Linking assessment and pedagogy:
Pre-primary teachers’ literacy practices in
Catholic schools, Western Australia

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Education
Murdoch University, 2010.
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Rashmi Watson
Abstract

International interest in the body of research concerning teachers’ practices in literacy education, specifically during early childhood, has grown consistently. In Australia, a number of recent initiatives and increased funding have brought substantial changes to early childhood literacy education affirming and paralleling the increased focus internationally. In this climate of change in early childhood literacy education, the goal of this study was to document the pedagogical and assessment practices currently being utilised in Pre-primary Western Australian classrooms to examine how teachers link these aspects of their teaching in planning and monitoring their literacy programs. A mixed-method research approach was applied using both qualitative and quantitative data gathering and analyses to portray and interpret the day-to-day pedagogical and assessment practices in literacy of a select group of Western Australia early childhood teachers. Data were gathered using three methods: survey questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations. Participants included Pre-primary teachers from the Catholic sector in Western Australia. All teachers were invited to participate in a survey and a smaller number of participants were involved in being interviewed and observed.

Using the three dimensions of conceptual focus, namely, pedagogy, assessment and monitoring and planning. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses identified a number of consistent terms used within each dimension when examining the practice of effective teachers of literacy. In this way, key findings in literacy teaching and assessment were extracted to uncover and elevate consistencies in effective teacher practices. Briefly, effective early years’ teachers of literacy implement a variety of
pedagogical and assessment methods; are intentional and explicit in what they do; systematically spend regular, consistent and significant time on both instruction and assessment; apply an iterative approach in their practice; share responsibility; interconnect the dimensions of pedagogy and assessment and provide a safe and nurturing environment for their learners. Effective teachers of literacy implement these characteristic practices in their day-to-day literacy programs. In summary, this study demonstrates that early childhood teachers in Western Australian Catholic sector are actively applying a range of instructional and assessment practices in their own contexts and are open to increased awareness and professional learning in the areas of literacy pedagogy and assessment. Two implications for practice arise from the current study. The first is a strong need for development of a set of guidelines articulating how to facilitate effective early childhood literacy pedagogy, assessment and monitoring, and planning. The second implication for practice involves the dissemination of this information, implementation of its suggested practices and the provision of ongoing support to teachers through professional learning frameworks.

Greater support for early years’ teachers through the development of a set of guidelines around effective literacy practice within a supportive professional learning framework are two avenues likely to enhance the pedagogical and assessment practices in early years’ literacy. A grounded understanding of intentional pedagogy, intentional monitoring and assessment and intentional planning is necessary for early years’ teachers regardless of teaching experience. To achieve this across schools and systems, professional development within these key dimensions of literacy needs to be forthcoming. The continued development of early childhood literacy education in Western Australian schools could be bolstered by attending to findings and recommendations of this research.
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CHAPTER ONE

Research defined

Purpose

In recent years, international interest in the body of research concerning teachers’ practices in literacy education, specifically during early childhood, has grown consistently. Numerous studies and policy statements aimed at supporting and improving performance of both teachers and students in the early years of formal education focus on literacy, (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1998, 2003; National Institute of Child Health, 2000; Rose, 2006; Rowe, 2005). In a large-scale British study on effective pedagogy during the early years (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Mutock, Gilden & Bell, 2002), one finding was that effective early childhood centres were those with teachers who had sound pedagogy and subject matter knowledge. Students in Australian early childhood classrooms experience a variety of programs. Evidence suggests that the “higher the value-added academic effectiveness of the preschool attended, the better the long term outcomes for children” (Sylva, Melhuisha, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2008, p. iii).

In Australia the focus on the early years of schooling and literacy education generally, has also gradually increased over the last few decades. For example, a national five-year, longitudinal study of three- and four-year olds’ participation in early childhood programs has commenced with analysis of the programs’ implementation begun in 2009 and continuing to 2015 (University of Melbourne, 2010). In the 2008-2009 federal budgets, $540 million was invested to deliver a national action plan to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes over four years known as ‘Smarter Schools-
National Partnership Agreement on Literacy and Numeracy’ (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2010c).

Each State and Territory was allocated funding towards implementing these improvements across all education sectors. Additionally, in 2010, the first National Australian Curriculum is currently being developed with initial roll-out scheduled for 2011 (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2010). Also in 2010, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) document as part of the government’s National Quality Framework to ensure high quality care and education in early childhood was introduced (DEEWR, 2010). Another major development has been the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care (OECECC) within the federal DEEWR office in 2008 with the “aim to achieve a nationally consistent, accessible, affordable and high quality early childhood education child care system for all Australian children and families” (DEEWR, 2009, para 1).

A number of recent state level initiatives and changes within Western Australia focusing on early childhood and specifically on the Pre-primary year of schooling and the literacy education teachers provide are also currently underway (Department of Education [DoE], 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). A follow on from the establishment of the national office was the creation of a WA based office in March, 2009 named the Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning (OECDL; DoE, 2010a). One of the priorities of the OECDL is to ensure that the highest quality Kindergarten, Pre-primary and junior primary school programs are delivered, and another to help parents and early childhood professionals work together to give children the best start to life (DoE, 2010a). From the commencement of 2010, state government schools introduced state-wide testing in Pre-primary known as ‘The Online Interview-Literacy’ (OLI-L; DoE, 2010). A corresponding numeracy online interview was implemented at the same time.
Specifically in early childhood, in 2009, a major WA Review of educational practice in Kindergarten, Pre-primary, and Year 1 (Review K/P/1), was commissioned with an advisory group led by the University of Melbourne (DEEWR, 2010). The Review K/P/1 examined ways to improve Kindergarten, Pre-primary and Year 1 student performance in WA schools in line with national and state initiatives and standards (DoE, 2010a); review recommendations are yet to be published. Finally in WA, Kindergarten attendance hours are in the process of increasing in 2010 from 11 to 15 hours per week (DoE, 2010) bringing about changes in the early years of education.

This study focuses specifically on literacy and early childhood education by simultaneously examining the pedagogical and assessment literacy practices of Pre-primary teachers. The intended outcomes of the current study are: (1) to document which pedagogical and assessment practices are being utilised in Pre-primary classrooms; and, (2) to examine how teachers link these aspects of their teaching in their literacy programs. In addition to relating the purpose of this research, this introductory chapter includes my perspective on the significance of the study and the research questions that guide the study. Some background and contextual information explaining the circumstances leading to the decision to undertake the current study is also discussed, including: 1) my development as a researcher and early childhood educator; 2) Pre-primary and early childhood education in Western Australia; 3) the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA) and its approach to early childhood education; and, 4) literacy and literacy assessment in that sector. This assists in further contextualising the current study’s focus. The chapter concludes by providing an overview of the other chapters in this thesis.
Significance of the research

The findings of this current study are intended to inform interested stakeholders about teaching and learning in literacy education using examples gained through the various data collection instruments. For example, the survey results provide Catholic system-wide data on literacy related practices, and data collected through interviews and classroom observations provide detailed descriptions and analysis of a smaller sample of literacy-related practices.

Thus, the current study holds significance in two key areas that have been widely researched and debated: early childhood and literacy education. Literacy education has been an area of contention amongst researchers, educators and politicians for at least 40 years with an ever increasing quantity of debate and dialogue at national and international forums (Chall, 1967; Ewing, 2006; Luke, 1998; Street, 2003). Early childhood education is also an area that has attracted increasing attention with greater understanding of its importance especially with recent developments in brain research (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; McCain & Mustard, 1999; Smith, Grima, Gaffney, Powell, Masse, & Barnett, 2000). Thus, literacy education has gained priority on a national level as outlined earlier with a number of current national projects and reviews attracting large sums of funding to address the considerable gaps in our understanding of the Pre-primary year of schooling (University of Melbourne, 2010).

A high level of interest in the area of literacy education has been maintained with constant media interest and regular discussion between interested stakeholders, including politicians, literacy specialists and researchers (Ewing, 2006). Literacy creates a sense of panic amongst educators as it is often discussed in “the context of a crisis” (Freebody, 2007, p. iii). The area of early childhood education is particularly
significant as we now know the importance of the early years on brain development (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; McCain & Mustard, 1999). From birth to age ten, the brain is under a critical or sensitive period of development during which the brain demands certain types of input to create or stabilise certain long-lasting structures (Machado, 2006). The literature affirms that children whose early development is hindered rarely catch up with their peers; instead, they continue to lag behind in literacy levels for an extended period of time (Adams, 1990; Torgeson, 1998).

This study focuses on the Pre-primary year of schooling where a student-centred, developmental program is argued to be the most appropriate form of learning for Pre-primary children (Bredekamp, 1998; Copple & Bredekamp, 2008; NAEYC, 2009a). With the introduction of *The Curriculum Framework* (Curriculum Council, 2008) in Western Australia (1998), pedagogical practices came into focus with expectations placed on teachers to provide a student-centred program catering for a developmental approach to learning and with expectations for teachers to meet stated curriculum outcomes. This research provides an opportunity for dissemination of knowledge in order to give further impetus to the dialogue around pedagogical practices in Pre-primary, a key aspect of the study. Individual narratives that reveal teachers’ conceptualisation of literacy and assessment practices provide further insight into this crucial time of introduction to formal schooling. Researchers, educators, school administration staff, politicians and other interested stakeholders may benefit from the findings of this study with an insight into what is currently occurring and how this may impact policy and practise.
Research questions

The broad research aim of this study is to explore, through the use of a mixed methods approach, how Pre-primary teachers conceptualise pedagogy and assessment, and the linking of the two, in the context of literacy education. This research aims to produce rich narratives explicitly illustrating the manner in which teachers apply literacy instruction, and monitor, assess, evaluate and plan their literacy progress. To achieve the broad aim of this study, specific questions need to be asked. In particular, the following questions guide the research:

1. What literacy pedagogical and assessment practices are Pre-primary teachers applying within Catholic primary schools in Western Australia?
2. How are teachers monitoring and planning literacy?
3. How do Pre-primary teachers link pedagogy, assessment and planning in literacy education?
4. To what extent do factors such as age, stage of career and level of qualification relate to teachers’ literacy pedagogical and assessment practices?

The answers to these questions are both relevant and timely for teachers in and out of Australia who may compare this study’s findings or use the information to guide practical decisions around literacy pedagogy.

For teachers in Catholic schools in Western Australia, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA), an increased emphasis on professional learning began in 2004 through a system-wide initiative known as Raising Standards in Education (RAISe). Literacy education was the initial curriculum content used as the focus for RAiSe implementation, followed by numeracy. Schools self-nominated
participation by making a three-year commitment (Catholic Education Commission, 2009) attended whole school professional learning days and received in-school support for those who had undergone specific training to be literacy coordinators of RAISE. Schools could nominate to be RAISE (literacy) or RAISE (numeracy) schools or both and were referred to accordingly.

Knowledge of the impact of professional learning on Pre-primary teachers’ pedagogical and assessment decisions provides meaningful data for administrators who form policies on educational initiatives. In this current study, participants who stated they were attached to a RAISE (literacy) school are referred to as RAISE school participants from here on. An intention of this study is to provide system administrators with the research results needed for them to continue the initiatives started, or to reinforce the nature and purpose of having such initiatives. At the outset, this study was stated not to be an evaluation of initiatives already implemented by the CEOWA, but to include data on RAISE necessary in the context of this investigation.

The terms pedagogy, literacy and assessment are defined in the following ways: pedagogy as “the way teachers promote children’s development and learning” (Epstein, 2007, p. 5); assessment as a “social practice that involves noticing, representing and responding to children’s literate behaviours” (Johnston & Rogers, 2001, p. 54); and literacy “involves the integration of speaking and listening, critical thinking with reading and writing. Effective literacy is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic, and continues to develop throughout an individual’s lifetime” (Department of Education, Employment and Training [DEET], 1991, p. 9).
Research context: Change in early childhood literacy education

The researcher

My professional experiences over the past 17 years have focussed specifically on education in early childhood and literacy education, thereby leading to interest in the current study. My professional experience includes: teaching in the Pre-primary year of early childhood; supervising early childhood university practicum; lecturing in pre-service education and coordinating early childhood and primary literacy for students learning to be teachers.

As a practising teacher prior to and during the introduction of the Western Australian Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council, 1998) mandated for all education sectors (Kindergarten to Year 12) in 1998, I saw both the anguish and triumphs of teachers becoming familiar with its application. The intent of the Curriculum Framework was to set out the “knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes that students are expected to acquire described as a series of learning outcomes” (Curriculum Council, 1998, Foreword). Another major educational change in 1998 which I experienced as an educator was the introduction of the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessments (WALNA; DoE, 2008) administered annually in Years 3, 5 and 7. WALNA was part of a National Plan agreed by Commonwealth, State and Territory ministers to improve literacy and numeracy skills in the early years of schooling (DoE, 2010d). Both were major educational changes to the WA system a decade ago.

Over the years, professional conversations with experienced early childhood teachers have included listening to concerns about a perceived ‘push-down’ curriculum. Early childhood teachers discussed this as a factor causing pressure on them to adapt
their program so to more closely reflect the philosophy underpinning that of the upper school, with expectations of increasing curriculum content in the early years and the concomitant fear of losing the ‘play-based’ model of early childhood education.

Additionally, many research studies and reports have offered recommendations for the early years to ensure students do not fall behind in their literacy skills and knowledge (Adams, 1990; National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

In my role as a university lecturer, I was a participant in the data collection for the *National Inquiry into Literacy* (DEEWR, 2004) which also resulted in numerous recommendations being produced in which to engage with. These included: “better teacher quality and building teacher capacity towards quality” (p. 12). This national study found that the teaching of reading in teacher preparation courses was not consistent and thus “an evidence-based and integrated approach including instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge and text comprehension needs to be adopted” (p. 12). As a university practicum supervisor I have spent countless hours in teachers’ classrooms observing, not only student-teacher interactions but experienced mentor teachers interacting with students, and applying various literacy practices and assessments. In this process, I have seen a myriad of organisational and administrative forms and documents. During these observational visits, practising teachers have commented on what they perceive as increased administrative requirements and levels of accountability. Their comments echo a feeling that the increased administration takes them away from their focus on teaching and their students.

