the IDZ for performance to improve?' and 'How many SARs can work in the IDZ with one teacher and still achieve improvement?' are rich areas to explore in future studies. At this point however, all that can be said with confidence is that the SARs in the case study schools do receive some individualized attention and do work in small groups for some of their tuition time. Learning is more likely to occur in these situations as the teacher can assess the student(s) level of development and adjust their instruction accordingly.

Research on individual and small group (SG) tuition, in improving reading outcomes, supports the theory discussed above and provides further evidence for why the programs operating in the case study schools are successful. Begeny, Levy and Field (2018) evaluated the existing research on using small group interventions to improve student reading fluency and found,

According to the authors of these studies, in the vast majority of cases the students responded as well to the SG condition as they did to one-on-one (not usually better), but this is still an important finding. It suggests that a large percentage of students should fair just as well with the less resource-intensive SG intervention that targets fluency as they would with a one-on-one intervention. (p. 57)

This finding is supported by Ledyard (2017) who found that, 'Participants identified small group instruction as the best possible instructional intervention to support constructivist learning for overage (students two years behind in reading) students' (p. 1). Research with Year 7 and 8 students failing in reading, found that reading interventions in groups of two to four students resulted in significantly higher scores than comparison groups. Linnenbrink-Garcia, Rogat and Koskey (2011) agreed with these findings but with the proviso that the students entered the small group environment with positive affect. They found that, 'Overall, this prior research suggests that positive affect should support social-behavioural engagement during small group work' (p. 42). Positive affect referred to students bringing a happy and calm demeanour to the small group situation and social-behavioural engagement was an indicator of positive outcomes. This research provides support for the effectiveness of small group interventions like those found in the case study schools and adds to the explanation for why these schools achieved positive gains in student reading years 7 to 9. This knowledge of the importance of small group interventions has been accepted and applied in the case study schools.

6.2.6 Knowledge and decoding.

The use of decoding practices was identified in Finding 2, as a feature of the interventions in all the case study schools. Decoding and phonics are two somewhat controversial terms in educational circles as attested to by Ilana Snyder in *The Literacy Wars (2008)* and it was in part, Victorian Department of Education and Training 'experts', criticism of the use of a decoding program with SARs, that led to this thesis: they argued that decoding programs involving specific instruction in phonics had no place in secondary schools. However, all of the case study schools used a phonics based decoding program or strategies, with very low SARs. This was employed after the students were assessed on a range of tests, including NAPLAN and PATr.

Data from the interviews showed support for the decoding/phonics programs with the principal at Case three opining, 'the problem for us is that, I suspect there are far more than 6 or 7 students within each year level that need that sort of thing, the best decoding program' (C3KPD29) and a teacher at Case one noting, 'we have even had kids who are at prep level not even knowing basic sounds. So those groups in decoding are quite small maximum of six in a group' (C1LMCTD1). These students are in small groups, working with a teacher who knows their level of development and has the appropriate 'tools' to meet their needs: one of which is the ability to provide instruction in decoding. This level of instruction is critical if the students are not at the level of attainment, whereby they can decode text with

some degree of automaticity. If students do not have the decoding skills that allow them to develop word-reading and comprehension strategies, the two 'problem areas' Compton et al. (2014) identify as contributing to reading disability (p. 57), then it is unlikely that they will improve their reading. The use of decoding instruction with these students should have them working at an appropriate level, where, according to Vygotsky, learning is likely to occur.

The literature on reading theory and research provides further insight into the use of decoding/phonics programs with SARs. Compton et al. (2014) in their paper, *Have We Forsaken Reading Theory in the Name of "Quick Fix" Interventions for Children With Reading Disability?,* argue that there are three major sub-groups of students with reading disability, 'Children with word-reading problems only, comprehension problems only, and mixed word-reading and comprehension problems'. (p. 57). They also contend that,

> We advocate for word reading interventions that promote advanced decoding skill and word identification development through explicit instruction in subword, orthographic–phonological connections in conjunction with equivalent additions of word-specific entries achieved through mastery word learning. (p. 68)

They warn against 'context-independent decoding instruction' (p. 68), an idea that is supported by Luke and Freebody (1999). Luke and Freebody's four resources model (1997, 1999) places reading in a socio-cultural context with the reader developing a set of resources or social practices around code breaking, text participation, text using and text analysis. This model focussed on struggling readers and notes the critical nature of 'code breaking'. Struggling readers need to be able to break the phonetic code but it should be embedded in and with the other three resources/social practices. The decoding intervention needs to be that which promotes the 'advanced decoding skills' advocated by Compton et al., discussed above.

The idea that struggling readers need to master code breaking–decoding skills is built upon by Paris (2005) and Gee (2004). They argue that constrained skills, such as alphabet and phonemic knowledge, need to be mastered because they are necessary but not sufficient for other reading skills to develop. While Alexander and Fox (2004) argue that the sub-skills, particularly those to do with phonemic knowledge and orthographic knowledge, recognised as underlying reading acquisition, may need to be explicitly taught, especially to struggling readers. These theorists acknowledge the need for students to attain phonemic and orthographic knowledge, but they also acknowledge it is not enough. The proficient reader also needs to be a text participant, user and analyst, according to the four resources model which underlies the view of reading acquisition employed in this study.

How does this theoretical knowledge position the finding that all of the case study schools employed decoding/phonics programs? First it should be noted that the decoding programs were delivered to small

groups of 5–6, for 2–4 sessions a week and the students participating in these programs were tested at reading ages from 6–8 (Grade Prep-2). In addition, these students were exposed to vocabulary development, fluency instruction and comprehension strategies in the interventions and in mainstream classes. So, in effect they were participating in, using and analysing texts as well as being assisted with code breaking. This idea of students being presented with all four elements of the Resources model aligns with Lamping's (2016) research who found that teachers who employed all aspects of the four resources model in their teaching with 'newly arrived' adolescents, achieved successful outcomes and the 'process was not linear, nor was it compartmentalized. Instead, it employed all four resources in a simultaneous relationship with the aesthetic experience and created a dynamic space for these readers' (p. 73). It has been illustrated that the use of instruction in decoding/phonics, with adolescents with very low reading skills, has some support in the literature (Alexander & Fox 2004, Brooks, 2013; Compton et al., 2014, Gee 2004, Luke & Freebody 1999, Paris 2005), with the qualification that the instruction is part of a holistic approach to the reading process and focusses on 'advanced decoding', not context-independent decoding strategies.

The case study schools have recognised the need to provide instruction in decoding to their very low-level readers. To meet this need they have acquired knowledge in that area from primary trained teachers and have employed programs such as THRASS and SPELD.

6.2.7 Knowledge and EAL strategies.

An aspect of the second finding was that each case study school employed some teachers with EAL experience to teach in their interventions and provide professional development for staff. These teachers are well versed in the needs of students who struggle to read in English and have many tools to address these needs, the most important being the students' first language. Eun (2015) comments that, 'Bilingual instruction as a psychological tool serves to bridge students' developing skills in the L2 (second language)with their already developed L1 (first language) linguistic system' (p. 621).While the SAR may not have a first language which can be used to mediate their development in English, a process strongly advocated by Vygotsky (1987), they do have some reading skills which can be built upon in a similar way to how the EAL teacher uses bilingual instruction with EAL students. The SAR has had at least seven years of failing to learn to read but it does not mean they do not have some capacity. EAL teachers generally have the capacity to identify students' needs, often with a deep understanding of decoding /phonics, and design programs to meet them: in effect they have the 'psychological tools' Vygotsky argued, that are essential to mediate a student's development.

Reference to Vygotsky's idea of 'psychological tools' can also help explain why EAL strategies have been successfully used to support SARs in the case study schools. Kim (2015) comments that, 'Based on the theoretical framework provided by Vygotsky and various socio-cultural researchers, it is argued

that the most important goal of contemporary education is equipping every student with psychological tools' (p. 615). EAL teachers have multiple tools based on the EAL framework that they can provide to the EAL student. These tools can be used, according to Powell and Kalina (2009) to mediate learning, and development, because of their potential to connect the developing functions and processes with the students' already developed system of knowledge, skills and understanding. EAL teachers possess the knowledge to determine the needs of adolescents acquiring reading skills and the psychological tools to meet these needs. This provides an explanation for why EAL practices were identified as important features in the interventions and why the interventions achieved improvement in SARs' reading outcomes.

Literature on EAL pedagogy helps explain why these practices were found to be effective for SARs in the case study schools. Rodrigues and Smith (2014) in their discussion of EAL pedagogy note.

> Not many of our students come to school using Standard Australian English. We believe it is important for language to be a real focus in our programs and that explicit teaching of language is important for all of our students not just EAL students. (p. 34)

The relevance of EAL strategies for all SARs is directly commented on by Miller (2014). 'The strategies used by the experienced EAL teacher in this case would also be helpful for teachers who lack specialist literacy or EAL training' (p. 44). Taplin (2017) builds on this argument, 'The strategies that assist EAL student learning are beneficial for all students. This article will offer some strategies to help you in the EAL classroom while supporting all students into better learning' (p. 44). This paper, addressed to new EAL teachers, notes that the strategies they use in EAL classes are beneficial for all students and provides support for the use of these strategies with SARs.

Nine teachers, an EAL specialist and the principal in a successful multicultural school were interviewed by Premier and Parr (2019). They found that,

> Distinctive features of the stories reported here, include: high levels of support for teachers that facilitated collaboration in their teaching and professional learning; informed use of EAL strategies that met the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students; and a vibrant community of practice which supported and enriched teachers' everyday classroom and staffroom practices. (p. 66)

One of the teachers in this study commented on 'the challenges' of meeting the literacy needs of particular EAL students, which helped to make her 'a better teacher' for all students' (p. 66). The demands of EAL students require EAL teachers to develop a set of skills that are directly applicable to all students who struggle with their reading. Consequently, the presence of EAL teachers in schools successfully intervening with SARs is understandable. Of interest here is Premier and Parr's description

of the school as a 'vibrant community of practice which supported and enriched teachers' everyday classroom and staffroom practice'. The researchers saw community of practice as the foundation for the teaching and social interactions that create a successful school. This observation lends support for the contention that the success the case study schools have had with SARs is, at least in part, due to the EAL knowledge base that has been extended to be used with SARs.

The Victorian Department of Education and Training (VDET) produces *The EAL Handbook* (2019) which provides detailed advice on how to support EAL students. The excerpt from the handbook below may help explain why there is reference to the influence of EAL teachers and strategies in all of the case study schools:

> Classroom teachers must understand and be equipped to meet the educational needs of their EAL learners.
>
> Schools should therefore consider the following:
>
> - a whole-school approach to EAL programming and provision, including EAL policy development
> - the development of a specialist EAL program
> - the ways in which EAL needs in mainstream classrooms are met
> - the professional learning (PL) needs of staff. (p. 5)

This policy document describes a whole-school approach, specialist programs (interventions), support in mainstream classrooms and providing staff with professional learning, all of which are themes that have emerged from the case study schools in relation to SARs. If the acronym EAL was replaced with SAR, and the sections relating to first languages were omitted or modified, then there might be the basis for a policy that all schools with SARs could adopt. This idea will be revisited in Chapter 7.

6.2.8 Knowledge and the RTI program.

Another perspective on the interventions in the case study schools is provided by the RTI program introduced in the United States in 2004. Zirkel (2018) summarises the program.