In 2004, I attended an information session on the Primary Performance Indicators in Schools (PIPS). This large-scale standardised testing being introduced within the Catholic sector of Western Australia was the first of its kind I had seen since
being employed in the early years’ classroom. My personal views were both interest and reservation about its validity in early childhood education. As an educator, I accepted both the benefits and pitfalls that exist with any testing. Over time and after discussions with many teachers in the Catholic system using PIPS, I came to my own conclusion that some form of literacy testing in the Pre-primary year was a positive step for students in their early years, thereby providing teachers with real data to interpret and apply to their teaching.

The year of schooling on which I have focused this study is Pre-primary. This was of high interest to me because I had spent a number of years teaching students in their initial year of formal education. The Pre-primary year has been unique within the school system as it was previously isolated from the main school site. Each of these rich experiences led me to the current study. My aim was to gather data about what was occurring in schools in the Pre-primary year with regard to early childhood literacy, thus combining my two areas of interest.

The research will investigate the concept and practice of literacy, a term often used and with varying definitions, as one that incorporates a wide range of social and cultural practices which engage students in making and taking meaning in their daily lives, including the language modes of speaking, listening, reading, writing and viewing as mandated in the WA Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council, 1998). Underpinning the study is a belief that Pre-primary teachers implement, monitor and assess literacy practices in varying ways, teaching these in the manner in which they conceptualise them in their classrooms; this is at the core of the current study.
**Early childhood and the pre-primary year in Western Australia**

The year prior to the first year of compulsory schooling in WA is referred to as Pre-primary. Changes to schooling in 2001 brought the age at which children start school in WA closer to school starting ages across Australia. Two school years (known as Kindergarten and Pre-primary) precede the first year of formal primary education.

Approximately 95 percent of Pre-primary children attend a Pre-primary program in WA (DoE, 2010a) even though it is not mandated (in accordance with the School Education Act 1999). In Western Australia, students enrolling in Pre-primary must be five years old by June 30 of the particular school year. Students who attend Pre-primary school are expected to attend school for the five full school days in all education sectors (Government, Catholic and Independent).

Until 2002, Pre-primary classes were under the auspices of the WA Preschool Board, and known as Kindergartens. These formal institutions were situated off-site as ‘community Kindergarten’ buildings and were fee paying. In 1975, pilot centres called ‘Pre-primary’, were attached to, but separate from, primary schools. In order to receive more Commonwealth funding, the government then repealed the WA Preschool Board Act in 1977 and placed these children within the mandate of the Education Department. Some groups did not wish to transfer and remained functional as community Kindergartens. By 1993, some schools in every district offered five days per week, as distinct from four half days for Pre-primary students as a trial. This resulted in parents deciding they wanted four full Pre-primary days or two half days for Kindergarten. This plan remained in place until 2001 when there was a change in school entry age: the Kindergarten program was extended to four half days or the equivalent as determined by individual schools; and the following Pre-primary year offered full time schooling (DoE, 2006).
From the beginning of the 2009 school year, major changes to early childhood education were seen in the Catholic sector with the introduction of three-year old children into Catholic schools in what are referred to as ‘three-year old programs’ (CEOWA, 2010). Students attend 2 two-and-a-half hour sessions per week or an optional full day session depending on the school decision. To enrol, students must have turned three by the commencement of the school year (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia: Policy Statement 2-C4, 2008b). The Catholic Education Office Strategic Plan (2008a) states that, the aim is to “develop a whole-system focus for enhancing literacy and numeracy learning and a whole-system focus to address the needs of early childhood education”. This is one aspect explored in the current study as this research asks participants whether they are aware of whole-school literacy plans and whether they are part of the RAISe initiative.

To place Pre-primary education in context, some data are included. In 2007, the first year of data collection for this study, a total of 36,308 primary aged children were enrolled in the Catholic sector of which approximately 4,200 were in their Pre-primary year (Catholic Education Commission, 2007). In Western Australia, a number of initiatives in early childhood education have been implemented and are currently in place. The state strengthened its commitment to early childhood education in recent years as there was recognition that investing more in early childhood programs was worthwhile for on economic, social, health and educational grounds (DET, 2001). With the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) in 2010, more information is provided to teachers to inform them about development of their early childhood programs. Additional support resources have been recently published to further assist teachers with the EYF implementation. The establishment of the OECDL in 2008 gave a renewed national focus on early years’ education.
The Australian government is working with the states and territories to implement a number of reforms including: priority for Aboriginal students; better coordination of Kindergarten and Pre-primary with child-care services; and working more closely with parents to help with the transition between home and school (DEEWR, 2010a). Related to this study is the aforementioned *Review of educational practice in Kindergarten, Pre-primary, and Year 1* (DoE, 2010a). This review includes non-government schools and examines current Kindergarten, Pre-primary and Year 1 educational practice compared against research evidence on effective practice in early childhood education. From the review, a set of findings on student performance in WA schools is expected in the near future (DoE, 2010). In an overview of national initiatives (DoE, 2010c), a coordinated approach to pedagogy, assessment and curriculum is being proposed by the OECDL. The intended outcome is to develop in one document a WA based, relevant and focussed Early Years Learning Framework (DoE, 2010b).

A Western Australian government initiative “to assess the foundation literacy and numeracy skills of all Pre-primary students in public schools” (DoE, 2010a) commenced at outset of the 2010 school year. The assessments are named “The Online Interview-Literacy” and are referred to as “OLI-L (Literacy)” and “OLI-N (Numeracy)” (DoE, 2010b). The assessment tool being implemented is the “Victorian Online Interview (English and Mathematics)” (DoE, 2010); this was considered to be most suitable for Western Australian schools. In the online interview, assessments are conducted on a one-to-one basis, the teacher and student being at a computer for approximately 30 minutes. Each Pre-primary teacher interviews students one by one using an interview provided on the DoE website (DoE, 2010b). A number of texts and other resources used during the interview are also provided. The OLI-L assessment
measures: oral language, phonemic awareness, concepts of print, words, sounds and letters, comprehension and writing.

The On-line Interview-Literacy assessment was introduced as a response to recommendations of the study, *Literacy and Numeracy Review* (Literacy and Numeracy Review Taskforce, 2006), and with agreements between states and territories to implement a tool which identifies students at educational risk. One recommendation for Pre-primary educators was to undertake “diagnostic assessment of sounds in words (phonological awareness)” (Literacy and numeracy review taskforce, 2006, p. 20). This was in the same year the CEOWA introduced the PIPS assessment which assesses phonological awareness.

At the commencement of the 2010 school year, 50 government schools were invited to participate in OLI-L through self nomination; in 2011, it will be compulsory for all government schools to participate. Any individual student exemptions will be decided by schools (DoE, 2010b). The perceived benefits of the assessment are expected to be: better support against teacher judgements; provision of longitudinal data; links to National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scales; standardisation of assessment; more information to parents; and easier transfer of information between schools. The resultant reports for students and schools allow teachers to compare data against ‘expected targets’ and use the support material to assist students who show deficiencies in any areas (DOE, 2010b). This on-line assessment is somewhat similar to the PIPS base-line assessment conducted in Catholic schools (see Chapter one). This highlights how WA has two different on-line assessments being administered in Pre-primary in two of its education sectors.
A large-scale study was published in 2008 on the literacy growth of Pre-primary and Year 1 students (Louden, Rohl, & Hopkins, 2008). This was a three-year longitudinal study investigating literacy and numeracy for the Western Australian Department of Education and Training. The study is relevant to the current research as it documented findings about effective literacy teachers based on observations using the Classroom Observation Schedule (CLOS-R). The findings are discussed in the context of the current study’s findings as both relate to Western Australian. One finding from the Louden et al., (2008) study of particular interest was that “effective teachers of Pre-primary and Year 1 took a broad approach to the teaching of literacy and did not focus on any one aspect” (p. 60). In summary, Western Australia has undertaken several change initiatives in the area of early childhood literacy in past decades. In addition to these changes, new curriculum documentation, national testing and an early years’ review are underway bringing continued change, expansion and accountability.

**Early childhood literacy education in CEOWA**

The Catholic sector is one of three educational sectors in WA, (the others being Government and Independent). There are currently 160 Catholic schools across the state of which 130 are primary schools (CEOWA, 2010a). It is the state’s second largest education sector. Within the CEOWA, teachers must have accreditation to teach Religious Education before being considered for employment in Catholic schools and students who are Catholic are given priority to enrol in Catholic schools (Catholic Education Commission, 2008b), however; non-Catholic students may apply but each Catholic dioceses has a limit set by the Bishop which they must first consult before admitting non-Catholic students (CEOWA, 2009b). The CEOWA seeks to nurture the staff as persons of faith with a sense of mission working in a
Christian community. The curricula of Catholic schools are concerned with students' integrated development as Christians who are responsible, inner-directed individuals, capable of free choice and making value judgements enlightened by an informed Christian conscience (CEOWA, 2009b).

In 2004, the CEOWA created an education initiative named ‘Raising Achievement in Schools’ (RAISe), aimed at improving teaching and learning standards. Schools were asked to make a three year commitment to the project (CEOWA, 2009) on a voluntary basis. Literacy became the central focus of the initiative, after being identified as a way the teaching and learning to be improved across the system. RAISe professional learning involved revisiting language theories, examining best literacy practices, evaluating assessment tools, and providing ongoing professional development. The RAISe initiative impacts directly on this study as it may have influenced or altered the literacy teaching and assessment practices of Pre-primary teachers, and the knowledge they possessed about literacy education. Since 2004, 78 schools have joined the RAISe project.

Staff of schools volunteering to implement the RAISe initiative attended several whole-school RAISe conference days where professional development in a range of literacy topics was provided. Each school developed its own comprehensive whole school approach concerning the implementation of RAISe practices. Teacher leaders and support networks were built within the RAISe initiative and those in supporting roles were provided with ongoing assistance about how to help teachers within schools. Also, teachers in RAISe schools were appointed to be school leaders thereby giving them the role of overseeing the literacy practices already introduced; and of providing ongoing support to their teachers. A number of assessments known as the
‘Observation Survey’ (Clay, 1993) were mandated as part of the RAISE initiative for those schools volunteering to be a part of the project. The Observation Survey was employed with students in Years 1 to 3, omitting the Pre-primary year. The Observation Survey assesses: concepts about print; reading; letter identification; word reading; writing vocabulary; and hearing sounds (Clay, 2006).

In another initiative, through the Smarter Schools National Agreement on Literacy and Numeracy Partnership (DEEWR, 2010), the “Collaborative Professional Learning” model (CPL) emerged. The CPL is “a comprehensive plan for onsite professional growth that engage teachers in deep investigation of practice with the intent to improve and consolidate learning” (CEOWA, 2010b). The CPL model now replaces RAISE but continues to use the same metalanguage introduced during RAISE to continue the professional learning begun in 2004. In the document outlining CPL (Catholic Education Commission, 2010), under the heading of ‘effective teaching’, it states that “effective teaching is central to the CPL model and that there are three domains of teacher knowledge under effective teaching. These are: knowledge of content; knowledge of students; and knowledge of pedagogy. These are represented as a Venn diagram. This CPL model is current and relevant to this study as my findings will discuss how to support teachers’ pedagogy in light of the investigation’s findings. The CPL model will be referred to in my research findings and discussion in accordance with the context applicable.

**Literacy assessment in CEOWA**

Annual literacy testing in WA has seen some changes in the last decade. In 1998, the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) was introduced at Years 3, 5 and 7 in all education sectors to test students’ reading, writing, spelling,
grammar and punctuation (DoE, 2010d). The WALNA national testing in literacy and numeracy commenced in 2008 led to the introduction of the current national testing known as the National Australian Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN, ACARA, 2010). The Catholic sector in WA introduced the Primary Performance Indicators in Schools (PIPS) baseline assessment to its Pre-primary students in 2006. PIPS is not mandated; however, it is strongly encouraged by the Director of CEOWA.

PIPS was developed in 1994 at Durham University in the United Kingdom to gain data assessing early reading and early mathematics. PIPS is administered by the classroom teacher using a computer program purchased by individual schools. The test takes approximately 20 minutes for each child, in a face-to-face with the teacher. A beginning of year test is administered during the first four weeks of the school year. A second test is administered towards the close of the year. In 2008, more than 26,000 students were tested using PIPS. Currently 318 WA schools use PIPS, including government schools and all Catholic primary schools.

The major outcomes of PIPS are that data in literacy and numeracy are provided for teachers early in the school life of each student. Data are analysed externally and then individual student and class reports are sent back from the external centre to classroom teachers to act upon as they deem necessary. A second PIPS assessment conducted in the same manner in term four of the same school year provides a second set of data which teachers may compare with that received from the first test (Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring, Durham University, 2009). In Western Australian Catholic schools, PIPS testing provides the baseline assessment used in the context of the study. It is unknown how individual teachers interpret this information and how it is used by them. This study will include any information given voluntarily by participants on PIPS but does not set out to promote or deny its use. As mentioned in
the prior section, the Government schools in WA have introduced the On-line interview to their Pre-primary students from the beginning of the 2010 school year.

Overview of chapters

Chapter two explores the literature relevant to early childhood education pedagogy and assessment in literacy education. The chapter commences by presenting a background on early childhood from a historical to contemporary view, giving a context for the study by enabling a clearer understanding of the evolving nature of early childhood. The next segment includes a discussion related to early childhood on the international, national and local level. Subsequently, a section follows on literacy pedagogy and assessment including a section specific to early childhood.

In chapter three, the research methodology is outlined. The rationale for a mixed method approach, the manner and rationale of participant selection, the choice of instruments, data collection, analysis and interpretation are discussed in turn. The first data interpretation commences in Chapter four with a summary of statistical information gathered through a survey questionnaire. In Chapter five, the data analysis of the qualitative data is presented as narrative accounts with a discussion and analyses of all accounts. In Chapter six, the research is discussed, recommendations for further research, practice and policy are outlined and the research conclusions brought together.

In summary, international interest in the body of research concerning teachers’ practices in literacy education, specifically during early childhood, has grown consistently. Students in Australian early childhood programs experience a variety of programs. Evidence suggests the greater the quality of the program, the better the long term outcomes for children (Sylva et al., 2008). In Australia, early childhood education is changing. A number of recent initiatives and increased funding in the early years
affirms this shift in focus. One relevant review related to this study is the *Review of educational practice in Kindergarten, Pre-primary, and Year 1* (DEEWR, 2010); findings and recommendations are still pending. The intended outcomes of the current study are: (1) to document which pedagogical and assessment practices are being utilised in Pre-primary classrooms; and, (2) to examine how teachers link these aspects of their teaching in their literacy programs. My professional experiences over the past 17 years have focussed specifically on education in early childhood and literacy education and have thus lead me to interest in the current study.
CHAPTER 2
Literature Review

Chapter overview

This chapter explores the literature that informs and contextualises this study. Its purpose is to situate the current study within the existing body of knowledge, and to provide a context for subsequent chapters in the thesis. A review of the existing literature also provides a theoretical perspective on literacy pedagogy and assessment in the early years. This research is situated within two broad areas of educational research and interest: early childhood and literacy. Literacy and early childhood education are both significant areas, and together have attracted substantial attention over the past 40 years due to developments in research and greater insights into how children learn.

Literacy and early childhood education have been the subject of continual debate about approaches to teaching in early childhood; namely, which concepts of literacy should be taught and assessed and which processes are apposite. This chapter includes literature on these domains and also includes a literature review on teachers’ career development to cover the research questions posed in this study. The chapter commences with a discussion about early childhood on international, national and local levels followed by a similar section on literacy education focusing on the aims of this study by exploring pedagogy, planning, assessment and monitoring. The discussion also includes a short summary of the stages of teacher career development. Figure 1 provides a graphic overview of the framework for the literature review.
Figure 1. Overview of literature review
Early childhood

*Historical to contemporary view*

Internationally, the early childhood years are defined as being from birth to eight years (Bredekamp, 1987). In this research, teachers of Pre-primary children aged between four and six years of age were the focus of attention. The early years of education have attracted ever increasing international attention, recognition and focus as knowledge in the field has expanded. There is a long and dynamic history which needs to be acknowledged in order to place this study into the context in which it belongs. Historically, before 1700, early childhood education in Western society did not receive much attention. Children received little attention and were expected to grow up learning from their parents (Driscoll & Nagel, 2005, p. 25). As time went by greater importance was placed on valuing children. Influences from philosophers and educators such as Rousseau, Froebel, Locke, Comenius and Pestalozzi placed a greater emphasis on valuing young children and the environments to which they were exposed. A greater emphasis on the health and welfare of young children emerged in the 1900s (Gordon & Brown, 2008).

Since 1900, early childhood education has consistently grown and branched in many directions; it has been consistently revised and reformed and is now widely seen to be of the utmost importance in the wider context of education. A number of interdisciplinary influences have enriched the field of early childhood since early times. A review of the literature on the history of early childhood education and care reveals that kindergartens and nurseries were established in the 19th century, often drawing from the same models based on Froebel, Pestalozzi, Montessori and the activities of missionaries (Kamerman, 2006).
The work of Maria Montessori (1870-1952) whose research with children’s diseases and mental challenges brought about her ‘Montessori Method’ is now reflected in ‘Montessori schools’ (Gordon & Browne, 2008). Between 1960 and 1995, major economic, social and global changes such as economic growth, increased female participation in the workforce, globalisation and increased awareness of preschool programs (in the 1980s) all influenced early childhood services and policies for the better (Kamerman, 2006). Another major educational education system that has influenced early childhood educational practices is based on the work of Loris Malaguzzi (1993) undertaken whilst he worked in the town of Reggio Emilia, Italy. The Reggio Emilia approach has influenced educators internationally because of its respect for children and their creativity. The Reggio Emilia approach continues to serve as a model for early childhood education in many places across the world (Gordon & Browne, 2008).

The child study movement in the 1920s and 1930s was the impetus for later research into improving child development and education (Gordon & Browne, 2008). In 1965, the Federal government of the USA created the largest, publicly funded education program for young children known as Head Start. The program aimed to provide quality services for young children regardless of family income, and particularly to children deemed at risk by their family’s economic situation (Office of Head Start, 2008). The ideology driving Head Start implied that if children were provided with adequate opportunities through programs to enhance their early intellectual development at school, then long-term benefits would naturally follow, including perhaps the hope of ending the cycle of poverty. Over the past 40 years, more than 25 million children and their families have been enrolled in the program which has
been generally viewed as a success due to the achievements of its objectives and principles (Office of Head Start, 2008).

Recent reports from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2010) demonstrate a commitment of many OECD countries, including Australia, to increased quality of policy and services in early childhood arrangements. For example, in December, 2009, 62 participants from 28 countries attended an OECD meeting in Paris to discuss the manner in which the ‘integration of education and care’ (OECD, 2010) could be improved. This view is further supported by such international organisations as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and The World Bank (Arthur, Beecher, Dockett, Farmer, & Death, 2008). In 2010, international and national emphasis on early childhood education and care services continues to expand and improve. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1986 is now the most ratified of all human rights instruments (Brennan, 2009). The convention highlights the view of the child as now seen as important, a vast change from the past. Acknowledging the long history of early childhood education is important for placing it in the context of today’s society, wherein young children and their education are valued and supported by a wide variety of programs, research and funding.

**Early childhood**

*International initiatives and perspectives*

Early childhood commonly agreed as being the period from birth to eight years, is recognised internationally as a crucial developmental period in a child’s life and is widely considered as the most important time for literacy development (NAEYC, 1998). Educators Bredekamp & Copple (1997) highlight the significant role of
delivering quality programs in all early childhood settings that reflect developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) defined as, “a framework of principles and guidelines for best practice in the care and education of young children” (NAEYC, 2009a). An increase in demand for early childhood education services has resulted from a greater understanding of the critical importance of these years for literacy development, foundational to later success. Thus, during the early years, current knowledge of appropriate child development and pedagogical practices should be applied in the classroom context (Dunn & Kontos, 1997; Rouse & Fantuzzo, 2006). In recent times, ‘Sociocultural theory’ and ‘activity theory’ have emerged, providing researchers and educators with “methodological tools for investigating the processes by which social, cultural and historical factors shape human functioning” (Daniels 2001, p. 1). In the context of these theoretical perspectives, development is seen as being actively shaped by the social, cultural and political contexts in which humans reside (Fleer & Raban, 2005).

Research has shown that the early and lasting effects of children’s environments and experiences have an effect on brain development and cognition; connections formed in the brain cells from infancy through about age ten retain their greatest malleability (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; McCain & Mustard, 2002). Greater understanding of recent research in brain development during the early years and the long term effects both for cognitive and behavioural outcomes has led governments and organisations to rethink and provide better opportunities for children both at home and beyond (OECD, 2010). Research has highlighted that the early years in a child's life significantly impact on later development and participation in society. McCain and Mustard assert (1999) that “learning in the early years must be based on quality, developmentally attuned interactions with primary caregivers and opportunities for
play-based problem solving with other children that stimulates brain development” (p. 7). UNICEF (2008) stresses the importance of investing in the early years to enhance the long term benefits to children in educational achievement and learning.

Learning commences from birth; the pathways into learning about literacy start in early childhood and continue throughout schooling, during which the students encounter a wide range of social contexts where literacy practices occur (Makin & Jones, 2004). The importance of investing early in life is reinforced by McCain and Mustard (1999) who found from their study of early years development that “a child requires appropriate stimulation for the brain to establish neural pathways in the brain for optimal development. Many of the critical periods are over or waning by the time a child is six years’ old” (p. 6). This study led to a number of investments being made in Canada to better prepare children for academic and social successes in later life. Postponing investment in young children is not an option; learning is “dynamic and is most effective when it begins at a young age” (McCain & Mustard, 2002, p. 4).

Numerous early childhood associations exist internationally, the largest being The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which was founded in 1926 and currently has nearly 90,000 members (NAEYC, 2010). The NAEYC works on behalf of young children, being dedicated to the preservation of childhood developmentally appropriate practice, quality education, and developmental services for children within the early years (Gordon & Brown, 2008; NAEYC, 2010).

**National initiatives and perspectives**

A number of initiatives, projects and programs have been introduced, implemented and are currently underway in Australia. Relevant to the current study, in 2001 the Victorian government invested $7.6 million dollars on an early years’ initiative named
the Best Start Program. One of the program’s aims was to improve the social, emotional and physical well being of early childhood aged children. The program was extended over three phases, and is now in its third phase which comes to an end in 2011 (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010).

During 2009, every teacher at Pre-primary level participated in informing a national database of information known as the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI). This research project collected information on 261,203 Australian students. The results, released in December, 2009, provide an overview of the well-being of children in a community (AEDI, 2010). On the AEDI website, any region in Australia may be selected, (e.g., Perth) and a summary table is provided giving information on physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive competence (school-based); and communication skills. The table is presented in percentages of children ‘on track’ and ‘developmentally vulnerable’ (AEDI, 2010).

A major change to national testing in literacy and numeracy commenced in 2008 with the introduction of the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (ACARA, 2010). Every year, all students in years three, five, seven and nine are tested in literacy and numeracy on the same day using national tests in reading, writing, and language conventions (spelling, punctuation and grammar). The NAPLAN testing has not been without discussion and controversy over the administration of tests, ranking of results and publishing of the results on the My School website (ABC news, 2010; Ferrari, 2010; Taverniti, 2010).

In July, 2010, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed a major early childhood reform named the National Early Childhood Development Strategy. This strategy states that “by 2020 all children can have the best possible start
in life to create a better future for themselves and the nation” (DEEWR, 2010b, p. 7). Along with this strategy the Australian government announced in 2010 the investment of $273.7 million dollars to support the introduction of the National Quality Framework (NQF) for early childhood education and child care. The money is being used to create better staff ratios, infrastructure for early years’ services and improvements across the sector (DEEWR, 2010b). The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF, DEEWR, 2010b) was endorsed in July, 2010 as a component of the (NQF). It describes “the principles, practice and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children’s learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school” (DEEWR, 2010b). The NQF will be implemented progressively from mid 2010 through to be fully operational by January 1, 2012 (Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care, 2010).

The main professional organisation for early childhood educators in Australia is Early Childhood Australia (ECA) established in 1938 with its primary focus being advocating for the early childhood profession, children and their families (Early Childhood Australia, 2010). ECA provides leading publications on various early childhood topics and continues to be a resource for all educators from birth to eight years. Branches exist in every Australian state and territory offering support, forums and information to local early childhood teachers and parents (Early Childhood Australia, 2010). The Western Australian branch currently has about 80 members.

In Australia, every state has a kindergarten for children aged four to five-years-old and a Pre-primary school for children who are in the year they turn five. However, starting ages for students vary by each state and are named differently. The compulsory starting age for children is: when a child turns six years in (South Australia, New South Wales, Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory); the start...
of the school year in which the child turns six years and six months (Western Australia); when the child turns six by June 30 of the school year (Queensland) and at five years of age in Tasmania (DoE, 2010a). Table 1 depicts the state, name of the year of schooling prior to Year 1, age of child and number of days attending for the year prior to Year 1, the year of focus in this study.

Table 1

_School starting age (year prior to Year 1) in Australia by state_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian state/territory</th>
<th>Name of year prior to Year 1</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of days attending/week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia (WA)</td>
<td>Pre-primary</td>
<td>5 years by June 30 of the school year</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales (NSW)</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>5 years by July 31</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria (VIC)</td>
<td>Preparatory</td>
<td>5 years by April 30</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland (QLD)</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>5 years by June 30</td>
<td>Five (half days)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia (SA)</td>
<td>Reception</td>
<td>5 years Continuous entry after 5(^{th}) birthday</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania (TAS)</td>
<td>Preparatory (compulsory)</td>
<td>5 years by Jan 1 in year of entry</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory (ACT)</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>5 years by April 30</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory (NT)</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>4 years and 6 months by Jan 1</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Note. Source DoE, 2010a_

_Local (Western Australia) initiatives and perspectives_

In Western Australia, a number of initiatives have been implemented to date. The government has strengthened its commitment to early childhood education in recent years, showing its belief that investing more in early childhood programs is worthwhile
on economic, social, health and educational grounds (DoE, 2007). With the introduction of the EYLF, greater support is aimed at teachers of early childhood programs. The Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning was established in 2010 in WA with a renewed focus on early childhood development. The Australian government is working with the states and territories to implement a number of reforms including; priorities for Aboriginal students, better coordination of Kindergarten and Pre-primary with child-care services and working more closely with parents to help with the transition between home and school (DoE, 2010). The Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning is currently considering whether to proceed with the Morton Phillips review which will examine the ways in which government provides children’s services (DoE, 2010).

With regard to this study, one relevant review mentioned in the previous chapter is underway, the Review K/P/1 (DoE, 2010) which is a review conducted by the Department of Education with non-government schools also invited to participate. The review will examine current kindergarten, Pre-primary and Year 1 educational practice against research evidence on effective practice in early childhood education. From the review, a set of findings to improve student performance and pedagogy in WA schools is expected to be released in the near future (DoE, 2010a). In an overview of national initiatives (Early childhood development and learning update handout, 2009), a coordinated approach to pedagogy, assessment and curriculum is being proposed. This is relevant to this current study; the intention is to develop a more focussed curriculum and pedagogy document for WA (i.e. a WA EYLF; DoE, 2010a).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, at the commencement of the 2010 school year, a Western Australian government initiative “to assess the foundation literacy and numeracy skills of all Pre-primary students in public schools” (DoE,
2010b) was instituted known as “OLI-L” (Literacy) and “OLI-N” (Numeracy) (DoE, 2010b). The perceived benefits of the assessment are: better support for teacher judgements; provision of longitudinal data; linkages to NAPLAN scales; a consistent (standardised) approach; provision of information to parents; and, ease of information transfer between schools.

The assessment results are printed in a finalised assessment report for each student, class, region and state in tabulated format (DoE, 2010). The online application itself allows teachers to print out student reports, principals to print school reports and other interested stakeholders to print whole state reports. At this stage the reports are used by teachers to plan teaching programs. Parent reports are not yet available but DoE hopes to make them available for delivery in Term 4, 2010 (DoE, 2010a). Teachers can compare related data against ‘expected targets’ outlined on the DoE website; and use appropriate support material to assist students who reveal deficiencies in particular areas (DoE, 2010b).

Recently, in 2008, a large-scale study on the literacy growth of Pre-primary and Year 1 students in WA schools was conducted by Louden and colleagues (2008), titled Teaching for Growth. This was a three-year longitudinal study for the Western Australian Department of Education and Training concerning literacy and numeracy. It is relevant to the current study, as it documents the findings of effective literacy teachers based on observations using the Classroom Observation Schedule (CLOS-R). The findings of the Teaching for Growth study are discussed later in this thesis in relation to this current study’s findings as both have been conducted in the Western Australian context. One outcome of the Louden (2008) study was that the finding that “effective teachers of Pre-primary and Year 1 take a broad approach to the teaching of literacy and did not focus on any one aspect” (p. 60).
In summary, Western Australia has been the site of several initiatives in the area of early childhood literacy over the past few decades. In addition to the changes briefly noted here, other initiatives such as a new national curriculum, national testing and early years’ educational review are underway, the harbingers of continued change and expansion.