> DEOSEP (Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs), has repeatedly recited four distinguishing core characteristics of RTI: (a) high quality, research-based instruction in general education, (b) continuous progress monitoring, (c) screening for academic and behaviour problems, and (d) multiple tiers of progressively more intense instruction. (p. 113)

Point (d) is of specific interest as the RTI program designates three tiers of intervention. Tier 1 is the 'mainstream' classroom. Tier 2 is for students tested and deemed unlikely to succeed with just Tier 1

support. Tier 3 is for students who do not respond to Tier 2 support and involves individual and more intensive intervention. On the surface this appears to be a very logical, evidence-based approach that should have system wide impact as it was mandated practice. Zirkel (2018) notes, 'Unlike differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, and other areas that are entirely a matter of professional discretion, RTI is one of the legalized areas of current educational practice' (p. 117). As would be expected of such a significant reform it has received widespread academic focus and review (Douglas & Frey, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; Fuchs, Fuchs & Compton, 2010; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Mesmer & Mesmer, 2011; Dougherty & Stahl, 2016; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2010; Zirkel, 2018) and the results are mixed at best but they do provide insights into the success of the four case study schools.

Fuchs, Fuchs and Compton (2010) reviewed the RTI program in 2010 and describe disappointing outcomes particularly at the middle school and high school levels.

> Nevertheless, the results of the researchers' more substantial and more carefully designed Tier 2 intervention are sobering and, in this commentary, we consider why differences between elementary versus middle and high school settings may require an alternative conceptualization of RTI at the higher grades. (p. 21)

Stahl 2016 supports this sentiment with her ominously titled 'RTI: Is the Sky Falling?', where she is highly critical of aspects of the program and the methods used to assess it. Fuchs and Fuchs 2017 support these criticisms with, 'Their regression-discontinuity analysis showed that first-grade children designated for more intensive intervention in the 146 study schools performed significantly worse than children not designated for it' (p. 255). Despite these results, Dougherty and Stahl do believe the program can be effective. 'Let's use the information acquired from the evaluation of RTI to continue to refine tiered intervention for children who need the most help to become proficient readers' (p. 663). Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) do, however, want the tiers reviewed and the valuable knowledge developed through the program to be refined and built upon. These comments indicate that 'valuable knowledge' is not enough in itself to ensure the success of an intervention. Dougherty and Stahl (2016) also note that 'schools need to make the maximum use of internal human resources' (p. 661) if a cohesive RTI infrastructure is to develop. Knowledge about how to intervene with SARs is critical but the RTI program shows that if it is not supported by community and shared practice-maximum use of human resources-it is unlikely to be effective: this idea is developed further in Section 6.4.3.

6.2.9 Summary.

The first fundamental element of a CoP is domain of knowledge, which is defined in this study as 'competence in providing support for SARs'. This discussion has demonstrated that the case study schools have developed a wide range of skills and practices that support the SAR. This knowledge acquisition has been supported by leadership providing direction but also allowing literacy leaders and

teachers freedom to explore and develop their own strategies to meet the needs of SARs. This has occurred at all levels across the schools and includes the interventions, strategic use of data, individualized attention, decoding programs, use of EAL strategies. In addition, the RTI program illustrated that knowledge alone is not enough for effective practice to occur. The next section discusses the role of community in explaining case study schools' success with SARs.

6.3 Community

6.3.1 Introduction.

The community component of CoP has been the most difficult to both define and identify. The definition used here, 'a community or people who care about a domain of knowledge' was not specifically addressed in the data collection but all those interviewed did describe practices and attitudes that showed they cared about SARs and the knowledge required to meet their needs. This idea of community is explored with a focus on student engagement and motivation and teaching and leadership practices in the four case study schools. If a students' needs are met, they are more likely to be engaged. Engaged students are more likely to be motivated and to feel they are with people who care and therefore see themselves as part of a community. The RTI program, in the USA, is also discussed in this analysis in relation to interventions and the importance of supportive whole school environments.

6.3.2 Community engagement and motivation.

The fifth finding involves engagement and motivation of SARs. This finding makes assumptions that certain practices such as being in small groups, reading conferencing, scaffolding and differentiation in mainstream classrooms and direct attention with book selection will engage and motivate SARs. Moreover, this engagement will play a part in making the SAR feel part of a community that cares for their needs. This is of particular relevance for SARs who have most likely experienced six years of frustration with reading and are unlikely to be motivated to learn.

The idea of motivation to learn and the concepts of engagement and motivation themselves, are complex and contested, particularly where they pertain to those who struggle to read. Addressing this area and the relevant findings is particularly difficult, as making a judgement on the efforts the schools have made to engage and motivate SARs, presupposes a clear idea of what motivation and engagement is for SARs. These concepts and the difficulty with their definition and application to the performance of SARs is discussed in detail in the literature review, Section 2.4. and will not be canvassed here, but two comments by Klanda & Guthrie (2015) illustrate the issue, 'it is of particular concern that current theories may not apply fully to struggling readers' (p. 240) and furthermore, 'motivation and engagement may not facilitate achievement as readily for low-achievers as for other students' (p. 267). This analysis will try to avoid this debate by focussing on aspects of the literature around engagement

that recognise practices that improve the performance of SARs. If these practices are evident in the case study schools, then it can be argued that the schools are making an effort to engage SARs: the question of motivation is more difficult to determine.

A very practical framework for making judgements about whether the case study schools engage and motivate their SARs is provided by Guthrie and Humenick (2004). They identified four features that are critical to increasing and maintaining students' motivation to read: (1) providing interesting content goals for reading; (2) supporting student autonomy; (3) providing interesting texts and (4) increasing social interactions among students related to reading. These four features are broadly supported by Piazza (2012) who found that three themes emerged from their most successful literacy engagements: relevant text selection, motivation and engagement, and building relationships. Samson and Lesaux (2009) support and add to this list contending that a motivating learning environment is one where 'students receive age appropriate supports to access rigorous, thought provoking content and see evidence of their own progress' (p. 239).

Synthesising the findings of Guthrie and Humenick (2004), Lesaux (2009) and Piazza (2012) produces five features deemed to support SARs in improving their reading. These features have been shown to be effective in literacy engagements and by avoiding the terms engagement and motivation a clearer picture may emerge. These five features: 1. providing specific goals for reading which allow students to see their own progress; 2. providing interesting relevant and thought-provoking texts; 3. supporting student autonomy in reading; 4. age appropriate support to choose thought-provoking content and 5. social interactions that build relationships around reading, provide a framework for analysing Finding 5.

This fifth feature makes assumptions that certain practices, such as being in small groups, reading conferencing, scaffolding and differentiation in mainstream classrooms and direct attention with book selection will engage and motivate SARs. These assumptions will be tested against the five-point framework identified above.

The first feature of the framework is providing specific goals for reading which allow students to see their own progress. Data from the four case study schools provides strong evidence that this feature is evident in each school. 'Every reading conference they leave with a reading goal' (C1ACTD4); 'we have our reading conferences in our individual literacy classes and that's so that as individual teachers, we can monitor student progress' (C2ACTD19); 'them actually reading to you and you try and get them to actually, you know, talk about their learning, talk about what they need to improve on' (C3KCTD5); 'so, what we do when we're conferencing, we're looking at the reading log' (C3MCT8) and 'I ask the students after they have read, what goal they would like to concentrate on' (C4RCT9).

The second, third and fourth feature of the framework: providing interesting relevant and thought-provoking texts; supporting student autonomy in reading and providing age appropriate support to

choose thought-provoking content, are all evident in all of the case study schools. Each school was very clear on the importance of age appropriate, high interest level texts and providing students with assistance in choosing them. All of the schools had a large range of age appropriate texts often referred to as 'skinny reads'. The principal at case study one notes that equity money was used, 'buying thousands of dollars-worth of what are called Barrington-Stoke novels, that both willing and unwilling readers love to read' (C1PGPD9). Similar resources were used by all of the schools with teachers and librarians actively assisting students in book selection. A teacher at case study one describes her processes clearly, 'So, these are the things I explicitly teach: not to abandon texts; to find just right texts so that does not happen' (C1ACTD4). A teacher at case study four describes the pressure exerted on students 'Why aren't you reading? Where is your book? Why don't you go and get a book? Let's go and get a book' (C2RLL21): similar processes are described by most of the teachers interviewed.

The idea of 'age appropriate texts' for SARs discussed above requires clarification, as what constitutes age appropriate texts has been an area of debate in academic literature. Fisher and Frey (2014) and Shanahan (2011) advocated instructing students at their frustration level which involves 85% decoding efficiency while Allington (2013) and Fountas and Pinnell (2006) supported students working with texts at their instructional and independent levels which involves 95% decoding efficiency. This debate concerning the reading level that is most favourable for reading instruction is largely resolved as both groups advocate the use of scaffolding and repeat readings when texts are at a student's frustration level. In addition, it is acknowledged that different types of texts required different levels of decoding for comprehension to occur with instructional texts requiring a higher level than narratives. The real issue here is encapsulated by Hastings (2012) who argues that inflexible, levelled reading practices using texts at instructional or independent level can result with, 'some readers with decoding issues progress through school lacking opportunities to engage with challenging text appropriate to their age and cognitive level' (p. 65). This is not the situation in the case study schools as 'age appropriate texts' in their context refers to levelled texts which are appropriate to the SARs' age and cognitive level and therefore are chosen by the students as they can read, be challenged and enjoy them independently.

The final feature of the framework, 'social interactions that build relationships around reading' are provided by the schools in at least two ways. The reading conferences build relationships between individual students and their teachers with many examples of this provided in the detailed description of student engagement, Section 5.6. In the interventions, particularly with students in the small, low-level groups, there is a focus on reading together. The literacy leader focusses on the importance of relationships around reading with her observations on reading with SARs.

> The important thing about working with groups of students with low literacy skills is that they're in a group … they're in small groups where they feel safe, where they can take risks. They don't

want to be ridiculed or humiliated because they are well – they're behind and they know they're behind. (C1LGLL13/28)

This comment encapsulates the importance of building relationships with SARs, a constant theme across the case study schools and an important feature in any community.

This analysis of the five features deemed to support SARs indicates that the case study schools do have structures, resources and practices in place that will support SARs in improving their reading skills. Appropriate reading materials, assistance in choosing them and reading them, all within an environment that builds relationships around reading are apparent in each of the schools.

The second part of Finding 5 was that reading conferencing, scaffolding and differentiation were a feature of mainstream classes in each case study school. Here the assumption is made that these processes will increase the likelihood of students engaging in mainstream class activities. This assumption can be tested through consideration of Vygotsky's views on effective instruction. 'The only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it: it must be aimed not so much at the ripe but the ripening functions' (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 188). Instructing in this way requires tasks that are accessible to students, with the teacher (more significant other) mediating the activity through dialogue (tool). Differentiation means the task has been modified to be just ahead of the student's level of understanding while scaffolding is the tool or tools the teacher employs to assist the student in developing their understanding. Hausfather (1996), in his discussion of socio-cultural theory and the creation of zones of proximal development in classrooms, argues that scaffolding is critical to the learning process in the ZPD and that it can motivate the child to focus on their learning

> Scaffolding is a metaphor with the potential to redefine teachers' roles in the classroom. Scaffolding is creating supported situations where children can extend their current skills and knowledge. It involves recruiting a child's interest, simplifying a task so it is manageable, and motivating the child to maintain their pursuit of the goal. (p. 6)

It follows, that if scaffolding is evident in a classroom then it is more likely that the student will be motivated in the manner referred to by Hausfather. The following voices of teachers provide strong evidence that this is the situation in the case study schools. 'We are highly skilled at differentiating for our kids and helping them to goal set and to improve' (C1AZCT9). 'It would be the same core content, but it would be modified in several ways, so we would, modify the works so that it is more visual … the work expectation is less … the instructions are more simplified '(C2CTA31). The approach that our staff have is very much about making sure that you're reaching that student, and then very much differentiating or adapting what you do to get to that '(C3TLL43). 'You can group students … I created a lot of my own worksheets … individual resources so I can see where to pitch things for them'

(C4KCT6). Implicit in the process of scaffolding and differentiation is caring about students' needs and caring people are the community in the CoP.