**Literacy**

**International initiatives and perspectives**

Literacy education has been an area of focus and debate amongst researchers, educators and politicians for at least 40 years, with ever increasing debate and dialogue at national and international forums and within the literature (Chall, 1967; Ewing, 2006). A high level of interest in the area of literacy education is maintained with constant media attention and regular discussion between interested stakeholders including politicians, literacy specialists, parent bodies and researchers. Debates surrounding reading have caused a great deal of angst and have been politicised more than any other educational debate in Australian primary education (Ewing, 2006). Two theoretical approaches to literacy teaching dominate the ongoing debate: the top-down (phonics approach) and the whole language (bottom up) approach. Numerous research studies highlight the effectiveness of each approach (Goodman, 1968; Gough, 1972; Samuels & Kamil, 1984; Smith, 1978).

Current literature points to a not-one-or-the-other approach but instead a ‘comprehensive approach’ where decoding skills, a balanced immersion in texts, and prior learning are all activated so that students make connections and the learning context is taken into consideration (Ellis & Bochner, 2003; NAEYC & International Reading Association [IRA], 1998). In a balanced approach, one can utilise the benefits
of both whole language and phonics “to create instruction that is more than the sum of its parts” (Pressley, 1998, p. 1). Effective teachers of literacy use aspects of both approaches in a balanced and integrated way (Stanovich, 2002). Further to this point, Hassett (2008) has referred to a multidynamic literacy theory to reflect “ways in which early literacy methods and theories must always be dynamically reinvented and adapted to specific classroom contexts and the lived world of children” (p. 203). This study does not promote either the whole language or phonics approach; instead is situated within a pragmatic framework based on the latest research supporting a comprehensive balanced approach that caters for children’s developmental needs.

The area of literacy teaching and learning has been extensively researched. Internationally, much of the research has focused on reading (NRP, 2000; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). The NRP (2000) studies reveal that approximately 100,000 research studies on reading alone have been conducted since 1966. Two major influential research studies into reading have emerged in recent years: The National Research Council’s *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow et al., 1998) and *Teaching Children to Read* by the NRP (2001). The research findings of both studies revealed a number of aspects regarding the teaching of reading; including: phonics; fluency; comprehension; phonemic/phonological awareness; reading instruction; comprehension; and teacher education. The results were accepted to the US government; however, some criticisms about the studies on the methodological approaches were made by Cunningham (2001, p. 334) who argued against the validity of findings regarding silent reading, comprehension, application of computer technology and teacher education. Whilst the current study does not explore specific skills taught by participants in any depth, it is important to note the major emphasis seen in the area of specific skills to be taught in the early literacy program.
Rapid growth in understanding the acquisition of early literacy has provided positive outcomes for students, but increased the challenges for adequate teacher preparation (Spear-Swerling, Brucker & Alfamo, 2005). Internationally, teachers of children in the early years are expected to deliver greater literacy services and outcomes for young children—in comparison to the past—as knowledge based on theory in the area increases. This is evidenced by the growing number of curriculum documents prescribing what skills and knowledge should be taught as discussed earlier in this chapter. Research reinforces the critical need for teachers to provide regular opportunities to students in the early years to develop literacy skills (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; NAEYC & IRA, 1998). Children who have less of an ideal start in reading typically remain poor readers throughout their entire school years and lives (Adams, 1990). Professional development for experienced teachers and teachers in training assists in developing a research base supporting literacy instruction which meets the diverse needs of students (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). As a result, numerous practices are implemented across classrooms.

The wealth of research information can, however, cause confusion amongst early years’ teachers in terms of what skills and knowledge need to be taught and the ways in which these are expected to be taught; “We have become lost, as educators, in the complexities of literacy instruction” (Whitmore, Martens, Goodman & Owocki, 2004, p. 319). This underlines the fact that the term ‘literacy’ is complex and today means a variety of things to different people. Literacy as a ‘social practice’ is one contemporary view acknowledging that meaning in oral and written texts are socially constructed (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Gee, 1990; Genishi, 1988; Luke, 1994; Muspratt, Luke & Freebody, 1997). The nature of literacy instruction is generally more complex, especially in the children’s early years (Whitmore, 2004).
Literacy can be defined as

“The ability to read and use written information and to write appropriately in a range of contexts. It is used to develop knowledge and understanding, to achieve personal growth and to function effectively in our society. Literacy involves the integration of speaking and listening, critical thinking with reading and writing. Effective literacy is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and continues to develop throughout an individual’s lifetime” (DEET, 1991, p. 9).

In a summary of literacy literature (Department of Education and Training, Northern Territory, 2010), literacy is referred to as “not a subject but rather a set of skills that include speaking, listening, reading and writing. These skills are not confined to the English learning area” (p. 3). Further to this definition of literacy, in recent times there has been a call for literacy to be redefined to recognise the new literacy skills required by the use of information technology (Arthur & Makin, 2001) such as visual and other non-linear ICT literacies (Makin & Whitehead, 2004). In light of new technologies, Leu & Mallette (2005) suggest new challenges for schools given the new technologies and multiple modes of communication. They further contend that in relation to learning literacy, technology redefines literacy and new learning environments facilitated by teachers may also have the potential to redefine technology. For example, children use multi-modal literacies to describe meaning through different modes of representation, including gestures, images, sound and words (Flewitt, 2008).

New literacies thus form new knowledge and new challenges for classroom teachers as students are immersed in complex information sources. Conventional, hard-copy forms of linear texts will continue to co-exist with electronic multi modal texts for some time, and both will have complementary roles in a range of contexts (Unsworth, 2002). Given this, teacher learning and knowledge will need to incorporate these emerging connections between written, visual, oral and digital contexts.
The view of literacy held in this study is that it incorporates all aspects of language including: speaking, listening, reading, writing and viewing as reflected in the WA Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council, 1998) and the visual and multimodal modes. Further, literacy is flexible and dynamic incorporating the two definitions cited above. Getting literacy ‘into place’ in early childhood contexts is seen to be an effective way of promoting future educational success and guaranteeing a “smart workforce for the contemporary global economy” (Comber & Nichols, 2004, p. 43). In the next section, I examine the literature in terms of the role of the teacher, instructional and grouping choices and the learning environment.

A shared responsibility approach emphasises that assisting students to become literate is the responsibility of the teacher, family, school administrators and community taking a holistic view of the child (ECA, 2006; Kent, 2002; Neuman, Bredekamp & Copple 2000). Forty years ago parents were not encouraged to be seen as active facilitators in their children’s literacy development; it was not an area worth research discussion (Hiatt-Michael, 2006). Now, however, a shift in thinking emphasises parents as critical stakeholders who play a significant role in their children’s development (Antonacci & O’Callaghan, 2004; Beaty, 2004; MacNaughton, 1995; Sheridan, 2000).

International research on parental involvement confirms the positive outcomes in regard to schooling including: greater attendance rates; increased knowledge of student achievement; higher school satisfaction; more student self-pride; and increased academic achievement in reading and maths (Epstein, 2007). Thus in many important ways, literacy educators have revised their thinking related to literacy acquisition leading to dramatic changes in literacy pedagogy in schools and in relation to the environment of early childhood classrooms. The current study explored the views of
participants on parental involvement and the ways they include parental and community involvement. In summary, literacy has and will continue to be an important, albeit vigorously debated, area of research.

**National initiatives and perspectives**

In Australia, literacy education holds just as much interest and significance for educators and researchers reflecting its increased profile on the international level. Consequently, Australian governments have also recognised its importance which has resulted in a generally heightened political interest in the methods used to teach literacy. Various initiatives and funding have been provided with the aim of improving literacy outcomes for all Australian students. In 1991, the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1991) called for a higher level of English proficiency for all Australians; however, funding for the early years of education was relatively small. In 1997, the Commonwealth, State and Territory Education Ministers agreed to a national goal that “every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and able to spell at an appropriate level” (DEETYA, 1998). A number of projects since then have been implemented to examine how this may be achieved (DEETYA, 1998).

In 2004, the national interest in literacy education was heightened with the Australian National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (NITL) which gathered data about how schools were educating their students for literacy competency. Universities across Australia were invited to be included in the study to examine their manner of preparing student teachers for their teaching of reading. In my professional role, I was one of the participants who provided information for the National Inquiry. One finding was that assessment in literacy competency should occur as early as possible and with
little stress on students in the process of data collection (Littlefield, Stokes & Matthews, 2005).

In 2005, another study, *In Teacher’s Hands*, funded by the Australian government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) focused on identifying teaching practices that led to improved literacy outcomes (Louden et al., 2005b). This study is relevant to this research as it explores the effective pedagogy of early childhood educators, observing their practices as both effective and relatively ineffective. Thus, literacy education has continued to be a domain of learning in the early years of schooling much focussed on across Australia.

**Curriculum documents**

Numerous curriculum documents entailing what teachers are to teach in the area of literacy education have emerged in the past few decades. A number of Western Australian documents relevant to the current research surfaced from 2005 onwards with the inception of the *Curriculum Framework* (Curriculum Council, 1998). These have included the following related documents: the *Curriculum Framework Curriculum Guide-English, Progress Maps* (Curriculum Council, 2005a) and the *Western Australian K-10 Syllabuses early childhood, reading and writing* (Curriculum Council, 2007). These curriculum documents were actively endorsed by government departments and implemented across WA schools. In other parts of Australia, similar state and territory curriculum documents were created and implemented around the same period e.g. *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2005).

The first national *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) for Australia for early childhood educators was endorsed in 2009 (DEEWR, 2009) as discussed
previously. The EYLF provides early childhood educators with principles and practices to assist in supporting children from birth to five years of age, particularly in their transition to school, including literacy and numeracy. Implications for practice from the Framework include: (i) a holistic approach, (ii) responsiveness to children, (iii) learning through play, (iv) intentional teaching, (v) supportive learning environments, (vi) cultural competence; and, (vii) continuity of learning and transitions (pp.14-16).

In regard to pedagogy, the EYLF document is written in a generic manner stating for example that “Educator’s professional judgements are central to their active role in facilitating children’s learning” (p. 11). Regarding practices the document notes that teachers can draw on a “rich repertoire of pedagogical practices to promote children’s learning” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 14). These include “planning and implementing learning through play; intentional teaching; and assessing and monitoring children’s learning to inform provision and to support children in achieving learning outcomes.” An ‘educator’s guide’ to complement the EYLF with greater detail has been due for publication since the beginning of the year.

**Literacy pedagogy in early childhood**

Teachers of early childhood make decisions about the social, emotional and physical environment, the instructional strategies and grouping organisation, the content to be taught in the curriculum and the pedagogy to be used. All of these are critical decisions in teaching literacy in the early childhood setting.

**The role of the teacher and curriculum**

The role of the teacher appears in the literature as the key to successfully teaching literacy (Hattie, 2003; Reutzel & Cooter, 2007; Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998).
“Excellence in teaching is the single most powerful influence” (Hattie, 2003, p. 4). The term “intentional teaching” (Epstein, 2007, p. 1) refers to a teacher acting with purpose, and is being thoughtful and planning conscientiously. An intentional teacher is one who uses knowledge, judgement and expertise to organise learning experiences for students and takes advantageous use of unplanned opportunities (NAEYC, 2009a). Epstein (2007) discusses the need for teachers to have a broad-range of instructional strategies and the need to be mindful of students’ individual learning styles. It has long been recognised by early childhood practitioners that effective teaching of this age group must be child-centred, informal, and based on a wide variety of active, manipulative activities, which begin with children’s existing knowledge and interest and build on these (Gifford, 1994). An effective early childhood program encompasses both adult-guided and student-guided experiences (Epstein, 2007).

The role of the teacher can be described as consisting of numerous duties and responsibilities. Among others these include: facilitating learning; asking questions; providing rich learning experiences; challenging thinking; promoting higher thinking; providing feedback on learning; planning for the needs of their students, and listening to students (Brunten, 2008). A curriculum that has developmentally appropriate content and outcomes encourages teachers to “embed culturally and individually relevant experiences in the curriculum” (NAEYC, 2002, p. 5). The recommended teaching practices in literacy education outlined by the NAEYC (1998, p. 11) support developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood. These practices include providing opportunities to be read to and read independently on a daily basis; to engage in writing a range of text types; to work in small groups; to encourage collaboration; and to focus instruction. The latter must simultaneously allow for varied instructional groupings, implementation of a challenging curriculum and an emphasis on a balanced
instructional program with systematic instruction and meaningful reading and writing experiences.

In Australia, the new EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), asserts that the curriculum of early childhood encompasses “all the experiences, interactions, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children’s learning and development” (p.9). The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP) (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1991) concludes that the early years’ curriculum should emphasise the processes of acquiring knowledge which set students on the path to successful literacy practices and skills. Students learn at different rates and thus the curriculum is reflective of this (NAEYC, 2009a).

To provide a curriculum that caters for the needs of students, an acknowledgment of the need for teachers to have an extensive “repertoire of effective teaching and intervention strategies and the significance of parental and family involvement” (NAEYC, 2009a, p. 17). Children are viewed as active constructors of meaning needing meaningful experiences in which to explore literacy practices (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). The likelihood of a child succeeding in their first year of schooling depends a great deal on what they already know about reading before getting there: knowledge of books, phonemic awareness and alphabetical knowledge (Adams, 1990). In a research-based classroom, children become skilled in reading through competencies in a number of skills (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). These include: phonological awareness; and alphabetic principle and meaning. Children must acquire these skills in coordination and interaction with meaningful experiences (Neuman et al., 2000).
A joint position paper by the IRA and the NAEYC on learning to read and write emerged in 1998. The statement provided early years’ educators with a framework to guide literacy development, recognising the key role adults play in this facilitation. Key literacy concepts encouraged in the early years were: reading aloud to children; exposure to concepts about print; alphabetic principle; linguistic awareness; phonemic awareness; invented spelling; and vocabulary development through repeated readings, concepts of words and letter naming (NAEYC, 1998). The skills list continued into more complex linguistic concepts as the primary years of schooling advanced.

**Social, emotional and physical environment**

At the centre of an early childhood teacher’s role is the fostering of positive values and a sense of community (Stone, 2001). An important consideration for early childhood teachers is that of the social-emotional and physical environmental factors conducive to having literacy inculcated. In the common core of knowledge of skills for early childhood identified by Bredekamp (1997), states that early years’ professionals must have the skills to “establish supportive relationships with children and implement appropriate guidance and guidelines” (p. 68). The social and emotional environment is a significant part of the ‘environmental’ aspect, students depending upon teachers to provide the care, nurturing and responsive interactions under which they thrive (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The importance of the environment is summed up by the following statement: “Children who develop warm, positive relationships with their kindergarten teachers are more excited about learning, more positive about coming to school, more self-confident and achieve more in the classroom” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004, p. 2) and the development of a child’s brain architecture depends on this (p. 1).
Teacher and student relationships in the early years are critical to emotional and academic success (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). The critical nature of early relationships including that between a teacher and student is a predictor of either later success or possible problems. In their research (Hamre & Painta, 2001) describe in teachers’ words the experiences which have proved to be indicators of behavioural outcomes throughout the primary years and beyond to the eighth grade. These strong relationships are indicators of children’s ability to adapt to the many social contexts they encounter and act as indicators of academic success in the early and primary years of schooling.

A teacher builds relationships to increase all aspects of a child’s development and enhance positive school outcomes (Joseph & Strain, 2004; Webster-Stratton, 1992). A classroom that is conducive to learning is heightened through the development of positive relationships. Webster-Stratton et al. (1992) refer to the term “making deposits” (p.22) as a way of providing positive affirmations and praise to students throughout the school day to develop and build positive relationships. The term making deposits is an analogy to making deposits into a child’s “relationship piggy bank” (p.22). Negative responses are seen as withdrawals from this relationship bank (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). In this current study, the relationships and role between teacher and students are observed as they frame the manner in which literacy pedagogy practices are implemented.

Concerning the physical environment, the literature (NAEYC, 1991; Walsh & Gardner, 2005) suggests it to be a key teaching strategy and one that effects motivation. Resources should be accessible promoting a ‘print-rich’ environment (Freeman & Hatch, 1989; NAEYC, 1991). A print-rich classroom would include print in the forms
of labels, posters, charts, signs and lists. In a study by Walsh and Gardner (2005) which evaluated early years’ classrooms from the perspective of the child, they found that a high level of motivation was evidenced through an environment in which “resources were plentiful, attractive, age appropriate” (para 12) and the space was “airy, spacious and aesthetically pleasing” (para 14). Resources were noted possibly to include literacy learning centres with manipulative materials, posters of children’s art, dramatic play equipment and books.

A language centre in the layout of a classroom and the materials provided by teachers can enhance and promote time with books (Morrow & Weinstein, 1986; Neuman & Roskos, 1997). Some ways to encourage literacy development are through the inclusion of literacy centres which promote all forms of language, including a classroom library or book corner, a listening centre to listen to audio-recorded books and a writing centre (NAEYC, 1991; Neuman et al., 2000; Wortham, 2010). The classrooms of early years' pupils are encouraged to include a range of high-quality children’s books reflective of cultural and family backgrounds. Learning centres are not necessarily literacy specific and may contain a variety of curriculum-wide equipment and resources that encourage students to engage with the curriculum and work as individuals, small groups or whole groups. The NAEYC (1991) proposed that activity areas be defined through spatial arrangements.

**Instructional methods**

Literacy instruction and content should be varied to suit the learners’ needs; this is referred to as ‘differentiated instruction’ (National Research Council, 2002). The pedagogy of learning literacy should therefore vary by student need and be developmentally appropriate. To provide a balanced pedagogy teachers apply varied

A classroom reflective of differentiated practice would provide flexible grouping and pacing, where assessment is ongoing and used as one basis for instructional planning (Antonacci et al., 2004). Small-group instruction has many benefits, including both cognitive and social/emotional implications for young students. This small-group method allows teachers to engage more with individuals providing maximum opportunity to students (Wasik, 2008). The use of small-group instruction has according to Katz (1995), the potential for greater development of teacher-student relationships, a key component of high-quality pre-school education. In a differentiated classroom, a teacher carefully plans and employs various strategies according to student differences, interests and needs (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010).

The promotion of small-group methods in early childhood teaching is seen favourably by a number of researchers (Bowman et al., 200; Katz, 1995; Wasik, 2008). They highlight the positive benefits academically, socially and emotionally. Harrison, Ungerer, Zubrick and Wise (2009) found that, when small-group tasks were implemented and supported by the teacher, higher literacy outcomes were achieved when compared with those of students being left to self-initiated activities. This reinforces the teacher’s need to be aware of differentiated classroom organisation in relation to students’ needs.

Another literacy instruction method to which the literature refers is that of ‘rich demonstrations’ (also referred to as teacher modelling). This occurs when a
teacher practices in daily activities, models of literacy teaching that are explicit in nature and that make sense to students; “children need to receive many demonstrations and be explicitly shown how oral, written and viewed texts are constructed” (NAEYC, 1998, para 7; ECA, 2009, para 6). Cambourne (1988) emphasised the importance of demonstrations in his ‘conditions for learning’ language and literacy, paralleling the theories of constructivism. He asserted that demonstrations can occur in a range of contexts and with the whole-group, small-groups or individuals. Demonstrations are considered to be an important component of a well-balanced literacy program (Antonacci & O’Callaghan, 2004) and useful across all curriculum areas including Science and the Arts (Bae, 2004; Klein, Hammrich, Bloom & Ragins, 2000).

Demonstrations are also considered to be an important component of a well-balanced literacy program (Antonacci & O’Callaghan, 2004). Blaney (1980) found that “teachers whose classes consistently show gains in achievement rely on traditional methods of instruction, at least in the basic skills” (p.128). Blaney highlighted the importance of student-centred methods in early childhood classrooms. During demonstrations, the teacher “should allow time for students to listen and intently observe what the teacher intends” (Rogoff, Paradise, Mejia Arauz, Correa-Chavez, Angelillo, 2003, p. 178). During this participation students are involved in observing, actively listening or engaging in the activity being demonstrated.

The terms ‘systematic’ and ‘explicit instruction’ appear numerous times within the NRP Report (2000) which contends that teachers demonstrate and explain exactly what and how they want students to learn encompassing everything from skills to strategies to meta-cognitive processes. Little debate exists around the effectiveness of using this approach as part of a teacher’s instructional repertoire (MacNaughton & Williams, 2009). Teachers who use this approach make explicit the intention and
processes of the particular element in literacy instruction through modelling and demonstration, explanation and exemplification (Wray, Medwell, Fox, & Poulson, 2000). For literacy gains to be made, therefore, a systematic approach to explicit teaching is required with an emphasis on key early literacy skills (Louden et al., 2008).

In summary, literacy development is initiated well before students commence their formal schooling; it is a critical area that needs to be carefully planned, continuously monitored and assessed for pedagogy to be maximally effective. Although debates about what should be taught and how it should be taught continue amongst researchers and interested stakeholders, literacy is nevertheless internationally agreed as a critical contributing factor to the increased economic wellbeing as well as to the personal fulfilment of any nation’s citizens.

Assessing, evaluating and monitoring literacy in early childhood

Curriculum, assessment and instruction are integral and reciprocal (Cobb, 2003). Assessment is a critical component of teaching and learning and commensurate with the instruction of literacy continues to be one of the most controversial topics in early childhood education (Neuman & Dickinson, 2002).

Assessing and evaluating literacy

At the outset, with any discussion on assessment, key definitions need to be made to avoid confusion. Assessment involves the gathering of data and provides teachers with the information they require to make judgements about the learning progress of their students (Cobb, 2003). Assessment being a social practice requires “noticing, representing, and responding to children’s literate behaviours” (Johnston &
Rogers, 2001). Evaluation, is the “final analysis of instruction and assessments; it is used to assign grades or determine grade placements (Johnson & Rogers, 2001, p. 386).

Assessment is most effective when it is a regular and part of the teaching and learning cycle that goes hand in hand with instruction; a critical component of teaching and learning (Cobb, 2004). Three recommendations with regard to the use of assessment to improve instruction and student learning are put forward: 1) make assessments useful for students and teachers; 2) assessments should be a checkpoint for learning; and, 3) there should be many opportunities for students to demonstrate success (Guskey, 2003). Information gained from assessment informs teachers, and has the potential to shape future teaching and learning processes (Curriculum Corporation, 2004). As noted, literacy development, which commences prior to students enter upon formal school years is a critical area that needs to be continuously monitored, assessed, evaluated and planned with thorough and effective pedagogy.

Assessments should be developmentally appropriate, responsive to students’ learning and integrally linked with teaching and learning (ECA, 2009; Meiers, 2000; NAEYC, 2000). Sound, developmentally appropriate assessment occurs when the purpose of assessment is to guide teaching and results assist teachers to plan both the curriculum and the consequent learning experiences (NAEYC, 2009a). Further, assessments are effective when multiple indicators are regularly and systematically implemented (NAEYC, 2009a). In early childhood education, literacy assessments may include observations, anecdotes, interviews, narratives, work samples, authentic activities, running records or informal reading inventories (NAEYC, 2009a; Neuman et al., 2000).
Observation was the primary tool employed during the 1960s when testing of pre-school children was carried out by professionals, for example, doctors, psychologists or other professionals in the area of children’s services. Observation was the primary tool and is still commonly used in today’s early childhood classrooms and is still considered to be the most direct method of becoming familiar with the development and learning of young children (Machado, 2006). Observations of students involved in a diverse range of literacy-based experiences are an integral part of authentic assessment processes based on observations and real-life experiences, particularly where a broad range of literacy experiences are valued (Makin & Jones, 2002). However, when considering the multidimensional nature of literacy, no single assessment tool or type of tool can provide all necessary information. No decisions about an individual’s education should be made on the basis of test scores alone; there is a need for multiple sources of evidence (American Educational Research Association 2000).

Assessment should be a natural part of the developmental process within classrooms, children’s learning being most influenced by ongoing and continuous assessment practices (Meiers, 2000). Ongoing assessment is essential if teachers are to gain deep knowledge of their students (Ewing, 2006). Additionally, assessments should be based on what students can do on their own and with scaffolding by peers and adults (NAEYC, 2009a). A student’s parents, families and the students themselves are all valuable contributors to the assessment process and these form a comprehensive assessment portfolio (NAEYC, 2009a; Shepard, Kagan & Wurtz, 1998).

The National Inquiry (Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005a) found that during the first three years of schooling in Australia, assessment methods varied greatly. In the context of Western Australia, the
CEOWA (2008) policy statement states, “A range of fair, valid, educative, explicit and comprehensive assessment processes clearly linking teaching, and assessment, shall be used to inform and evaluate the progress of student learning” (p.2). This study aimed to ascertain which assessment tools were being implemented in Pre-primary classrooms in the Catholic schools of Western Australia. This aim dovetails with the Australia-wide ethos where a number of assessment tools and large scale assessments have emerged as part of the overall effort to meet local and national standards.

Assessments can further be classed into two broad categories: formative and summative. Formative assessment is considered assessment for learning occurring during the process of learning; the teacher provides timely feedback in support of students’ learning (Johnston & Costello, 2005). In summative assessment, a teacher looks back at learning, through for example accountability testing. A range of assessment tools for formative assessment is available to Western Australian Pre-primary teachers but no particular assessment tools are mandated leaving the choices open-ended based on information received by teachers through educational experiences, formal qualifications and professional learning. One summative assessment screening tool used in WA Catholic schools is PIPS which is administered twice during the Pre-primary year, as discussed in the context of CEOWA literacy education.

In a position paper on *Curriculum, assessment and program evaluation*, the NAEYC (2003), provides a list of 11 indicators of effective assessment including that assessment instruments are used for their intended purpose; assessments are appropriate for ages and characteristics of those being assessed assessment instruments meet professional criteria of quality; what is assessed is developmentally and educationally significant; evidence is used to understand and improve learning; assessment evidence
is gathered in realistic settings; assessments use multiple sources of evidence over time; screening is always linked to follow up; use of individually administered, norm-referenced tests is limited; and, staff and families are knowledgeable about assessment.

A model for effective assessment also includes consideration of the following: why to assess; what to assess; when to assess; documenting (collecting, recording, documenting, compiling and summarising) assessment information; and interpreting and using assessment data (McAfee & Leong, 2002). An effective early childhood teacher considers each of these parts of the process when assessing students. The first decision about why to assess influences every other aspect about how assessment is administered (Shepard et al., 1998). Secondly, teachers decide what to assess in regard to literacy outcomes, attitudes, knowledge, expected outcomes or concerns about individual students or groups. Systematic assessment promotes accuracy in monitoring all students and reduces the likelihood of not knowing an individual student’s level of development. Continuous assessments add to the accuracy of gauging students’ development. Effective teachers plan for assessment before the school year, during the school year both in and out of class time (McAfee & Leong, 2002, p. 35).

The documentation of assessment may include data collection through observations; a collection of products (checklists, work samples, rating scales); conversations elicited from students, parents and other adults; games and assignments; or projects (Wortham, 2005). Recording may be through narratives; participation records; anecdotal records; narratives; diagrams; frequency counts; audio-video or recordings; rubrics; checklists; and rating scales. Teachers interpret assessment data gathered through systematic collection combined with their “own understandings, insights and intuitions from day-to-day interactions with children. The mix of objective
information with teacher judgment is assessment in its ‘truest’ sense” (Barnett & Zucker, 1990, p. 115).

Summarising and reporting assessment can take many forms including portfolios; profiles; rubrics; and annotated items. Some early years programs include a developmental portfolio documenting growth over time (Herbert & Shulz, 1996). Decisions about which items are to be included in the portfolio need to be determined first. For example, it may include a portfolio reflecting development; best work samples; a record of all activities; how students work on particular projects; or group processes (Arter & Paulson, 1991). Profiles may be summarised information of individual students or groups of students gathered through formative assessments. Teachers may keep individual student profiles that record differing aspects of literacy into a literacy profile (McAfee & Leong, 2002, p. 110). Group profiles assist in identifying clusters of students with similar needs or strengths or performance. Profiles provide information for planning. A rubric has descriptors that define what a teacher looks at to determine performance at each level (Wiggins, 1996).