In the literature review it was posited that creating an environment where SARs are motivated and engaged in ways that can improve their reading performance may involve: student choice of text; identifying the unique literacy needs and interests of each group of students; sharing responsibility for learning and providing ongoing evidence of progress. An argument has been made that the case study schools have created environments, that promote positive attitudes to learning, that engage and motivate their SARs. The SARs are entering an environment where they feel cared for and will be in a learning situation that caters for their needs-they are part of a community.

6.3.3 Community and the RTI program.

The RTI program in the USA provides valuable insight into the importance of community in supporting effective interventions. While the systemic data on RTI is underwhelming there are case studies of the program showing strong outcomes. Douglas and Frey (2011) carried out a two-year study of Carver High School, a small (444) Year 9–12 school. The results in this school showed improvement on all measures which accelerated over the period of the study. While the results were impressive it is the whole-school processes and practices which are of most interest for this study. This summary by Douglas and Frey (2011) has direct relevance to the findings from the case study schools.

> The instructional framework served as an overarching guarantee that students had access to quality teaching in the first place. We question whether the successes at Carver could have been realized had the faculty been fractured or disinterested in collaboration. This is an important point that deserves additional research attention. When secondary schools are places where teachers engage in professional learning communities or other systems of collaboration, RTI is likely to be easier to implement. (p. 111)

This school has a clear instructional framework that guaranteed high-quality teaching in mainstream classrooms. It had strong leadership supporting a whole school, collaborative focus on the intervention supported by a professional learning community. This sounds very similar to the processes and practices in the case study schools and supports the contention that the leadership and the learning environment within which an intervention is placed, is critical to the intervention's success. In this study Douglas and Frey also noted,

> As a future study, we would like to examine the implementation of RTI in a high school that has been resistive to change and where teachers do not have a history of cooperation. The present study presents what is possible in one type of school, and data are needed on a variety of different types of schools. (p. 111)

This is one possible area for future research that would complement this case study.

The mandated RTI program in the USA provides considerable support for the proposition that a whole-school approach is required if schools are to maximise the possibilities of an intervention program. Collaborative, sharing, professional learning communities creating learning environments responsive to the needs of SARs, seem likely to be critical to an intervention's success. However, these features cannot be mandated and are the product of instructional leadership at all levels in the school. Imposing a reform on a school, even if the principal is receptive, is not a recipe for success. All of the school community need to be committed and have the capacity to accept the intervention, as indicated by the results of this study and Douglas and Frey's work, if it is to be effective. The idea of mandating a reform, as occurred in the USA with RTI is open to question. According to The Balanced Leadership Framework outlined by Waters and Cameron (2008) if a change is second order change, as the RTI would be for many school communities, as it involves a break with the past, is outside existing paradigms, conflicts with prevailing values and norms and requires new knowledge and skills to implement, then it is highly unlikely to be successfully implemented, as has been the case in many schools in the USA. Interventions are more likely to be successful if the case for change is made and understood prior to mandating its implementation. The four case study schools in this study implemented their successful interventions in response to a need perceived by a community of people who cared about the reading performance of their students.

6.3.4 Summary.

The state of mind with which a student enters a learning environment is a critical determinant of whether learning will take place. A calm, orderly, respectful environment with a literacy focus, supportive and addressing the needs of the SAR (Finding 9) is likely to be one that maximises the possibility of the SAR engaging in learning. The data presented in Chapter 5 strongly indicated that all those interviewed cared about the SAR and improving their performance. Caring environments existed in each case study school. Caring environments in this sense refers not just to safe, calm, caring environments but to environments which recognise the needs of SARs, particularly in terms of engagement and motivation. These features of the case study schools indicate the existence of community, as used in reference to CoP and provides another part of the explanation as to their success with SARs.

6.4 Shared Practice

6.4.1 Introduction.

This third feature of CoP, framing this analysis, is 'shared practice'. In this context it refers to practices the communities in the case study schools have developed to effectively meet the needs of the SAR. In the discussion of 'knowledge' it was established that a rich repertoire of knowledge existed in the case

study schools around the SAR and their needs. It was also noted in the discussion of the RTI program in the USA that knowledge in itself is not enough to ensure successful intervention. Knowledge must be actively shared if it is to constitute part of a community of practice. In this section shared practices in relation to the leadership, learning environment, professional learning, use of data and individualized attention are all addressed.

6.4.2 Shared practice and leadership.

Finding 1 showed that the leadership in all the schools provided direct support for reading interventions and a whole-school focus on literacy, including goal setting, professional development and the employment of experts. In addition, the second part of Finding 3 was that principals promoted whole-school literacy professional learning, involving teachers from all disciplines. These types of leadership practices have promoted shared practice and align with Fullan's view of the 'Learning leader—one who models learning—but also shapes the conditions for all to learn on a continuous basis' (Fullan, 2018, p. 9). The leadership practices described in the case study schools align very closely with Fullan's description of the instructional leader. The instructional leader is focussed on collaboration and the type of professional learning required to build capacity, but not actually instructing. They had shared goals, in these cases about reading and literacy, which Fullan (2018) considers critical to improving student achievement.

> When the school is organized to focus on a small number of shared goals, and when professional learning is targeted to those goals and is a collective enterprise, the evidence is overwhelming that teachers can do dramatically better by way of student achievement. (p. 83)

This description of school practices that promote student achievement is an accurate description of the practices in the case study schools with 'collective enterprise' resonating with the idea of shared practice.

Research into 'relational trust' and 'social and decisional capital' by Fullan (2018) provides further insight into the type of leadership that promotes shared practice. Fullan defines these terms: 'Social capital is expressed in the interactions and relationships that support a common cause among the staff' (p. 78) and 'Decisional capital refers to resources of knowledge, intelligence, and energy that are required to put human and social capital to effective use' (p. 80). These combine to create 'relational trust', which Fullan sees in successful schools.

> In all of the literature about principals who lead successful schools, one factor comes up time and again: relational trust. When it comes to growth, relational trust pertains to feelings that the culture supports continuous learning rather than early judgments about how weak or strong you might be. (p. 78)

A range of common policies and practices creating collaboration and relational trust were identified in the case study schools and a consistent theme was the role of the principal in developing and supporting these practices. Herein lies another link between the type of leadership shown in the case study schools and shared practice. Relational trust allows the teachers to continuously explore and address a common cause and to be part of a continuous learning culture that must involve shared practice.

The influence of leadership in promoting shared practice is built upon by Hattie (2003) and Fullan (2018). Hattie contends that to be influential, principals need to work through their teachers. In the case study schools, all teachers interviewed expressed a commitment to improving students' reading. Each of the principals supported their teachers in their focus on reading and it is through these teachers they have had their impact. Hattie (2003) contends that what the student brings to the table accounts for 50% of the variance in performance, teachers account for 30%, by far the biggest area that leadership can influence. The 'principal and school' only account for 5–10% of the variance, so to be effective in any type of intervention, leadership must influence and work with teachers. Combining teacher, school and principal gives nearly 40% of the possible influences on student performance. Fullan (2018) builds on this idea asserting that research shows that groups of teachers working together will produce greater learning in more students. Thus, if principals directly influence how teachers can learn together, they will maximise their impact on student learning. This idea is further supported by an Australian study reported by Townsend et.al. (2018). Nine case studies of principals participating in the PALL professional development program led to a conclusion, 'that to improve reading performance in schools, principals need to have not only leadership knowledge and skills but also an understanding of how students learn to read, and knowledge of ways in which teachers might be supported to do this.' (p. 206). This is another description of shared practice promoted by knowledgeable leadership.

The case studies have shown that the principals have influenced how teachers work together by establishing common goals, PLTs and more importantly through relational trust. All of the teachers interviewed were taking responsibility for their students' learning and demonstrating leadership in their classrooms. Leadership in these schools lies with all the teachers, not just the principal and leadership team. The principals have been quite explicit about the importance of a whole-school literacy approach and developing effective reading practices, but they have provided their teachers with time and resources to find their own solutions to the needs of the SAR. This provides a link between leadership, a collaborative learning culture and the development of shared practice around reading, the third element of a CoP.

The four case study schools have been led by principals who have demonstrated practices described in the literature as instructional/educational and distributed. Fullan (2018) prefers the term 'learning

leader' to describe those who lead successful schools, and this resonates with the practices identified in the case study schools. These practices have allowed a community of people who care about the SAR to develop a body of knowledge and a culture of knowledge sharing. In turn this has created a learning environment supportive of all students and SARs in particular. This learning environment has provided the foundational support for the literacy interventions and it plays a major part in explaining the success these schools have had with SARs.

6.4.3 Shared practice and effective learning environments.

The fourth finding was that there were very similar practices in the classrooms across the four schools. All the teachers used data to identify students' needs and monitor performance. All discussed a 'student focus' with reading conferencing, scaffolding and differentiation mentioned directly, along with a variety of other literacy strategies. All classes in all of the schools currently use table-like groupings and were calm and orderly while being observed. These features of the schools are the product of, and in turn produce, shared practices. In this section the shared practices of scaffolding, differentiation and classroom organisation are discussed.

SARs supported in the small group environment of the intervention and in mainstream classes are most likely to develop their reading skills. Support for SARs in the mainstream classrooms in the case study schools has been in the form of scaffolding, differentiation and a calm and orderly working environment. The importance of the shared practices in the mainstream classrooms are apparent when the time they spend in these classes is highlighted.

The SARs in the four case study schools spent most of their time in 'mainstream classes': two to four sessions a week were spent in the interventions. In the Australian context mainstream means mixed ability classes with a maximum of 25 students and one teacher and aides, if students with formally identified disabilities are present. Case study two had groups of 70–80 students with up to five staff with low literacy groups, in a multi-function centre for a special 'Investigate' program four periods a week: remaining classes were 'mainstream'. Case study three had student groups of 30 in humanities classes with two teachers team teaching. The other two schools had mainstream classes as defined above. Overall, SARs are spending approximately 90% of their time in mainstream classes and less than 10% of their time in interventions. The knowledge and skills gained in the intervention are seen as critical to the performance of SARs, but it is contended that the schools would not have achieved the consistent results they did in student gain from years 7 to 9, if the mainstream learning environment had not supported the intervention. A socio-cultural perspective on learning provides a picture of a learning environment that should support the learning needs of all students and adds to the explanation of why the case study schools achieved the results they have with SARs.

Steiner and Mahn (1996) consider Vygotsky's ideas on the importance of teachers' understanding of students' cultural experiences in everyday life and how teachers need to understand these if they are 'to provide the learning opportunities to facilitate literacy acquisition for all students' (p. 203). The teachers in the case study schools do not specifically mention understanding students' cultural experiences. However, the data the teachers provided on student focus, individualized use of data, conferencing, differentiating and scaffolding instructional tools, attest to a shared, deep understanding of their students' cultural and linguistic needs.

Teachers knowing their students was a constant theme with the principal at case study three encapsulating this with the comments, 'So, it is the use of student data to understand who your learners are both as people and as learners' (C3KPD9) and 'Every child is deeply connected and understood both as a learner and as a person, and it's that focus on every child as an individual' (C3KWD3). A student of the school, now a classroom teacher at case four notes, 'So, I think when I was in school this culture of developing a relationship with the kids has been massive' (C4ECTD14). Teachers at cases two and three comment, 'We could talk about what their interests are, what they like to read, what their struggles are with reading' (C2ACTD19) and 'The approach that our staff have is very much about making sure that you're reaching that student, and then very much differentiating or adapting what you do to get to that' (C3TLL43). All of this data points towards teachers communicating with and understanding the intellectual and cultural needs of their students, which according to Steiner and Mann (1996), is the first step in providing the learning opportunities to facilitate literacy acquisition for all students.

Gee (2004) contends that understanding students' cultural experiences is important as, 'the failure to bring prototypes of academic language to school is exactly why the fourth-grade slump occurs' (p. 19). He argues that these students fail because they are not versed in the discourses that predominate in schools. These students' homes do not provide them with the 'tools' to be successful in the school system' (p. 39). One specific 'tool' provided by all of the case study schools is age appropriate reading material both in terms of high interest age appropriate texts and differentiated classroom materials presented to students. While this does not guarantee access to the discourses predominant in schools, it makes their acquisition more likely. If these tools are combined with effective diagnosis of students' needs through data analysis and differentiating and scaffolding of instructional materials based on this data, all apparent in the case study schools, then the likelihood of the students acquiring the appropriate discourses further increases.

However, understanding the students' cultural experiences and providing access to the predominant classroom discourses is not enough to guarantee that the SARs' needs are supported by the classroom teacher. According to Vygotsky the teacher will also need to be working with their students in the ZPD if effective learning is to take place. Hausfather (1996) addresses this issue, first warning that where the

social environment of schools is controlling and focussed on the individual, the learning environment in these schools may be counterproductive due to the lack of joint interactions. He argues, 'For the zone of proximal development to be effective, a teacher must be willing to support learning and a student must be willing to assent to learn' (p. 5). In the case study schools, every teacher interviewed expressed an understanding of how to support learning, starting with relationships, using data and differentiating and scaffolding instructional materials. While students' 'willingness to learn' has not been a direct focus, evidence of its existence is provided in the data. Comments such as: 'we certainly don't have the discipline problems that the other schools have, so that makes a big difference' (C4KCT14) and the observation that all of the schools had calm and orderly classroom environments supports the proposition that the students have a willingness to learn. In addition, the classroom observations recorded a high level of student focus with students seated in 'table groups'.

'Table groups' refers to classroom furniture organisation where 4–6 students sit around a table during class time. Three of the four case schools had students sitting in this format while the fourth had a variation that still allowed for groups of 3–4 to easily converse. Many schools use this format but students sitting in lines or in U-formats are also in evidence. The argument that table groups allow and promote interaction between students and indicate a more student-centred classroom is presented. However, it is not directly supported by theory or literature and an extensive search for literature on seating arrangements in classrooms and their effect on, or indication of pedagogical practices was unsuccessful. Despite this, it is still contended that students sitting in groups, rather than in lines facing the teacher, is an indication of a more student-centred classroom, employing pedagogy in line with socio-cultural theory.

Doherty and Hilberg (2007), while not mentioning table groups, provide some support for the idea that 'activity settings' promote effective socio-cultural pedagogy.

> Evidence shows that certain classroom organizational features afford the highest enactment of effective pedagogy. A classroom organized into multiple, simultaneous, diversified activity settings provides the best support for teachers' implementation of the five standards. (Doherty et al., p. 26)

The five standards mentioned here are those developed by Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, and Yamauchi (2000). The five standards are:

1. Learning through joint productive activity involving opportunities to converse.
2. Language and literacy development across the curriculum is promoted through extended, connected reading, writing, and speaking activities.
3. Contextualizes instruction by connecting new information to students' prior knowledge and experience from home, school, or community.

4. Promotes complex thinking by engaging students in activities that require the elaboration of new content to achieve an academic goal.
5. Teachers use dialogic teaching by using planned, goal-directed instructional conversations between themselves and a small group of students.

Tharp et al. (2000) articulated the five standards for effective pedagogy to bridge core socio-cultural principles into contemporary classrooms. At its simplest level, the five standards-instruction model, consists of a teacher centre and an array of peripheral activity centres connected by a common learning objective. While this does not directly support the contention that table groups are an indication of pedagogy employing socio-cultural principles that support SARs, it does point in that direction.

The five standards mentioned above provide another framework for analysing learning environments in the four case study schools and determining whether they support the SAR.

Tharp et al. (2000) contend that, 'The five standards for effective pedagogy are critical for improving the learning outcomes of all students, and especially for those facing cultural, linguistic, or economic challenges' (p. 24). If this argument is accepted, then evidence of the five standards in the case study schools' classrooms, would point to how the classroom teachers support the SAR. Three of these five standards articulate the need for conversation in the classroom, the last stipulating 'small groups of students.' The table group formats make group conversation and small group discussion with the teacher more likely and thus aspects of three of the standards are evident in the case study school classrooms. Evidence of all of the features of the five standards in the case study schools' classrooms is difficult to determine, as it was not a focus when collecting data. However, the findings to do with, use of data to identify SARs needs, reading conferencing and extensive use of scaffolding and differentiation strategies, all support aspects of the standards which helps explain how teachers support SARs in their classrooms.

Gee (1992); Hausfather (1996); Steiner and Mann (1996); and Tharp et al. (2000) each approach learning and effective learning environment from a socio-cultural perspective. They contend that teachers understanding students' cultural experiences, providing them with access to the predominant classroom discourses and working with willing students at their level of development are all ingredients that should produce classroom environments that support all students and socially deprived students in particular. These features are evident in the case study schools and provide an explanation for how classroom teachers support SARs.

This discussion of effective learning environments provides theoretical and research-based support for the effectiveness of the shared practices of scaffolding, differentiation and classroom organisation identified in the case study schools.

6.4.4 Shared practice and professional learning.

The first part of the third finding was that all of the schools employed literacy experts and conducted most professional learning in-school. The value of coaching in assisting teachers with addressing the needs of SARs was consistently mentioned by classroom teachers. These features of the professional learning environment in the case study schools are major contributors to the shared practices that have developed in both the interventions and in the mainstream classrooms.

The learning environments in the case study schools have evolved over time and are largely the product of a very similar model of professional learning. Each school employs experts to work with staff and provide ongoing, in-school learning opportunities. The possibility of this model creating literacy expertise in the schools that supports SARs has support from two sources: an extensive review of professional development carried out by Darling-Hammond (2017) and Biancarosa and Snow's (2004) detailed report on middle and high school literacy.

Darling Hammond et. al. (2017) produced a report on teacher development in the USA and abroad considering professional learning from a socio-cultural perspective. They reported four main findings.

1. Professional development should be intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice.
2. Professional development should focus on student learning and address the teaching of specific curriculum content.
3. Professional development should align with school improvement priorities and goals.
4. Professional development should build strong working relationships among teachers. (pp. 9–11).

These findings provide an accurate description of the practices in the case study schools. Professional development that is: intensive, ongoing and connected to reading practice: focussed on student learning and reading; directly aligned with priorities and goals; and building strong working relationships among teachers around literacy and reading. The report also determined that 'school-based coaching may enhance professional learning' (p. 12), a practice found in all of the case study schools. These practices are most likely to have developed shared literacy expertise relevant to the needs of SARs.

Biancarosa and Snow (2004) in their report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, identified 15 elements aimed at improving middle and high school literacy achievement.

Three of these were seen as foundational to any effective interventions that would improve the literacy levels of middle and high school students. These were formative and summative assessments, discussed in Section 6.3.2 and professional learning.

Effective interventions should include three specific elements: professional development, formative assessment, and summative assessment. No literacy program targeted at older readers is likely to cause significant improvements without these elements, because of their importance to ensuring instructional effectiveness and measuring effects. (p. 5)

Professional development is defined as, 'Professional development that is both long term and ongoing' (p. 4). This accurately describes the practice in the case study schools and reinforces the importance of professional development in developing shared practice which supports the SARs in the intervention and in the mainstream classroom.

The second line of argument, supporting the contention that the case study schools do have the expertise to meet the needs of SARs lies in socio-cultural theory. Vygotsky's learning theory has four main themes: mind, tools, ZPD and community of practice, all of which have relevance to the discussion of teachers' expertise relevant to SARs. The social constructivist paradigm considers knowledge is constructed socially through interaction and shared by individuals (Bryman, 2001). This description of knowledge constructed socially and then shared by individuals incorporates Vygotsky's 'mind' concept. It also provides insight into how a body of expert knowledge can develop in a school. If all teachers are expected to focus on literacy, are provided with 'tools'(skills and strategies) by experts in the field and are required to regularly address the literacy needs of their students through performance plans which include literacy goals, ongoing professional learning and professional learning teams, then literacy knowledge should be constructed as a shared practice. As these are the attributes of professional learning in the case study schools then there is a strong argument that they have developed the knowledge and expertise required to meet the needs of SARs. This argument is supported by the observation, made in the analysis of leadership section, that a culture of knowledge sharing existed in the four schools. The focus of this community of knowledge sharing has been reading, literacy and assisting students with low skills. Over time the school communities have socially constructed a body of knowledge in these areas, that is now shared by the individuals within it to improve the outcomes of SARs.

Further support for the argument that the case study schools do have the expertise required to support SARs as a product of shared practice, comes from Wells (1999) and Warford (2010). In his work on dialogic enquiry, Wells (1999) applies Vygotsky's theories to learning environments and teaching in the ZPD. He argues that, 'Vygotsky stressed the crucial role of more expert members of the culture in providing the guidance and assistance that enables the learner to become an increasingly competent and autonomous participant in the activities in which he or she engages' (p. 295). In each case study school, literacy experts-more expert members of the culture- were employed to provide professional development and coach teachers: the precise process Wells argues is needed for effective teacher learning.

Warford (2010) covers some of the areas discussed by Wells above in relation to teachers' professional learning. His ZPTD model provides a developmental pathway from, Self-Assistance to Expert Other Assistance to Internalisation to Recursion, described in Chapter 2, Table 2.6. This model provides a way to assess the professional learning practices in schools and make some judgements based on a socio-cultural perspective. Based on the employment of literacy experts in all of the case study schools it can be claimed that they are at least working in the 'Expert Other Assistance' level. The other two levels require teachers to be reflective of their practice, conference with peers, observe, discuss, share, micro-teach and collect information and make warranted claims for change. While these features of teachers' learning can be found in the interview data, no claims can be made as to their ubiquity across all the teachers in the schools. However, the argument that the case study schools are working at the 'Expert Other Assistance' level, gives credence to the proposition that they do share practice and have the literacy expertise required to meet the needs of SARs. This provides further evidence for why the case study schools have achieved the results they do with SARs.

The effectiveness of the type of professional learning identified in the case study schools is supported by research and theory. Central to this effectiveness are the social interactions implicit in professional learning teams, in in-school professional development and in the coaching model evident in each of the schools. The social interactions required in these situations provide the foundation for shared practice.

6.4.5 Testing and data as a shared practice.

The sixth finding was that all the schools use NAPLAN and PATr data, as well as additional data sources to identify students' needs and monitor performance. All teachers in the four schools were required to use data to inform their practice and the literacy leaders describe a deep understanding of data use.