The final part of the assessment process is interpreting assessment data and using it to inform teaching. Teachers look for patterns, compare evidence against curriculum outcomes and examine both qualitative and quantitative differences (McAfee & Leong, 2005). To interpret data, teachers also view progress at different points in time (McAfee & Leong, 2002). Finally, teachers use the interpreted assessment data and act upon it. Assessment data should be linked to learning experiences and instruction if it is to benefit students (Wortham, 2005). Planning is what needs to occur from assessment interpretation linking it to pedagogy. The assessment cycle as has been discussed is portrayed in Figure 2 below.
Figure 2. *Decisions in the assessment cycle* adapted from McAfee & Leong (2002)

**Monitoring literacy**

Effective monitoring is a necessary component of maintaining quality in any literacy program. Teachers require a system that enables them to determine how students are progressing. The information gained “provides a basis for making decisions, planning instructional activities and experiences and distinguishing from effective and ineffective procedures” (Cooper, 1997, p. 513). Monitoring is “the relationship between assessment and evaluation; that is, the relationship between teaching and learning” (Anstey & Bull, 2004, p. 333). Paris and Wixson (1987) draw attention to a functional orientation towards literacy teaching and learning that involves monitoring students’ learning for future planning. Anstey and Bull (2004) emphasise that monitoring is the teacher knowing what and how pedagogical and learning processes are occurring in their classrooms and monitoring is recursive” (p. 333). Recursive implies a procedure
that can be applied repeatedly (dictionary.com). An iterative process can be defined as a “process for arriving at a progressively better decision or a desired result by repeating the rounds (Business Dictionary, 2010).

Four necessary components of monitoring have been outlined by Anstey and Bull (2004) as necessary in implementing a monitoring process. These are: 1) the frequency of monitoring; 2) focusing on what is to be monitored; 3) how it is to be conducted; and 4) who will be responsible for the monitoring. Another model put forward by Richards (1988) contends that monitoring simply involves collecting data, analysing and evaluating the data and taking action to improve performance. Patty, Maschof and Ransom (1996) assert that one of the tasks of an effective monitoring system is the establishment of a literacy committee whose goal is to improve the whole-school literacy program by implementing and supporting teachers in the monitoring process. The following monitoring diagram (Figure 3) from Anstey and Bull (2004, p. 334) depict a model for the teaching, learning and assessment cycle.

![Figure 3. Monitoring cycle, Anstey & Bull (2004, p. 334)](image-url)
Monitoring may be based on collecting data from individual students, the whole class, and/or the whole-school. Sloat, Beswick and Willms (2007), in their qualitative study of early literacy monitoring to prevent reading failure, noted that school-based monitoring systems were effective when student-data were obtained about each student and profiled. This data enhanced teachers’ knowledge about literacy and their abilities to assess effectively. A five-stage cycle outlined by Jones (2003), describes how literacy assessment is an integral part of the teaching, learning cycle. In this cycle, teachers (i) identify goals; (ii) collect data; (iii) describe; (iv) interpret; and, (v) apply this literary assessment repeatedly.

The use of continuous and varied means of monitoring and assessment are essential in building up detailed information profiles. Data can be gathered at both class and individual student levels to inform planning and teaching and permit timely responses when student difficulty or delay is apparent (Curriculum Corporation 1999; Department of Education, Science and Training 2005a; Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland, & Reid, 2002; Louden et al., 2000; Snow et al., 1998). The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (2008a) policy statement on curriculum asserts that teachers should be linking learning, teaching and assessment and using data to evaluate and inform student performance. This study examined the extent to which these aspects of monitoring occur.

**Planning literacy**

Planning for and facilitating students’ learning is a complex task that includes assessment “which is effective only when it is conducted in a systematic way and plays an interdependent role with teaching and learning” (McNair, Bharghava, Adams, Edgerton & Kypros, 2003). A teacher plans for individual students, small groups and
the whole group. Teachers plan what is to occur next for students with regard to their development and learning. A number of planning models have been suggested for teachers to use as a structure: a curriculum framework (Green & Reid, 1989); planning on a lesson-plan level more concerned with themes (Cairns, 1989); and principles for planning focussed on school-wide planning (Emmitt, 1991). It is not the framework which is the issue in planning; rather, it is more important for teachers to provide a plan that is “well thought out, comprehensive and logical; the plan can then be trialled over time to judge the effectiveness” (Anstey & Bull, 2004, p. 354).

Thus, planning may be short-, mid- and long-term. Long-term planning focuses on state/territory/national literacy outcomes; these are applied to a school plan and may be represented in a school policy. Medium-planning may be year-long where units of work are implemented to meet long-term goals. Short-term planning involves the development of daily and weekly lesson plans (Anstey & Bull, 2004). The ways in which teachers plan is influenced by the pedagogy they choose to implement (Anstey & Bull, 2004). As teachers’ knowledge about literacy changes, so does their planning and as their planning changes so does how they ensure they implement and integrate the knowledge (Bull, 1990).

**Teacher career development**

A section of this literature review needs to be devoted to teacher qualifications and career development as one of the specific questions relates to this point. In the current study, I hope to gain information about whether stage of career is linked to how teachers conceptualise literacy pedagogy and assessment. A number of developmental career stages for teachers have been documented in the literature (Huberman, 1989; Katz, 1972; Super, 1991; Stroot, Keil, Stedman, Lohr, Faust & Schincariol-Randall,
1998). The two examples to be discussed have been documented by Katz and Huberman. A large body of research exists around the first year of teaching, an aspect of this research; however, that literature is not examined here in any great depth.

**Teacher developmental stages**

Katz (1972) developed four stages of teacher career development which formed the basis of research by Stroot et al. (1998), who suggested how to support teachers during these stages. The four developmental stages are identified as: survival; consolidation; renewal; and maturity. In the survival stage, a teacher is preoccupied with coping with each day or week. In the survival stage, teachers need support, comfort, guidance, encouragement and reassurance. Stroot et al. (1998) state that in this stage the teacher should be provided with resources and explicit ideas regarding pedagogical strategies. The second or “consolidation” stage occurs after the first year with teachers becoming ready to consolidate gains made in that year and differentiate tasks (Katz, 1972, p. 5). In the third or “renewal” stage (often third or fourth year) of teaching, a teacher may begin to tire of doing the same things and begin to question new research in pedagogy. Teachers find it renewing to attend conferences and to meet with colleagues to discuss practice (Katz, 1972, p. 6). In the fourth stage, “maturity”, typically reached after about five years of teaching, a teacher has “come to terms with herself as a teacher” (p. 8). At this stage, the teacher is able to act as a peer expert or mentor (Stroot et al. 1998).

These developmental stages are referred to in my data analysis in Chapter 5. In Huberman’s (1989) model of teacher career development, he discussed career entry; stabilisation; diversification and change; stocktaking and interrogations (mid-career); serenity and affective distance; and conservatism and disengagement. In the current
study, teachers were at differing stages of career development, and this is used in data discussion of findings for the current study.

**Teacher qualifications**

There is a wide diversity of views on what makes particular teachers better or more effective than others. A small quantity of research has explored the area of teacher qualification as related to student achievement (e.g. Guarino, Hamilton & Rathbun, 2006). The third specific research question of the current study examines the extent to which level of qualification relates to teachers’ literacy pedagogical and assessment practices. There appears to be general agreement that teachers make a difference in students’ lives, but no consensus exists as to which aspects of teacher quality matter most (Palardy & Rumberger, 2008). The *No Child Left Behind Act* (US Department of Education, 2002) mandated that schools employ only highly qualified teachers in every classroom by the end of the 2005-2006 year. Full certification meant a minimum of a Bachelor’s Degree for primary teachers. In their study, Palardy and Rumberger (2008, p. 124), using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) of teacher variables found that having full certification was the only variable associated with reading achievement gains. In the current study, participants with varying qualifications have been recruited to ascertain the extent of any variation in literacy teaching practice, associated with differences in qualification.

In the large-scale ECLS study of 22,000 children in 1000 kindergartens in the US, the effects of teachers’ qualifications on reading achievement were examined (Guarino et al., 2006). Results indicated that qualifications may affect learning indirectly and that certification and possession of a Master’s Degree were unrelated to teachers’ emphases as measured by instructional scales. Guarino et al. found no direct
correlation between teachers’ self-reported qualifications and student achievement except in employment status. In this instance, it was reported that full time teachers made higher gains in their students’ reading than did their part-time colleagues (Guarino et al., 2008). In another study by Early et al. (2007) the findings indicated that policies focused “solely on increasing teachers’ education will not suffice for improving classroom quality or maximising children’s academic gains” (p. 558).

Much has been written about raising teacher qualifications in the US (Ackerman, 2004; Early et al., 2007). Since 1999, 18 states in the US raised their minimum pre-service teacher training for early childhood teachers in private settings. The same is being seen in Australia with the current implementation of the EYLF in 2010. It is anticipated that by 2013, “progress towards meeting new qualification requirements for early childhood teachers will commence” (Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning, 2010). This includes Family Day Care coordinators having a Diploma-level early childhood qualification and all family day-care carers being mandated to have or be working towards a Certificate III level in early childhood qualification as a minimum qualification.

In Western Australian Catholic schools, all graduate teachers since 1998 have been required to be four-year-trained before being employed by the CEOWA (Catholic Commission, 20008) as expected by the changes to teaching degrees in Western Australia. Since 2002, all teachers were required to upgrade to the equivalent of four-year training (Catholic Education Commission, 2008b). The last revised policy on early childhood education states that “all teachers providing a learning program for pre-compulsory years shall hold an early childhood qualification or complete it within five years” (p. 2). Since the introduction of the Western Australian College of Teachers (WACOT), all teachers have been required to register with the college which requires
the four-year training as a minimum for acceptance. The current study poses questions in contrast with the research literature; a summary table (Table 2) provides a summary of these contrasts in relating the research literature for the research questions that form the conceptual framework for this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question basis for review</th>
<th>Literature focus</th>
<th>Current study statements forming the Conceptual Framework</th>
<th>Supported by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) What literacy pedagogical and assessment practices are teachers applying?</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>Literacy approach is comprehensive drawing on both whole language &amp; phonics approaches</td>
<td>Hassett (2008); Pressley (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Early childhood</td>
<td>EC (birth to 8 years) recognised internationally as a crucial period in a child’s life. Early experiences &amp; environments effect brain development and cognition.</td>
<td>Hassett (2008); NAEYC, 1998; McCain &amp; Mustard (2002); NRP (2001); Snow, Burns &amp; Griffin (1998);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Early childhood literacy skills</td>
<td>phonics; fluency; comprehension; phonemic/phonological awareness; reading instruction; comprehension; and teacher education in reading instruction.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Early childhood literacy</td>
<td>Shared responsibility approach to literacy education: Parents and community involvement has numerous positive benefits including literacy development. Physical environment has print-rich materials, a range of resources, literacy centres and manipulative materials</td>
<td>Hiatt-Michael, (2001); Freeman &amp; Hatch (1989); NAEYC (2000); Walsh &amp; Gardner (2005); Epstein (2007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Literacy pedagogy</td>
<td>The role of the teacher is intentional. Teacher provides positive, emotional relationships. Teacher-student relations critical to literacy success. Teacher is a key to literacy success.</td>
<td>Hamre &amp; Painta (2001); Snow et al. (1998); NAEYC (1998)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Literacy pedagogy</td>
<td>The teaching practices in literacy education support developmentally appropriate practices. Varied instruction is necessary (small group, individual, whole).</td>
<td>NAEYC (2009, 2003);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) &amp; (iii) How do Pre-primary teachers link pedagogy, assessment and planning in literacy education? (ii) How are teachers monitoring and planning literacy?</td>
<td>Literacy assessment</td>
<td>Assessment is varied. Assessment, pedagogy and curriculum are integral. Developmental and responsive to learners.</td>
<td>Anstey &amp; Bull, (2004); Cooper (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) &amp; (iii)</td>
<td>Literacy assessment &amp; monitoring</td>
<td>Monitoring is iterative. An assessment system is necessary to determine (frequency, what, how and who) and who is to monitor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) &amp; (iv) To what extent do factors such as age, stage of career and level of qualification relate to (T &amp; A) practices?</td>
<td>Literacy planning Teacher qualifications and career development</td>
<td>Planning is short, -medium, and long-term &amp; interdependent with teaching, learning &amp; assessment. Teachers move through different stages in their career and require support in varying ways. Teacher qualifications are a variable that may increase reading development. Teacher qualifications do not equate with student achievement alone.</td>
<td>Anstey &amp; Bull, (2004); Katz (1972) &amp; Huberman (1989); Palardi &amp; Rumberger, (2008); Early et al. (2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In summary, a large body of research exists around the key areas of early childhood, literacy, pedagogy, and assessment and teacher career development. In this chapter, I have provided an overview of each to place the current study within the context of these large overlapping bodies of research. In doing a literature review on the various aspects of literacy in early childhood, the conceptual framework in which this study is situated has emerged as seen in Table 2.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This study investigated how Pre-primary teachers in Catholic schools, Western Australia linked their approaches to pedagogical and assessment practices. In particular, the study examines participants’ instructional and organisational methods, assessment and monitoring practices and planning in literacy education. The study also sought to understand the practices of teachers across a range of experiences and qualifications.

This chapter describes a structured approach to data collection, analyses and representation that address the research questions. The choice of methodology, selection of participants, instruments applied, methods of data collection, and techniques used to analyse data, the research trustworthiness and ethical considerations are each discussed in turn.

Research approach

Pragmatism

Historically, advocates of either a positivist (Maxwell & Delaney, 2004; Nagel, 1986) or interpretivist philosophy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) have engaged in debate highlighting the strengths of their respective approaches (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Recent literature (Alexander, 2006; Denscombe, 2008; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie; 2004; Pring, 2000), however, has attempted to bring these seemingly opposing paradigms together emphasising the considerable advantages to be gained by
their combination. For the pragmatist, the problem to be solved is at the centre of the research enterprise. Method always takes a back seat. Pragmatists use whatever method is best suited to answering the research question, or solving the research problem. In sum, pragmatist researchers see both the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative approaches and the advantages associated with integrating the two to advance their understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Niglas, 2000).

This research adopted a pragmatic approach “generally regarded as the philosophical partner for the mixed methods approach” (Denscombe, 2008, p. 273). A mixed methods approach based in pragmatism offers an alternative paradigm for social and educational research in that it uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches on the basis of pragmatism typically involves using both “qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques in either parallel or sequential phases” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 11).

In this study, the use of the mixed methods was decided by the purpose of the research (Patton, 2004). Mixed methods allowed for depth of exploration about current classroom practices to produce a more “complete picture by combining information from complementary kinds of data or sources” (Denscombe, 2008, p. 272), which was the case in this study. The complementary design allowed for elaboration, clarification and explanation and also provided a mechanism for the triangulation of data (Jang, McDougall, Pollon, Herbert, & Russell, 2008). Overall, the study used a blend of qualitative and quantitative data to illustrate and interpret the day-to-day pedagogical and assessment practices in literacy of a select group of early childhood teachers.
**Qualitative methods**

Qualitative methods were used for two phases of the research. The methods chosen under the qualitative banner in this study were the use of interviews and observations. Further, the methodological focus on narrative analysis in this study was concerned with interpretation (Patton, 2002) in that the research used qualitative data to reveal stories about each participant and their professional work. Through observations, day-to-day situations were noted that provided an account of how early childhood teachers approached literacy pedagogy, assessment, monitoring and planning. Both qualitative and quantitative researchers are interested in individuals’ points of view, but qualitative researchers are able to gain insights into their participants’ worlds through detailed interviews and observations, as were used in this study. Qualitative data can “put the flesh on the bones” (Patton, 2002, p. 193).

The collection of qualitative data as the dominant methods for this research was consistent with my research aims. First, the study aimed to capture an understanding of how Pre-primary teachers currently conceptualise the link between teaching, learning and assessment. To gather this information, I needed to engage in a dialogue that would bring forth the teachers’ thinking about pedagogical practices on both broad and personal levels. Through interviews, teachers shared their beliefs, opinions and attitudes towards teaching, learning and assessment. Thus, the study benefited from the depth of information that only qualitative methods can provide by recording classroom practices, and through data gathered in interviews with four interviewed participants.

**Quantitative methods**

Simply put, “quantitative data are numbers, and measurement is the process by which data are turned into numbers” (Punch, 2009, p. 234). In this study, the quantitative data
collected through survey provided a broad backdrop of information concerning early childhood literacy practices across the Catholic sector in Western Australia. Quantitative survey data therefore allowed the examination of variation around such items as: how many teachers used particular assessment tools; types of organisational methods; and time spent on teaching literacy. These data were best obtained through quantitative methods as I required breadth in data on specific practices teachers were applying to gain a better sense of the big picture.

In summary, effective use of a mixed method approach provides strength to a study that a single method cannot in terms of both depth and breadth. By using a mixed methods approach in this study, the gaining of the required information needed for the research was achievable. Together, these complementary methods each provided unique strengths giving robustness to the overall research design.

**Procedures**

In this study data were collected in three phases: interviews, observations and surveys. Data from four purposively selected participants were collected in phases one and two (interviews and observations) during 2007. The following year, survey questionnaires were developed from the analysis of phase one and two data and sent to all potential participants (Pre-primary teachers in CEOWA) in February, 2008. The entire Pre-primary teacher population of the CEOWA were invited to participate in the survey. An overview of the research procedures is provided in Table 3.
Table 3

*Overview of the research procedures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Period of collection</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>March - July</td>
<td>Four purposively selected Pre-primary teachers from the CEOWA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Two observations &amp; post-observation discussion per participant</td>
<td>September - December</td>
<td>Four purposively selected Pre-primary teachers from the CEOWA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Survey questionnaires</td>
<td>February-April</td>
<td>All Pre-primary teachers (CEOWA) by invitation (including above four purposively selected)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research participants**

*Phase one (interviews) and phase two (observations)*

Participants for Phase one and two were selected from Pre-primary teachers teaching in Catholic sector schools in Western Australia. My professional affiliation with the Catholic sector was the main reason for the selection of this sectoral emphasis as the focus of the study; this in turn allowed for ease of gaining access to schools, classrooms and survey participation through the CEOWA. Secondly, the size of the sector meant participation of all 130 primary schools in the sector would be possible (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2007).

Purposive sampling was used to identify four participants for phases one and two (interviews and observations). The process of selection involved purposive selection according to particular elements under study. The selection criteria for the four Phase one and two participants were: age, length of service and teaching qualifications. The first variable, age comprised two distinct age groupings: the first, school leavers who
had studied teaching directly after leaving school and second, mature-aged people. The age of participants brings with it varied life experiences that affect who the person has become, and the experiences they bring to teaching. The second variable was the length of service because teaching practices have been shown to vary according to career development stages (Huberman, 1989; Katz, 1972; Levenson, 1981; Stroot et al., 1998 Super, 1990). The third variable is concerned with teaching qualifications in terms of recency, the nature of the qualification and the level of the qualification. A summary of participant criteria is provided in Table 4.

Table 4
*Participant criteria for interviews and observations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Variables</th>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>Participant 2</th>
<th>Participant 3</th>
<th>Participant 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>School-leaver</td>
<td>Mature-aged</td>
<td>Mature-aged</td>
<td>Mature-aged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of service</strong></td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Experienced (&gt;20 years)</td>
<td>Experienced (&gt;20 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)</td>
<td>Diploma in Early/Primary Education + (No formal upgrade to educational qualifications since initial teacher training)</td>
<td>Diploma in Early/Primary Education + (Upgrade to educational qualifications-less than five years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finding participants who matched the criteria and were willing to be included in the study was challenging. An email requesting research participants was sent to all Catholic primary schools in WA. Email addresses of schools were provided by the
Catholic Education Office administration staff. After two weeks, no one in the potential cohort (to be interviewed teachers) had responded to that initial email. A reminder email was sent twice during the following three weeks. After four weeks no potential participants had responded via email. The need to be proactive by calling a number of metropolitan schools and speaking directly to the Pre-primary teacher thus became necessary.

In my conversation with Pre-primary teachers, I briefly described the aims of the research as I was calling during school time. Three participants agreed immediately, so consent forms and information letters were sent to these potential interviewees requesting appropriate permissions and to record the interview via a digital voice recorder. The fourth potential participant asked for some time to consider the option; I left my contact details with her. By the end of the week, she had contacted me and agreed to take part in the study. The four participants who were recruited for phase one interviews and phase two observations were all located in metropolitan Catholic schools. The small number of participants for the main components of data collection is consistent with a qualitative approach and allowed for a focused in-depth examination of their literacy practices (Patton, 2002; Punch, 2009). Each participant was an early childhood educator working in a Pre-primary classroom in the Catholic sector and possessed a teaching degree.

**Research participants phase three (survey questionnaire)**

Data from the four phase one interviews informed the development of the survey questionnaire. The survey was developed to answer the investigation’s specific questions as accurately as possible. All Pre-primary teachers in Catholic primary schools across Western Australia were invited to participate in the survey by
completing a hard copy of the survey mailed to every school during the third week of term one in 2008. Each survey package was addressed to the Principal and included an information letter for the Principal and the Pre-primary teacher.

**My perspective as a researcher**

In this section, I disclose my involvement and perspective knowing it is important to readers who wish to evaluate my findings. Reflexivity as defined by Punch (1998) refers to researchers’ involvement in the world they study. Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher’s contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and “an acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining “outside of one’s subject matter while conducting research” (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999, p. 28).

My involvement in this research includes: early childhood teaching experience, lecturing to pre-service teachers (early childhood and primary), and literacy coordinator within teacher training (early childhood and primary, undergraduate and post-graduate) including lecturing and tutoring. In addition, the past seven years of my career have been in a Catholic higher education institution. In this capacity, I have developed relationships with school personnel within the Catholic sector. My professional experiences initiated my interest in the current study combining both early childhood education and literacy. However, for this study, I was aware that I needed to be a researcher and not a teacher, university lecturer or supervisor. These experiences as a classroom teacher and university lecturer over the past 17 years gave me insight into the demands of each role and the administrative requirements, personal relationships and associated practical duties.
My work as a university lecturer in the areas of early childhood teaching and literacy education led me to infer a number of things. First, Pre-primary teachers have for a long time been located away from school sites and thus the physical separation has resulted in social isolation from other school personnel and day-to-day school interactions. Second, in regard to pedagogy and assessment practices, Pre-primary teachers often make personal choices about how this is applied in practice in their early childhood teaching. Lastly, Pre-primary teachers feel somewhat uncertain about which pedagogical and assessment practices they ought to apply and how much content should be introduced in the climate of debate between a play-based curriculum and content-based curriculum. This contention seems to me to have deepened with the emergence of curriculum documents such as the *Curriculum Framework* (Curriculum Council, 2008) and the *Early Childhood Reading and Writing Scope and Sequence* (Curriculum Council, 2005a, 2005b) both of which detail the learning outcomes students should achieve.

All data collection and results have been analysed with clarity of my role as a researcher kept in the foreground. For example, during interviews, a neutral tone and facial expressions were used. My own ideas and suggestions were suspended during the interviews ensuring no comments were made after each interviewee response so as to not influence participants in any way. I knew three of the four interviewed teachers and had observed participants in a student-lecturer relationship at either an undergraduate or post-graduate level. Cotterill (1992) refers to a “participatory model that aims to produce non-hierarchical, non-manipulative research relationships which have the potential to overcome the separation between the researcher and the researched” (p. 594). Knowing most of the participants in the major components of the data collection
allowed a personal approach and quick development of rapport. Participants were placed at ease and informed of my interest in finding out what Pre-primary teachers were doing and thinking in regard to literacy education in the early years.

**Instruments and data collection**

**Interviews**

Interviews are the “most prominent” data collection tool in qualitative research (Punch, 2009, p. 144). An interview is defined by Berg (2007) as “a conversation with a purpose” and extends this further referring to the term “dramaturgy” likening it to elements of “theatre, stagecraft and stage management” (p. 89). In qualitative research, interviewing commences with the idea that others’ perspectives are worthy of exploration and to reveal these explicitly is possible (Patton, 2004). Interviews allow participants to reveal their understanding of values, attitudes and beliefs (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000). The interview has become a means of contemporary storytelling (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998) where participants will share life stories in response to interview questions. This was important to this study to understand the stories surrounding literacy practices.

The interview type used was a “standardised open-ended interview” (Patton, 2002, p. 344). In this interviewing style, the wording and sequence are prepared prior to the interview. The questions follow the same format and the same order. In this format each question is worded carefully so that they are open-ended (Patton, 2002). This interviewing technique suited this study as I was seeking each participant’s individual responses on the same matters around their teaching and assessment practices. Various benefits are gained through interviewing: in-depth information to be gathered through
interviewer probing; insights into the participants’ worldviews about teaching, learning and assessment; and, a deep exploration about literacy practices which could not have been attained otherwise (Tashakorri & Teddlie, 2003).

Obtaining information around specific research questions from interviewees was therefore a critical component of the data collection process. A pilot study was conducted with two trial interviews of Pre-primary teachers who were not employed by the CEOWA; this strategy is discussed under ‘pilot study’ subsequently. I used Chadwick, Bahr and Albrecht’s (1984, p. 120) “five questions for assessing an instrument”, the interview being the data collection instrument. Chadwick and colleagues suggest checking for such things as the types of questions, specific wording, language and a guide to assist in the process.

Interview questions were ordered according to the idea of ‘funnelling’ (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1995) starting with broad questions before narrowing the focus to specific areas of the research. The design, a ‘standardised open-ended interview’, permitted participants to add their personal experiences. The initial broad questions began with their qualifications, location, years of experience and general views about literacy pedagogy that they currently held. The interviews then explored teachers’ thinking on which they were basing their decisions with regard to literacy pedagogy and assessment. The use of probes (Boyce & Neale, 2006, p. 5) such as: “can you tell me about?”; “can you give me an example?” and “is there anything else?” extends the interviewee’s responses and permits elaboration (see Appendix C questions 11, 13, 15, 18, 20, 25, 26). Interviews and later observations also enabled the identification of assessment tools currently being used. All participants knew my role
as an education lecturer but this did not seem to impede the flow of conversation. Each interview lasted about one hour.

**Observations**

Observations involve watching participants with intent and are considered as the “fundamental base of all research methods” in social and behavioural sciences (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 389). Non-participant observations were used in phase two of the data collection process for this research. The non-participatory form of observation meant there were no interactions with participants. I placed myself in a position some distance from the observed teacher and her students so as not to be intrusive. Teacher participants and their students knew that I was observing and hence direct observation was used with every effort to be unobtrusive. My intent was to avoid my participants feeling self-conscious and anxious (Patton, 2002; Gay et al., 2004). My rationale for using observations was to gain an understanding of the natural environments in which participants teach and practise literacy.

The observations occurred after the initial interview and proved useful in confirming what was stated in interviews and how these were realised in practice. Observations require “disciplined training and rigorous preparation” (Patton, 2002, p.185). My past experiences as an early childhood teacher have provided me with extensive training to pay attention to detail, observe what is there to be observed, hear what is there to be heard and record in a descriptive manner (Patton, 2004). The advantages of using observation in this study were that it placed me in the direct environment enabling an understanding of each school and classroom context; and, it allowed me to observe the incidental happenings of a classroom that may go unnoticed
During observations, I followed the prepared observation protocol (see Appendix F) to ensure certain aspects of literacy teaching and learning were recorded.

Open-ended narrative (Rossman & Rallis, 1998) was used as part of the observation protocol. Although I was a non-participant observer, there were times when students in the classrooms I was observing would come to me to show their writing. This is to be expected in an early childhood classroom where students become used to having many adults in the classroom at any time. When this occurred, I responded appropriately yet did not engage in lengthy conversation so as not to prolong the interaction and to be true to the non-participant method of observation I was applying. In any observation, objectivity is a key aspect (Patton, 2004; Scriven, 1998). In gathering quantitative data, objectivity may be easier to achieve but in qualitative methods, rigour is required. The manner in which research rigour was achieved will be addressed later in this chapter. Scriven (1998), states that objectivity is an ideal for which to strive is worthy; this discussed later in this chapter.

**Survey questionnaire**

A survey questionnaire is “a collection of self-report questions to be answered by a selected group of research participants” (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009, p. 154). To obtain comparable data from Pre-primary teachers in the Catholic sector, a survey was used. A considerable amount of research uses surveys for data collection as they are can be highly descriptive in nature. Surveys are relatively inexpensive to administer and useful for capturing characteristics for a large group. In this study, a questionnaire was developed and implemented in phase three of data collection to obtain statistical information about the practices of participant teachers in the CEOWA. The advantage of using a survey in phase three was the uniformity of responses gained from a large
number of participants as contrasted with the descriptive, qualitative data derived from phases one and two of the data collection.