Data use in the case study schools has been discussed in detail in Section 6.2.4. The focus in that section was on the interventions and the role data played in their development and ongoing monitoring of student performance. Data were also used extensively in the classrooms of those teachers interviewed and leadership effectively mandated its use for all teachers. The teachers in the four case study schools describe data use that assists them in knowing their students so they can conference, differentiate and scaffold. In doing so they are more likely to be working in the student's ZPD where learning takes place. The Learning Environments Section 5.4.1. provides detailed descriptions of teachers' data use These are descriptions of data being used forensically to understand students and their needs; being used to differentiate curriculum and determine the level and type of scaffolding required and being used to set goals for students and monitor their performance. Data is being used in all the schools to assess, monitor and inform practice at an individual level.

The ZPD, a central tenet of socio-cultural theory, requires the teacher to be intimately aware of their students' level of development so they can engage in appropriate dialogue and provide the tools that can support learning. Teachers in secondary schools usually have more than one hundred students, so 'knowing' them, and their needs is a difficult task. Test data is the tool that can provide the initial window into a student's needs, but it needs to be balanced, changed and constantly modified by the teacher's own observations and judgements. Test data is one tool that can help provide an accurate picture of a student's skills and knowledge and it was used and valued by all of the teachers interviewed.

6.4.6 Summary.

Social interactions are a fundamental part of a community of practice and the type of social interactions that are required for shared practice to exist have been discussed in this section. Leadership has provided the focus for professional learning that has created shared practice in the interventions, classrooms and in the use of data. Fullan (2003) provides an explanation for why these practices are effective. He contends two values must act in concert if schools are to create effective learning environments.

> One is the value that every individual in the organisation is responsible for seeking new knowledge on a continuous basis; the other is that the same individuals are responsible for sharing what they know or contributing to the knowledge of others. (p. 47)

While the data collected does not allow commentary on all of the individuals in the case study schools, the findings indicate that leaders and teachers have accepted responsibility to address the needs of SARs: they have then sought and shared the knowledge that will allow them to do this. These practices have been promoted through active participation in professional learning teams and in professional development on literacy which is mainly 'in-school'. This type of participation has resulted in shared practice in scaffolding, differentiation and classroom organisation that has supported the SAR

6.5 Effective Schools Research and the Case Study Schools

The body of research on effective schools, introduced in Section 2.4, provided seven correlates widely accepted as characteristics of schools achieving positive student outcomes. The seven correlates are: 1. High expectations for success; 2. Strong instructional leadership; 3. Clear and focussed mission; 4. Opportunity to learn/time on task; 5. Frequent monitoring of student progress; 6. Safe and orderly environment and 7. Positive home-school relations. While there are differences in wording, six of the seven correlates can be linked to the eight themes identified in the case study schools: these are shown in Table 2.6 below. The seventh, 'positive home relationships' did not emerge from the literature reviewed or from the data from the case study schools and this will be discussed later in this section following a review of research on effective low socio-economic schools.

Table 6.1 Effective Schools Correlates and Themes Identified in Case Study Schools

Effective Schools Correlates	Themes Identified in the Case Study Schools
1. High expectations for success	Motivation and Engagement
2. Strong instructional leadership	Leadership/ Literacy Experts
3. Clear and focussed mission	Leadership
4. Opportunity to learn/time on task	Learning Environment/Intervention
5. Frequent monitoring of student progress	Data and Testing
6. Safe and orderly environment	Whole School Environment
7. Positive home-school relations	

A body of research on effective low-socio-economic schools in Australia and New Zealand provides insight into why the case study schools have achieved their positive results with SARs. This research does not directly reference the general school effectiveness literature. However, the features of effective low socio-economic schools are very similar and align very closely with those identified in the case study schools. The exceptions are, no reference to 'positive home school relations' and no specific reference to interventions, although they could be included under 'opportunity to learn'.

Fullan (1999, 2001, 2007, 2008,) Elmore (2003) and Hattie (2012), provide details of the type of school environment that support student learning with a focus on disadvantaged students. In summary the research indicated that to be truly effective the school organisation—staff, principals, parents and council—needs to have:

• moral purpose

• awareness of the complexity of the organisation

• an understanding of the different dimensions of leadership

• an understanding of change management

• real distributed leadership

• effective teams

• a clear teaching and learning focus and

• constant evaluation of all aspects of the organisation.

The data from the case study schools showed evidence of real distributed leadership, effective teams, a clear teaching and learning focus and constant evaluation of the interventions for SARs. No specific data was obtained on the other four elements but the interviews, particularly with the principals, did

indicate their understanding of the complexity of their schools and the processes that led to their successful outcomes with SARs.

Two other studies, Joseph (2019), and Zbar et.al. (2008) on high performing low socio-economic schools, provide further evidence for why the case study schools have been effective with SARs. Joseph (2019) conducted a study into nine top-performing disadvantaged schools across Australia, three of which were secondary schools. This study identified, six common themes across the nine schools:

1. School discipline. Based on high expectations, a clear set of consistently applied classroom rules, and a centralised school behaviour policy.

2. Direct and explicit instruction. New content is explicitly taught in sequenced and structured lessons. Includes clear lesson objectives, immediate feedback, reviews of content from previous lessons, unambiguous language, frequent checking of student understanding, demonstration of the knowledge or skill to be learnt, and students practising skills with teacher guidance.

3. Experienced and autonomous school leadership. Stable, long-term school leadership, and principal autonomy to select staff and control school budgets.

4. Data-informed practice. Using data from teacher written NAPLAN and PATr assessments to improve teaching, track student progress, and facilitate intervention for underachieving students.

5. Teacher collaboration and professional learning. Collaboration among teachers and specialist support staff to cater for the often, complex needs of disadvantaged students, with a focus on teacher professional learning, involving peer observations, mentoring, and attending practical professional development activities which help refine literacy and numeracy instruction.

6. Comprehensive early reading instruction. Including five necessary elements of reading instruction: Phonemic awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension.' (p. 2).

These six themes align very closely with the findings from the case study schools. 'School Discipline' aligns with a safe, calm and respectful 'whole school environment'. 'Direct and explicit instruction' aligns with a 'learning environment' that differentiates and scaffolds learning. 'Experienced and autonomous school leadership' is what was found in the case study schools. 'Data-informed practice' describes exactly what was identified in the case study schools as is the case with 'teacher collaboration and professional learning.' The final theme, 'comprehensive early reading instruction', is an accurate description of what was provided by the interventions in the case study schools. These themes align very closely with the correlates of effective schools with the exception of the specific reference to reading instruction and the omission of any reference to positive home school relations.

The second study, Zbar et.al. (2008) is a case study of eight high performing, low socio-economic schools in Victoria, Australia. 'Ten lessons were identified as underpinning the success of these case study schools' (p. 3) The first four involved the preconditions for improvement: strong shared leadership; high expectations and teacher efficacy; an orderly learning environment; and few priorities focussing on the core things students need. These are the precise features identified in the schools in this case study. The other six 'lessons' pertained to how improvement was sustained over time. These involved, building teaching and leadership expertise; structuring teaching to ensure all students succeed; using data to drive improvement; a culture of sharing and responsibility; tailoring initiatives to the overall direction of the school and engendering pride in the school. The first five of these again align very closely with the attributes identified in the case study schools with the exception of positive home school relations.

McNaughton and Lai (2009) tested a model for school change across three clusters of low socio-economic schools in New Zealand. This study, which focussed on reading comprehension as one measure of improvement, found significant improvement, particularly for students from Maori and Pasifika backgrounds. This model for change had six key principles. The key principles are: that teachers need to be able to act as adaptive experts; that local evidence about teaching and learning is necessary to inform instructional design; that school professional learning communities are vehicles for changing teaching practice; that educative research–practice–policy partnerships are needed to solve problems; that instructional leadership in schools is necessary for community functioning and for coherence; and that effective programs in schools are built by fine tuning existing practices. (p. 55)

These six key principles align very closely with the practices identified in the case study schools. Teachers as adaptive experts resonates with the differentiation and scaffolding described by the case study schoolteachers. Evidence about teaching and learning is closely linked to use of formative data and teacher judgements. Professional learning communities are a feature in both circumstances. The educative research–practice–policy partnerships mentioned align with the use of coaches, literacy experts and outside institutions. Instructional leadership was a prominent feature in the case study schools and in the model for change and fine tuning of practice was a constant theme in both contexts.

These studies help explain why the case study schools have created environments which support student learning for all of their students. They do not specifically address the literature on effective schools but the language used to describe their practices: moral purpose, instructional leadership, effective teams, data-informed practice, a culture of sharing and responsibility, professional learning teams, partnerships, community functioning, all resonate with the effective schools research with the consistent omission of positive home school relations.

Positive home school relations were not identified in the literature reviewed as a characteristic of schools achieving positive gains for SARs or in the research into high performing low socio-economic schools. In addition, the data collected from the case study schools did not include any specific reference to home school relations. This may be a product of no specific questions focussed on the issue in the interviews, but all participants were provided with the opportunity to speculate on 'other' explanations for their school's success with SARs and none emerged. For these reasons the question of the influence of home school relations on the performance of SARs has not been addressed in this study. Why effective low socio-economic schools and schools achieving positive outcomes with SARs, appear to demonstrate only six of the seven correlates of effective schools, requires further research. The answer may lie, however, in Hattie's work (2003) where he contends that what students bring to school accounts for 50% of the variance in performance. What the SAR brings to school may be the very reason they struggle to read.

6.6 Chapter Summary

At the start of this chapter it was posited that this study would provide a more holistic perspective on practices schools will need to adopt if they are to enhance the prospects of their SARs. This perspective gains support from the research on effective schools and the unifying concept of community of practice. The characteristics of effective schools, identified from the body of research on effective schools, are evident in the case study schools. While the influence of 'positive home school relations' remains unresolved, the effective schools' research strongly supports the findings of the study. These characteristics of effective schools identified in the case study schools do not work in isolation. It is contended that the characteristics that make a school effective are enhanced when they become part of a community of practice.

The importance of CoP in explaining the success the case study schools have had with SARs developed during the course of this study when research in Australia, the USA and Britain, on effective interventions for SARs, provided no definitive answers. The RTI program in the USA found similar, evidence-based interventions were effective in some schools but not in others. This pointed towards something other than the content of the intervention influencing the performance of SARs. The analysis of interview data from the four case study schools did identify the intervention as being critical to the success of SARs but the context in which it was delivered became seen as equally important. This context involved a complex interplay between leadership practices and the development of a knowledge base around the SAR and literacy practices to meet their needs. This knowledge base evolved through shared practice, with in-school professional learning activities promoting deep understanding of the SAR and creating classroom environments which addressed their needs. Knowledge of the SAR and their literacy needs and people sharing this knowledge are the first two pillars of a CoP. The third pillar,

'community or people who care' may be the most important feature of the schools that explains their success with SARs.

At the start of this chapter Wenger' definition of CoP was introduced. However, Wenger's work was strongly influenced by Lave (Lave & Wenger 1991) and she had a particular perspective on CoP. In a discussion of community of practice and Lave's contribution to it, Edwards (2005, p. 57) asserts, 'What she (Lave) offers makes sense to those whose concern is not primarily with what learning is but with the cultures that support it'. In this study, learning as it pertains to the SAR and reading, is of concern, but effective learning, particularly for SARs, needs a culture, a community of practice, to support it.

7. Interpretation, Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Interpretation and Limitations

This interpretation of the findings from the case study schools is the product of detailed analysis of the interview and observational data. The data identified many common attributes which were grouped into eight categories derived from the theory and literature. There is some debate in the literature on qualitative analysis about the deductive process employed here but a case has been made for its validity as a methodology. Part of this methodology did allow for other categories to emerge inductively from the data, but this did not occur, with all of the data able to be assigned to the eight categories initially identified.

The lack of emergence of other categories, raises the issue of researcher bias and the conceptual framework influencing the interview process, the coding of the data and its allocation to the categories. The interviews used the same questions linked to the research focus and Jorgensen (2011) argues that, 'Formal interviews (where specific questions are asked in exactly the same way time after time) consequently, very comprehensively produce a highly uniform set of data' (p. 8). The questions were asked in the same way in each interview, but the 'atmosphere' was conversational rather than formal. However, when analysed, the data collected was shown to have a high degree of uniformity even when the questions in each interview provided the opportunity for other explanations to emerge. This raises questions about the interview process and whether it inadvertently focussed those interviewed in a way that precluded the emergence of alternative explanations.

In addition to potential researcher biases influencing the data collection process, it cannot be discounted in the analysis of the data. Every attempt was made to follow the qualitative content analysis method objectively, but the influence of the experience brought to the study by the interviewer, outlined in Section 1.7 also cannot be discounted. As the researcher I obviously hold certain views about schools and effective practices with SARs, but I believe I was open to new and unexpected explanations emerging from the data. Despite these reservations, the story told here is the researcher's best effort to make sense of a very complicated social environment where many factors interplay to produce an outcome.

This story of the four case study schools emerged as the categories were analysed at three levels to try and understand their influence on the performance of SARs. First, categories were analysed individually, secondly, a cross case analysis was conducted to try to understand the relationships between the categories and thirdly an analysis to determine the relative importance of the categories in contributing to the performance of SARs was carried out. The results of this process were then used to reflect on five theoretical propositions that emanated from the literature review.

The case is made that all of the eight conceptual categories and their attributes play a role in explaining the schools' success with SARs. However, it is considered that the intervention, the feature that the schools have independently created and supported, is critical in accounting for the SARs' performance. It has also been argued that the learning environment is essential for the intervention to be effective and the link between the two has been demonstrated. It is also contended that the distributed/instructional leadership over time has created an environment whereby a community of practice has evolved, and it is this community of practice that has provided the foundation on which the intervention and learning environment can stand and prosper.

Finally, the data and findings strongly support the five theoretical propositions derived from the literature. These propositions will be discussed in more detail in this chapter where they provide the basis for generalizing the findings and providing recommendations for schools that want to improve the performance of their SARs.

7.2 Conclusions

This purpose of this study of four secondary schools was to try and understand why successive, seven to nine cohorts, achieved results in reading gain well above the state (Victoria) average, while having a large percentage of SARs. The intention was to try and provide schools, struggling to meet the needs of SARs, some evidence-based practices that support these students.

The main conclusion from the study is that reading interventions for SARs need to be supported by leadership and the whole-school learning environment if they are to be successful. This is based on the findings that the four case study schools had very similar practices in relation to leadership and the learning environment and these practices created a community of practice that supported the interventions for SARs.

The intervention is paramount in explaining the schools' performance with SARs. The interventions in the four schools had very similar features: they were ongoing from years 7 to 9; involved use of data, small groups, EAL strategies and a phonics component and focussed on reading skills not normally addressed at the secondary level. The Interventions focussed on the skills required for SARs to become effective 'code breakers', essential if they are to meaningfully participate in the mainstream classroom. If the SAR has not become an effective 'code breaker' their ability to learn, in even the most supportive whole school environment and classroom environment is limited. It is also contended that the intervention would be less likely to positively impact on the SAR if the skills and knowledge acquired therein, were not supported in the mainstream classrooms with differentiation and scaffolding, as is the case in the four case study schools.

It is also concluded that leadership and the learning environment are critical features in explaining the performance of the case study schools, Without the long-term focus of leadership on reading and literacy and intensive professional learning it is unlikely that the community of practice and culture of knowledge sharing would have developed. Without the calm and respectful whole school environment and ordered classrooms with some individualized attention, it is unlikely that the SAR would be able to develop their reading skills. If the school did not have the reading resources and the teachers who encouraged reading, the SARs would be less likely to be engaged. If the testing and data were used differently the SAR may have felt less supported. These issues illustrate the complexity of social institutions such as the case study schools, and the difficulty of establishing cause and effect relationships. Consequently, this study has made a case for a holistic approach to intervention. The environment into which a reading intervention is introduced, must provide a focussed, supportive foundation, if it is to be assured of achieving positive outcomes for those who struggle to read.

In the next section the theoretical propositions posited in Chapter 3, will be addressed in light of the discussion of interventions, learning environments and leadership. Yin (2014) contends theoretical propositions, 'lay the groundwork for generalizing the findings from the case study to other situations by making analytical rather than statistical generalizations' (p. 26). Analytical generalisations derived from this process, provide the recommendations for schools which follow.

7.3 Findings and Theoretical Propositions

Theoretical propositions arising from the literature can lay the groundwork for generalizing the findings from the case studies to other situations. (Rosenbaum, 2002, Sutton and Shaw 1995 &Yin, 2014). Review of the literature in the first year of this study led to five theoretical propositions. Each of these will be considered in relation to the discussion above and the possibility of generalizing them to other situations considered.

> **Theoretical Proposition 1. The performance of the SARs will be the result of specific research driven literacy policy and practice.**

Each case study school had implemented interventions directly aimed at the needs of SARs. These involved use of diagnostic data to place SARs in small groups with teachers trained in appropriate strategies, including decoding and those used in EAL programs. The consistent feature of the interventions was SARs spending approximately 10% of their class time in small groups where their specific needs were addressed. Of equal importance was the whole-school literacy focus which meant the SARs' needs were still being met when they returned to mainstream classes where differentiation and scaffolding were expected practices. The evidence is clear that SARs will not thrive in the mainstream class without intervention and support. The NAPLAN reading data for Victoria, presented in Section 1.3, showed 4.1% of students in Year 7 in 2014, were two to three years below grade level.

Two years later in 2016, the same cohort had 9.1% of students two to three years below grade level. This strongly supports this assertion that SARs will not show improvement in reading if the only instruction they receive is in mainstream classrooms. This finding provides strong evidence for schools to implement very specific literacy policy and practice if the performance of their SARs is to be enhanced. One specific area that will be further explored in the concluding chapter will be the EAL framework and how it could provide the basis for a policy and instruction framework for SARs.

Theoretical Proposition 2. The schools' leadership will have introduced whole-school literacy plans and will be knowledgeable of the literacy needs of SARs.

The principals and other leaders in each of the case study schools displayed knowledge of the literacy needs of SARs and identified low reading performance as a major impediment to student learning and to the students' performance as they progress through the school. Whole-school literacy policies, with a specific focus on reading were written into long-term strategic plans, annual implementation plans and teacher professional development plans. These plans were supported by the use of substantial equity funds to provide extensive professional learning opportunities on the literacy needs of SARs; employ literacy expert; purchase age appropriate reading materials; and fund and staff literacy focussed interventions. The policy platform and plans and processes described here, would be a sound starting place for schools wanting to improve the performance of their SARs.

Theoretical Proposition 3. Schools will have staff who understand how to engage students and develop reading skills through collaborative learning.

This particular proposition directly relates to the findings on learning environment and the role professional learning has played in creating that environment. All of the schools employed literacy experts and coaches and literacy professional development was predominantly in-school and ongoing. This model aligns closely with the recommendations made by Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), in their status report on teacher professional development in the USA and abroad. This provides strong support for the type of professional development practice evident in the case study schools and schools wishing to improve the performance of their SARs should consider their practices.

The question of literacy expertise, engagement and collaborative learning and SARs' results is also addressed in the discussion on learning environment. All of the teachers interviewed discussed 'a student focus' and used scaffolding and differentiation strategies in calm and ordered classrooms, set up in 'table group' like formats with students showing a high level of focus on task. The evidence of table groupings indicates that collaborative learning could be a feature of the case study schools. This is reinforced by the teachers' descriptions of their classrooms where a student focus meant ongoing dialogue around reading goals and conferencing and differentiation and scaffolding of work. The issue of engagement is also addressed through the lens of research that has been shown to engage SARs.

Guthrie and Humenick (2004), Lesaux (2009) and Piazza (2012), identified appropriate reading materials, assistance in choosing them and reading them, and an environment that builds relationships around reading, as important practices that increased SARs' engagement: all of these are found in the case study schools. The practices identified here around reading support and collaborative learning are relatively easy changes that schools can implement. Acquiring age appropriate texts, providing assistance in their selection, beginning reading conferencing and moving lines of desks into table groups can be a simple starting point. Achieving real collaborative learning is not as simple but a move in its direction would be achieved by these changes

Theoretical Proposition 4. Staff will be skilled in the collection and use of data from multiple sources to identify the literacy needs of SARs and will establish learning environments that respond to these needs.

Each of the schools has very strong policy and practices around data use. NAPLAN and PATr are provided to all teachers and they are trained in its diagnostic use. Other data sources are also used to assess the needs of SARs and group them for interventions: teacher' judgements were also highly valued. Reading conferencing was used in each of the schools and it was reported to be one of the most important sources of data for improving student reading skills. The use of multiple data sources to inform the teaching practices was a constant theme in all four case study schools.

Theoretical Proposition 5. SARs will receive some individualized or small group instruction.

This proposition has already been addressed in the discussions in propositions one and four. However, one area that deserves comment is the individualized attention SARs receive during reading conferencing. Each school reported this practice with some teachers providing detailed reports of its effectiveness. Having used the practice extensively as a teacher and demonstrating it as a coach I have always seen it as valuable and observing students in dialogue one-to-one with a skilled teacher is seeing learning in a very pure form. Socio-cultural theory, the ZPD and Mercers IDZ provide the theory as to why this may be so. Reading conference may be the only time when student and teacher working with age appropriate text are truly in the 'zone', whether it be proximal or intermental, and it is a practice all schools should consider.

7.4 Recommendations

7.4.1 Recommendations for schools.

It has been argued that theoretical propositions can lay the groundwork for generalizing findings. Following the literature review five theoretical propositions were posited and these have been discussed in relation to the findings and conclusions. The result of this process is five suggested practices for schools wanting to improve the performance of SARs.

- Schools need to include very specific literacy policy and practices in their planning processes. These should include long-term and annual implementation plans and teachers should have literacy goals in their personal development plans. Practices should include intervention that provides very low-level readers with instruction, individually or in small groups, that allows them to become effective code breakers.
- Schools should provide extensive professional learning opportunities on the literacy needs of SARs and employ literacy experts who can support literacy focussed interventions.
- Schools need to acquire high interest, age appropriate texts, aid in their selection and organise classrooms into table groups.
- Schools should use multiple data sources to inform learning environments with a specific focus on differentiation and scaffolding.
- Classroom teachers need to conduct reading conferencing with SARs.

It is contended, that if these five suggested practices were implemented in a school, then the reading performance of SARs and other students is highly likely to improve.

7.4.2 Recommendations for future research.

This study identified small group, focussed intervention as the critical feature in improving the performance of SARs. Each of the case study schools had targeted interventions in small groups, for approximately 10% of the SARs' classroom time. Limited observations of the practices in these small group interventions, identified phonics instruction, vocabulary discussion, repeated readings and discussion of high interest age appropriate texts and a high level of engagement on the part of the SARs. This 'multiple component' approach is supported by the findings from the comprehensive review in Section 2.3.14 and could be a productive focus for future research. Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension are widely accepted as being key features in the acquisition of reading skills but how they should be taught is not. In addition, the place of oral language in improving the performance of SARs, one of the 'Big 6' identified in the PALLIC research, Riley and Webster (2016) could be a valuable area for research. Lamping's (2016) study also provides some direction in this area. She employed Luke and Freebody's Four Resource Model (1990) with considerable success with students with low literacy skills and part of her practice involved a focus on oral language. Further research of such practices may allow interventions to become more structured and focussed.

The effective schools research identifies seven characteristics of effective schools. Six of these, support the findings of this study, but the seventh-positive home school relations-was not addressed. An investigation of the home-school relations in schools with high numbers of SARs may provide further insight into what is required to meet their literacy needs.

The literature review identified reading programs and strategies with evidence of their effectiveness. Programs with a focus on contextual phonics, 'reciprocal teaching' and vocabulary development looking at the phonology, morphology and etymology have also seen observable improvement in SARs skill development and reciprocal teaching appears to engage and improve SARs comprehension. Further research into all three of these areas could be fruitful.

Another practice deserving further research is 'reading conferencing.' This practice was identified in all of the case study schools with teachers convinced of its efficacy. It is a practice that is supported by Vygotsky's theory as it should place the student and teacher in the ZPD or IDZ. Focussed research on this practice could identify its critical features and determine when, how and with whom it is most effective.

It is with some trepidation that further research into decoding instruction for SARs is suggested. This needs a much more nuanced focus beyond debates about analytic, embedded and synthetic phonics. Part of this could involve a clarification of terminology but it could also focus on suggestions by Compton et al. (2014) and Brooks (2013). Compton et al., in their study on effective interventions for readers with disability comment, 'We argue against the long-term effectiveness of context-independent decoding instruction. In its place we advocate for word reading interventions that promote advanced decoding skill and word identification development' (p. 68). Brook's (2013) comments in his conclusions on a detailed study into the effectiveness of intervention schemes for SARs that,

> Phonic teaching should normally be accompanied by graphic representation and reading for meaning so that irregular as well as regular patterns can be grasped. Children with severe difficulties in phonological skills or using English as an additional language may need more 'standalone' phonics teaching to support their speaking and listening. (p. 31)

The case study schools all incorporated a decoding component in their interventions that involved phonics instruction, but the exact nature of this component was not investigated. Research into the exact nature of the phonics/ decoding activities used with consideration of the insights provided by Compton et al., and Brooks could be valuable.

The complexity of the interplay between the eight conceptual categories was noted in the discussion of 'Conclusions' in Section 7.1. It was posited that 'complexity theory', as discussed by Fullan (2003), may provide some insights into this interplay. Using the concept community of practice as discussed by Fullan may provide an avenue to better understand the processes in play in the case study schools. It could also allow the relationship these schools have to the region and to the state to be explored, an area not addressed in this study.

7.4.3 Researcher reflection.

In 2010 the comment by a Regionally appointed literacy expert that 'decoding programs had no place in secondary schools' was the catalyst for this almost decade long research into adolescents who struggle to read. At the outset I believed that the 'right' intervention could be created and used in schools to address the needs of virtually all SARs. I also had a rather simplistic view of the reading process which changed dramatically after a year spent reviewing the literature on reading theory and reading interventions for SARs. Initially I thought the literature would provide the answers I wanted but instead of clarity came complexity. Complexity in relation to the reading process, the nature and needs of SARs and the research methodology that could help me understand how schools can better meet the needs of SARs.

The initial methodology considered was mixed methods with a strong focus on meta data as I had NAPLAN, student gain data on reading, years 7–9, for all Australian secondary schools. However, Freebody's (2007) and Davis' (2007) comments on the effectiveness of qualitative and quantitative research in influencing education policy and practice caused a change in direction and led to the multiple case study methodology employed here. This focus took me into four schools where all those interviewed showed knowledge, passion and commitment for all of their students but particularly for those who struggled with reading. Somewhat surprising was how similar the schools were both in terms of the feeling of order and purpose when you entered, the way students and staff greeted you and in the programs they offered. These subjective measures are captured to some degree by the data but the experience of visiting many schools as a principal, consultant and clinical specialist, has 'tuned my senses' to the feel of a school that is 'centred'; each of these four schools had that feel.

The findings from these schools are quite clear and unequivocal but translating the findings into recommendations for others is far from simple as their outcomes with SARs is the product of a complex interplay of factors. Some clarity has been provided by community of practice theory and Vygotsky's theories, particularly ZPD and its evolution into Mercer's (2008) Inter-Developmental Zone. These theories have provided a basis for understanding why the practices identified are effective with SARs.

When I see a teacher conferencing with a student, both deep in conversation about a character in a book, I now see Mercer's IDZ 'bubble' firmly surrounding the two. When I see a teacher working in a group in animated conversation, I see the ZPD alive and real. When I see a student who struggles to read, I see an individual who needs an expert who can forensically diagnose their needs, enter the IDZ with them, and find the key that opens their minds to the wonder of reading. When I see a school achieving exceptional results with those who struggle to read, I see a community of practice.

Appendices

Appendix A. Expanded Version of the ZPD

1. The ZPD may apply in any situation in which, while participating in an activity, individuals are in the process of developing mastery of a practice or understanding of a topic.

2. The ZPD is not a context-independent attribute of an individual; rather it is constructed in the interaction between participants in the course of their joint engagement in a particular activity.

3. To teach in the ZPD is to be responsive to the learner's current goals and stage of development and to provide guidance and assistance that enables him/her to achieve those goals and, at the same time, to increase his/her potential for future participation.

4. To learn in the ZPD does not require that there be a designated teacher; whenever people collaborate in an activity, each can assist the others, and each can learn from the contributions of the others.

5. Some activities have as one of their outcomes the production of an artifact, which may be used as a tool in a subsequent activity. Representations – in e.g. art, drama, spoken, or written text – of what has been done or understood are artifacts of this kind; engaging with them can provide an occasion for learning in the ZPD.

6. Learning in the ZPD involves all aspects of the learner and leads to the development of identity as well as of skills and knowledge. For this reason, the affective quality of the interaction between the participants is critical. Learning will be most successful when it is mediated by interaction that expresses mutual respect, trust and concern.

7. Learning in the ZPD involves multiple transformations: of the participants' potential for future action and of the cognitive structures in terms of which it is organized; of the tools and practices that mediate the activity; and of the social world in which that activity takes place.

8. Development does not have any predetermined end, or telos; although it is characterised by increasing complexity of organisation, this does not, in itself, constitute progress. What is considered to be progress depends on the dominant values in particular times and places,

which are both contested and constantly changing. The ZPD is thus a site of conflict and contradiction as well as of unanimity; the transformations it engenders lead to diversity of outcome which may radically change as well as reproduce existing practices and values (Wells, 1999, p. 333).

MONASH University

Appendix B. Documentation Provided to Principals and Interviewees and Ethics Approvals

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

(Directors/Principals/Educators/Teachers)

Project: A case study of schools achieving exemplary results with struggling adolescent readers.

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The project

'A case study of schools achieving exemplary results with struggling adolescent readers' is an attempt to understand why your school is achieving the excellent results it does with students who enter your school with very low reading levels. We are asking for you, as principal, to participate in this project and to seek consent from your literacy leaders and teachers to participate in the study. Please read this

Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not you and members of your staff would like to participate in the project. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

What does the research involve?

The project has identified struggling adolescent readers—those entering Year 7 at Grade 3–4 reading level—as a major concern for many schools. Across the state this involves 4.1% of Year 7 students according to 2015 NAPLAN data, but by Year 9, 9.8% of students are 2–3 years below the required level. In some schools 25% of students entering Year 7 are at the Grade 3–4 reading level. This project is an attempt to understand why you are achieving the exemplary results you do with these struggling adolescent readers. One goal of the study is to provide direction for schools with similar student cohorts.

I would like to visit your school over a two-day period and interview you and staff involved in the literacy program in your school. I would also like to observe some classrooms—3 to 4—where struggling adolescent readers are being taught and have access to your policy documents and survey data. The interviews would be no longer than 30 minutes and the classroom observations up to an hour.

Why were you chosen for this research?

My analysis of ACARA data has shown your school to be one of the best in the state in improving the results for struggling adolescent readers.

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the project.

If you agree to become a research site for this study please sign the consent form attached. Please be advised that your involvement in this research study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any stage, or to withdraw any unprocessed data that may have been supplied.

Possible benefits and risks to participants.

You will be provided with a detailed analysis of the results of this study This can be used for future staff development, school promotion in the community and ongoing pedagogic and policy development. As an outcome of this research I intend to produce materials schools can use to analyse their own programs with SARs and improve policy and practice.

While the risks are considered minimal data collection will cease immediately if any behaviour indicative of dissent or discomfort is observed.

Confidentiality

It is possible that the findings from this study will be published in journal articles, presented at teacher/educator conferences and included in other academic writing. We intend to protect principal and teacher's anonymity and the confidentiality to the fullest possible extent. We will remove any references to your centre/school and educator/teacher that might allow someone to guess their identity.

Storage of data

Data will be stored safely in locked filing cabinets and password-protected computers in the Faculty of Arts and Education, at Monash University. Access to the data will be strictly restricted to the project research team. As is the norm, the data will be destroyed after a period of five years. In any reporting or publication of the research findings, the principals' and teachers' names and the school sites will be kept anonymous.

Results

At the end of this study a summary report will be available to participating sites. Please provide an email address to receive a copy of the report.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer
Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Room 111, Building 3e
Research Office
Monash University VIC 3800

Tel: +61 3 9905 2052   Email: muhrec@monash.edu Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Thank you,

Steven Townsend, Janet Scull, John Ehrich

MONASH University

PRINCIPAL'S PERMISSION LETTER

Project: A case study of schools achieving exemplary results with struggling adolescent readers.

Date

Dear Steven, Janet and John

Thank you for your request to conduct a case study at my school,

_____(school's title)

I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement regarding the research and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

I understand a copy a research report will be forward to me on completion of the project

Yours sincerely.

(Signature of person granting permission)

(Name of person granting permission)

(Position of person granting permission)

MONASH University

PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

Teacher/Educator

Project: A case study of schools achieving exemplary results with struggling adolescent readers.

Steven Townsend

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Associate Professor Janet Scull,
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Dr John Ehrich
Faculty of Education, Monash University
Phone: 9905 2841
email: john.ehrich@monash.edu

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

I consent to the following:	Yes	No
Researcher observing teachers in my classrooms with no interaction with students	☐	☐
Interviews	☐	☐
Program documentation	☐	☐

Email for a copy of report _____

Name (please print)	
Signature:	Date:

MONASH University

TEACHER/EDUCATOR CONSENT FORM

Teacher/Educator

Project: A case study of schools achieving exemplary results with struggling adolescent readers.

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Phone: 9905 2841
email: john.ehrich@monash.edu

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

I consent to the following:	Yes	No
Researcher observing my classroom with no interaction with students	☐	☐
Interviews	☐	☐
Program documentation	☐	☐

Email for a copy of report _____

Name (please print)	
Signature:	Date:

Appendix C. Sample of Transcript

TRANSCRIPT

OF INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: 30th of April 2018. Lucy is being interviewed. Good afternoon, Lucy.

Lucy: Good afternoon.

INTERVIEWER: Good afternoon. Just as sort of a broad picture, Lucy, how would you describe the literacy program in your school?

Lucy: Okay, so there is no one program, there's a number of programs that are running. At the junior end of the school we have the Literate Practices Program, which basically looks at the child's reading level. We then slot them into the program that is suited to them according to their level and their needs.

The bottom end of the program works on building fluency and automaticity and sight word knowledge, building

confidence, getting them engaged with reading, playing with language, oral language skills.

The middle part of the program is comprehension, where they are able to decode. These children are one to two years behind their expected reading level of Year 7.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

Lucy: And we produce a program for the students to work on that looks at reading strategies, vocab building, practising the skill of inferencing, oral language skills and what we call mental models, which is visualising what's being read to them.

INTERVIEWER: Mm, mm.

Lucy: The other end of the program is critical literacy. These are children at expected level or above expected level for reading, and this builds on strategies to I guess strengthen what – their knowledge that they already know and it aims to extend them with their reading.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

Lucy: So that's the bottom end of the school. At Year 9 and Year 10 we are running now a Literacy Intervention Program which is a program designed for students who are at Year 9 or Year 10 but are still 3 to 4 years below the expected reading level.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

Lucy: We have groups of 5 to 7, no more. We focus on independent reading, so getting them engaged, independent reading, playing with the vocabulary or vocabulary building, playing with words, playing with language, reading to them. We use the high interest, low-level novels to get them engaged. We also have introduced the Cars and Stars Program.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

Lucy: So they do an online placement test, and they work at their level according to that program, and we focus on the 12 strategies for comprehension, reading comprehension.

INTERVIEWER: Comprehension.

Lucy: Yep. The other thing that we have introduced is an extra reading lesson at Year 7 which looks at mini lessons based on reading strategies, engaging students in independent reading, and reading conferences, okay so that's started this year also.

INTERVIEWER: Right, so it's quite extensive.

Lucy: It is, yes. It is.

INTERVIEWER: Right, and what PD have you been involved in the last few years?

Lucy: In the last few years, mainly Cars and Stars and how you would implement that in your classroom.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

Lucy: I've done PD around working with reluctant literacy learners.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

Lucy: There's the Carole Christiansen links program that we did here.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

Lucy: I've been involved in that PD. I've done a lot of PDs at libraries, so the State Library for example or kids' bookshops where listening to authors' speak.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, right.

Lucy: Trying to choose suitable authors that would get our students interested in picking up their novels. Yeah, they're the main ones.

INTERVIEWER: The main ones, right.

Lucy: Yes. I am looking at doing a PD on THRAS (?). That's coming up, and I am looking at doing some PD using ACER, the ACER website looking at data.

INTERVIEWER: Mm, mm. Well, with that sort of knowledge, you have covered it, in a sense, but how would you describe your ability to work with students with low literacy skills?

Lucy: So, the first thing you need to understand is that these students have very low confidence. They often have very well-established strategies to try and avoid doing the work.

It's important that you establish a rapport with them, and that they have an understanding that you are committed to trying to help them. They also need someone who is interested in helping them find books that they're interested in, and trying to reengage them with books, and that whole idea of reading for pleasure. Rewarding them when they have finished a program, and making sure that you're encouraging them the whole time.

The important thing about working with groups of students with low literacy skills is that they're in a group – they're in small groups where they feel safe, where they can take risks. They often will be in classrooms of 25 students where they are not willing to do that. They don't want to be ridiculed or humiliated because they are well – they're behind and they know they're behind.

So, I guess that the most important thing is establishing that you're interested, you're taking an interest in them, and that you're trying to – trying to build their reading skills because it's really an important part of school. It underpins everything that they do.

INTERVIEWER: Mm, mm.

Lucy: But it's also an important skill once they leave school.

INTERVIEWER: Definitely.

Lucy: Yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I suppose that leads on, what specific strategies, once you've sort of done that work, what specific strategies do you employ to work with the struggling adolescent reader?

Lucy: Um–

INTERVIEWER: I think you have probably mentioned some of them.

Lucy: Yeah. Look, I guess some strategies – I've got a few Year 10 students at the moment where it took a whole term for them to settle.

INTERVIEWER: Mm, mm.

Lucy: They really don't like being at school and they hate having to do the reading and the traditional things that we do in classrooms. I guess if you've known them since they were at Year 7, it's a matter of pulling them aside to say look, hey, I can see you don't like being here and I really understand that but, you know, you've come such a long way. Like, making them aware of how – what they have achieved in the time they've been here, and that often can turn things around. So, a little bit of praise, reminding with them where they have started and where they are at and saying to them I understand how difficult do it is. It often can get them to sit up and pay attention. They all like being praised. We all do.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely.

Lucy: That's a little trick that I try. Sometimes it's a matter of – I read a lot of young adult fiction.

INTERVIEWER: Mm, mm.

Lucy: And so I try and match would I think they may be interested in. I try and match the student with a book I think they will be interested in.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

Lucy: That often works, so they know that it's not just okay, I want you to read now when they have no interest in what they're reading or what they're doing but that whole idea of oh, I read this. I loved it. I couldn't put it down. I think you're really love it.

INTERVIEWER: Mm, mm.

Lucy: So never giving up with trying to suggest what they – suggest to them what they – or recommend books to them, or even movies that might teach them about, you know, just general knowledge or word knowledge. Certainly showing them their progression in terms of data, so Cars and Stars is very good at that, the pre-tests, the posttests, to show them the work that they're putting in has had an effect. Yeah, I think that's basically it –

INTERVIEWER: No, look –

Lucy: [Laughter].

INTERVIEWER: You're saying a lot there.

Lucy: Yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I'll talk about it later.

Lucy: Mm, mm.

INTERVIEWER: But it's interesting, your focus. I'm very interested in that.

Lucy: Mm, mm.

INTERVIEWER: How does the administration support literacy education in the school?

Lucy: It's a very big focus in the school. We have – so when we test our Year 7s, it becomes – when they come in at Year 7, it becomes very clear very quickly, that we have a lot of

struggling readers, and it's usually about –

INTERVIEWER: Mm, mm –

Lucy: Yeah, our testing usually indicates about a third of our Year 7 cohort is reading well below expected level. About a third is reading 1 to 2 years behind and about a third is reading at or above.

So, it is taken very seriously, and the more that we can try and address it in the early years the better it is those early students as they move through, so, yeah, I would say there is a lot of support, and you can see by the number of literacy programs that are running –

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, you mentioned it earlier.

Lucy: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Now, you mentioned that you had some literacy experts in the school. How do they work in the school, and what sort of support do they provide?

Lucy: So our literacy experts would be our literate practices team and our Year 9 and 10 literacy coordinators. Then we have the principal who is in charge of literacy at the College.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

Lucy: So, basically, teachers who are in charge of literate practices, or that whole team, produce the program and train other teachers, new staff, and are there as mentors and guides for anyone who is new to the program.

We also run a meeting once a term to PD staff and to make sure that everyone is updated.

INTERVIEWER: Mm, mm.

Lucy: And has an understanding of how important their role is and

whatever part of the program that they're teaching.

Year 9 and 10 coordinators basically are responsible for identifying which students need to be in Year 9 and 10, and then they invite those students to take part in the program. We do invite students at Year 9 and 10. We don't force them to do it.

INTERVIEWER: Mm, mm.

Lucy: But really we do see that if there is no buy in from the student then it often won't work.

INTERVIEWER: Mm, mm.

Lucy: But, yeah, they are there to support and guide the Year 9 and 10 literacy teachers.

There's a literacy leader. I've taken on the role of literacy leader, so I oversee all of those programs, and then I have Pip Griffiths, who is the principal in charge of literacy, guiding me as well.

INTERVIEWER: Some other teachers mentioned coaches in the school.

Lucy: There's – yes, there are some literacy – we have literacy consultants or coaches they come in.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

Lucy: They are now running PLT's, Professional Learning Teams with our Year 7 English teachers, and they are basically guiding teachers with the Year 7 extra reading lesson that we have this year.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, right, that focus.

Lucy: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: I see, yes.

Lucy: Absolutely, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And this is just sort of I suppose summarising it in the sense, that last question. How do you account for the success the school has had with SA? You probably have answered that but can you sort of summarise it in some way?

Lucy: I guess – I guess the people who are in a literacy are very committed and very passionate about trying to improve outcomes for these children.

I think if you're enthusiastic then I think you can pass that enthusiasm on to others.

For me, personally, I guess the education – the best education for me in terms of literacy development is watching my own children learn to read.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

Lucy: And I notice that by the end of Grade 2 really they're reading –

INTERVIEWER: Yeah –

Lucy: And it takes a lot to raise readers. Like there's a lot you need to do before they even reach primary school.

INTERVIEWER: Yep, mm, mm.

Lucy: So it kind of – it does upset me that we have a number of children coming in who are not at level.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

Lucy: So yeah I kind of – I find it – I took on a personal challenge to try and improve –

INTERVIEWER: Right –

Lucy: Improve outcomes for these kids. I don't feel that it's right that they're so behind.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

Lucy: Given that it's such an important skill.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

Lucy: So we really – our team works very hard to try and improve on what we're doing all the time and find new ways of engaging kids.

INTERVIEWER: Mm, mm.

Lucy: And it is a challenge, given that we have a lot of kids who are turning away from reading.

INTERVIEWER: Mm, mm.

Lucy: That may be because of technology now and, you know, children with a lot of devices. It's not something that a lot of them do for pleasure.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

Lucy: So, I guess – I guess that that enthusiasm and passion that we all share and that idea that we have to – we continue improving on what we're doing, we won't stop, [Laughter], finding ways of getting kids engaged and passionate about reading, I think that's had a – that's one of the reasons we have been successful in improving outcomes.

INTERVIEWER: On that note, thank you very much, Lucy.

Lucy: Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: It's been very much appreciated.

Lucy: Thank you.

Follow up question 5/2/2019

Interviewer: Morning Lucy I just wanted to follow up one area I didn't cover-that is EAL I know you run an EAL program can you give me some details?

Lucy: P28 Yes we do run an EAL program I taught in it for years. Smaller groups working on the English curriculum. Teachers used to work in the English classes years ago but now they

are smaller groups about 15. They work on the EAL continuum but with an English focus. The old model was vocabulary and grammar but became more skill-based-a focus on common assessment tasks in English.

Appendix D. Interview Questions

Principal Interview Questions

    1. What changes have occurred in literacy policy since 2008?

    2. What changes to literacy programs have occurred since 2008?

    3. (If appropriate) What factors lead to these changes?

    4. How knowledgeable are you about student literacy?

    5. How involved have you been in the development of literacy policy and programs?

    6. How has your literacy team been created?

    7. How is your literacy program funded?

    8. How knowledgeable are the teaching staff on the literacy needs of SARs?

    9. How are the needs of SARs addressed in the classroom?

    10. How do you, account for the success your school has had with SARs?

With Learning environment and Intervention, we have the tip of an 'Instructional Iceberg' Figure 5.1. The Classroom and the Intervention are clearly in sight, supported by Professional Learning, Testing and Data and Individual Attention but they also sit upon the less tangible entities of Leadership, Whole School Environment and Engagement: to remove any one might jeopardise the integrity of the whole. Therein lies the answers to the two questions posed at the start of this discussion. All of the categories are important in explaining the case study schools' results. Learning environment and Intervention may be the most prominent categories and those directly experienced by the SAR, but their very existence, structure and influence on the SAR is a product of the complex interplay between them and the six other categories. All have a part in explaining the success the case study schools have had with SARs.

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