The survey questionnaire was sent to participants by post allowing participants to provide confidential and anonymous information. One of the disadvantages of this approach was that no follow-up on specific participants was possible once posting to schools had occurred; but a positive aspect of the returned paper-and-pencil questionnaire was that it allowed for survey copies to be kept and analysed in depth. The survey included 10 checklist items; four Likert-scale items and one open-ended response item (refer to Appendix H). The checklist items were written to ensure that precise information was gathered. For example, in question 11, respondents were asked how much time they spent on daily, explicit literacy teaching. Respondents were to choose from specific 30 minute brackets comprising less than 30 minutes, 30 to 60 minutes, 60 to 90 minutes or more than 90 minutes. These data provided a clear picture of the time spent on explicit teaching. The final open response question asking participants about which area they would like to strengthen through further professional development in teaching or assessing literacy allowed a more in-depth and descriptive response whilst maintaining the focus of the question on the research.

**Pilot study**

A pilot study assists researchers to increase the success of any research, but offers no guarantee (Tiejlingen & Hundley, 2002). Prior to data collection, a pilot study of interviews was conducted, to ensure clarity of interview questions to address research aims, areas in need of refinement and to practise interviewing techniques. Two interviews with Pre-primary teachers from the non-Catholic education sector in Western Australian schools were conducted. These teachers were chosen so as to not
contaminate or distort the data collected for Pre-primary teachers in Catholic schools. The purpose of the pilot was to pre-test the interview questions to see whether questions were worded clearly and whether they elicited the types of responses that were anticipated. The test runs provided an idea of how long the interview might take. Pilot participants were sought who met the study criteria as closely as possible. There was success in achieving this, identifying a mature-aged teacher with twenty years experience, and a first year teacher.

Permission to record using an audio-device was gained prior to each interview; this allowed me to play back and listen to my own interview technique. I found myself making comments after interviewee responses. This caused me to become consciously aware not to repeat this during actual research interviews. Both pilot participants were encouraged to add comments to assist in the refining process of the final interview protocol. The pilot participants were encouraged to make comments about the suitability of each question and the participant’s ability to respond. Their response was that they did not find any problems in answering questions.

Some changes were made to the survey after pilot tests, e.g., minor changes in questions 12 and 22 (Appendix C). A decision to include a list of the assessment choices which could be given to participants to read from and elaborate their responses was made on question 12. Question 22 was included as a new question to allow participants to write about any other perceived influencing factors on their ability to be an effective literacy teacher. In summary, the process of the pilot-test interview provided an opportunity for the questions to be further developed, refined and clarified. My own interview technique was polished and some minor changes were made to the interview protocol before the first interviews occurred (see Appendix C).
**Data collection**

**Phase one: Interviews**

In phase one, interviews occurred at a venue chosen by each participant. All interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format. Three interviews took place at the end of the school day away from participants’ own school sites. The fourth interview happened during the teacher’s non-teaching time at her school site. Each interview lasted about one hour, and was recorded via a digital audio device with detailed notes of participants’ responses taken as the interview progressed. Consent forms had been signed prior to interviews. Gaining rapport was a critical feature of the study as the interviews and observations required a personal connection to be made and maintained with the teachers.

Lyons and Chipperfield (2000) discuss the ongoing commitment to building rapport as a means to overcoming difference. Rapport-building with each of the participants commenced with the initial meeting where each was made to feel valued and that their place in the research was important. I had already developed positive rapport with three participants as they had been prior students of mine. Because of this prior lecturer-student relationship, the process of interviewing was one where all were comfortable. The one participant whom I met for the first time seemed willing to present her story and experiences openly to me in the interview. The prior student—lecturer relationships that existed with the other interviewees enabled an immediate and increasing rapport during the interview process.

During the interviews, formal and informal influences on participants’ literacy pedagogy and assessment were discussed. Formal influences included curriculum documents, school development plans, CEOWA policies and guidelines, timetabling
factors and mandated assessment requirements. Informal influences discussed during interviews included: personal beliefs about pedagogy; classroom teaching experiences; assessments and ideologies influencing literacy pedagogy; and parental support with literacy development. The interviews, whilst of the standardised open-ended type, allowed for flexibility to pursue any direction indicated by the participants. The interview data in conjunction with observations were gathered to provide descriptive data about each of the participants’ beliefs and pedagogical practices. Each interview was transcribed verbatim for analysis.

**Phase two: Observations**

In this study, each teacher’s classroom provided a natural setting for data collection through observation. Thus, a substantial proportion of the data collected for this study was obtained through the method of observation. Observations occurred during a literacy session at a time determined by the participants. On the day scheduled for my first observation visit, I had an unfortunate accident breaking three bones in my leg and foot requiring surgery for an ankle reconstruction. My research plans were postponed for six weeks until I was physically and emotionally able to recommence data collection. I made my first observational visit assisted by my teenage son who drove me to the school and carried my files into the classroom. Needless to say, my impact was probably greater than intended, the children and classroom teacher looking amazed on my entrance.

I visited each of the interviewees twice during term four in 2007 for approximately two-and-a-half hours per visit including post-observation discussion time. All observations occurred between 9 am and 12 pm. Each visit was pre-arranged with participants in advance. During the visits I adopted the role of a non-participant
observer wherein I took field notes using an observation protocol to guide the visits. I physically placed either at the back or side of the classroom so as not to directly interact with the students unless approached, a natural occurrence given the year group (see Appendix F).

The twin aims of the observations were to bring to life and to validate what the participants had said during phase one interviews by comparison with their classroom occurrences. Another aim was to observe the literacy and assessment practices in the natural classroom environment. The observational data provided a detailed description of what was occurring in the classroom. This provided the opportunity for contextual factors to be observed as occurring in their natural setting (Tashakorri & Teddlie, 2003). At the end of each visit, I had a brief, informal discussion about the day’s activities to allow for any further clarification. Notes from these post-observation discussions were kept as part of the data collection. Furthermore, the discussions allowed for checking by the participants for certainty or clarification as to whether my observations were an accurate record of each participant’s actions. The data were stored in a secure, confidential place in four separate files, one for each participant. Most importantly, the teacher’s application of pedagogical and assessment practices in their classrooms was noted (see Appendix F). An interview and observation schedule and summary of data collection dates and times follows in Table 5.
Phase three (survey questionnaires)

Survey questionnaires were sent and collected in 2008, the year after the interviews and observations were conducted. Surveys were posted directly to each school addressed to the Principal. A letter of consent, an information letter and a reply paid envelope were supplied within the survey package (see Appendices G and H). In order to maximise the response rate a supporting letter was obtained from the Director of the Catholic Education Office and attached to the survey. An incentive (book voucher) was offered to encourage a high return-rate. My aim was to achieve a return rate minimum of at least 80 per cent. To reach this goal I spoke via phone to a key administrative staff member at the CEOWA. I requested access to email a reminder to all schools to participate. It was not possible to have a direct email list to all schools; however, the administrative staff member forwarded an email to the schools from me five weeks after the initial mail-out.

All Pre-primary teachers in the CEOWA (including the four interviewed participants) were invited to participate. Quantitative data derived from the surveys are

Table 5

Interview and observation schedule summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Observation 1</th>
<th>Observation 2</th>
<th>Total time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>one</td>
<td>14/09/07</td>
<td>18/09/07</td>
<td>16/10/07</td>
<td>4 hours and 45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15:30-16:45</td>
<td>08:45-11:30</td>
<td>08:45-11:30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two</td>
<td>24/10/07</td>
<td>29/10/07</td>
<td>09/12/07</td>
<td>5 hours and 15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16:00-17:15</td>
<td>09:00-11:00</td>
<td>09:00-11:00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>three</td>
<td>31/10/07</td>
<td>21/11/07</td>
<td>3/12/07</td>
<td>4 hours and 45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15:30-16:45</td>
<td>11:00-13:00</td>
<td>10:00-11:30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>four</td>
<td>12/11/07</td>
<td>16/11/07</td>
<td>23/11/07</td>
<td>5 hours and 15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:00-12:15</td>
<td>09:00-11:00</td>
<td>09:00-11:00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 20 hours
representative of a portion of the population. A total of 51 surveys out of 130 (39 per cent) were returned. The return rate may appear low at first but needs to be analysed against literature on response rates. Cohen, Lawrence and Morrison (2000), state that after surveys are initially despatched, a 40 per cent return is expected. A higher rate is expected with follow-up reminders. According to a US study of 199 online surveys, the average return-rate with a sample of less than 1000 is 41.21 percent (PeoplePulse, 2010). In this study, follow-ups were not possible to individual potential responders. In light of this, a reasonable rate of return was achieved. A summary of the interview and observation schedule is recorded in Table 6.

Table 6

Overview of data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection phase &amp; (Year)</th>
<th>Data collection tool</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1 (2007)</td>
<td>Interviews (one x one hour)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Narrative analysis</td>
<td>Narrative account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2 (2007)</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Narrative analysis</td>
<td>Narrative account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3 (2008)</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Quantitative + qualitative component</td>
<td>Tabulation &amp; coding</td>
<td>Bar graphs, tables &amp; figures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data analysis

The following section discusses how data were analysed for the three instruments used in its collection. The interview and observation data were analysed using narrative analysis and the survey questionnaire was analysed through tabulation and coding.
**Narrative accounts**

Narrative analysis was the method used to interpret the four interviews and eight classroom observations. “The primary purpose [of narrative analysis] is to understand a self or some aspect of a lived life in a cultural context. The “authors become ‘I’, readers become ‘you’, and subject becomes ‘us’” (Ellis & Bochner, 2003, p. 213). Data from field notes (observations), interview data and life experiences as the data sources is carefully selected by the researcher to construct and present narratives about participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). During analysis of the qualitative data gathered in observations, interviews and discussions, a story was crafted to depict the daily school lives, literacy practices and personal beliefs of each participating teacher.

The words of participants are used to strengthen the authenticity of narratives. Clandinin and Connelly (1990) refer to ‘narrative sketches’ which are developed through the data considered most meaningful and memorable in describing events. In a narrative sketch ‘burrowing’ is used as an analysis technique to extract information. In this process, “the highlighted stories are those that exemplify the nature of the complexity and human centeredness of an event seen through the eyes of the researcher in collaboration with people involved” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 87). The stories wove together a rich tapestry of each individual teacher’s voice as a narrative, and through its analysis, readers are able to become part of the lived experience of the participant. The interviews were recorded via a digital device, and transcribed verbatim before being coded. Three broad constructs: pedagogical practices, assessment and monitoring, and planning for an analytical framework were developed and data further analysed within these as a meta-analysis before being categorised as elements of the constructs (see Chapter 5).
Narratology or “narrative analysis” extends the idea of text by including such things as in-depth interview transcripts, life history narratives, historical memoirs, and creative nonfictions (Patton, 2002, p. 115). Narratology is how to interpret stories and more specifically, the texts that tell the stories which are at the heart of narrative analysis (p. 118). In Chapter 5, the four narratives derived from the qualitative data are presented to tell each participant’s story. Each narrative is given a title and referred to in the analysis by that title. The four narratives are written in the active, first person voice to portray graphically the experience of each participant. The length of each narrative account is between 900 and 1000 words and details pedagogical, assessment and monitoring and planning practices as these were the foci of the research. Their length permits enough credible discussion to depict experiences and to remain succinct.

In the development of a conceptual framework within which narratives were analysed, key phrases under the headings ‘pedagogy’, ‘assessment and monitoring’ and ‘planning’ were developed and are referred to as ‘constructs’. These constructs were highlighted from interview transcripts and observation notes. Once each narrative was composed, the ‘elements’ of the ‘constructs’ were identified. These elements emerged as they were common and repeated points within the interviews and observations. Each participant’s story represents variation in these elements. The information is summarised in Chapter 5 with a further discussion that provides an analysis for each narrative.

When researchers use narratives they are cognisant of their audience; the researcher becomes the audience for their narrator (Trahar, 2008). Patton (2002) suggests that storytelling is less threatening to the researcher than the language around ‘case studies’ or ‘ethnography’. In this study, the focus of the narrative was to draw
together information about pedagogical, assessment and planning practices and how these were portrayed during interviews, and observations in classrooms. For the purpose of this current research, the narratives have complemented the quantitative data obtained from surveys. During the process of narrative analysis, I as the researcher had to ‘get into’ the participants’ heads (Patton, 2002, p. 196) becoming each participant and telling the story as they would.

**Analysis of survey data**

Quantitative data require measuring variables across a sample (Punch, 2009). For this study, the survey data were analysed systematically through an examination and analysis of variables. The variables analysed were: time engaged in teaching and assessment. Most data were grouped into various categories and presented in simple frequency distribution tables; these being useful ways of understanding data and representing them (Punch, 2009). In Chapter 4 where survey data are analysed and presented, a series of bar charts represent the frequency distributions for Pre-primary teachers’ literacy and assessment practices. Survey data were analysed systematically through an examination and analysis of variables. Graphing of data was used in order to represent the frequency of such items as assessment tools used, and regularity and confidence in teaching and assessment.

The survey data were also coded into various categories of participants who self-rated as high, medium or low in the areas of teaching, assessment and both teaching and assessment. A further examination of the data including ages, qualifications and daily literacy practices followed to view which teachers specifically fit into each category. This content analysis involved identifying and categorising patterns in the data (Patton, 2002). Thus, survey data were analysed using this method.
of coding before being represented in bar graphs and summarised in tables under the areas of teaching, assessment and teaching and assessment. Statements from the one open-response question (see question 17, Appendix H) included in the survey were coded into the three areas of teaching, assessment or other. These data were summarised in terms of how many respondents chose a particular area and also illustrated in a bar graph.

**Trustworthiness and rigour of the research**

Trustworthiness is an essential component of any research. The terms trustworthiness and authenticity have been suggested as more appropriate than reliability and validity for research gathering (relying on) primarily qualitative data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Patton, 2002). The trustworthiness—or credibility—of the study hinged to varying degrees on the preciseness, skill and rigour of the observations made by the researcher. In the social sciences, verifying knowledge is discussed in relation to concepts of validity, reliability and generalisability (Yin, 1998; Wiersma, 1995). Terms such as: “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, replace the usual positive criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 14).

This study has a greater qualitative than a quantitative component and thus, its trustworthiness is discussed in terms of transferability, dependability, credibility and confirmability in the following section. Research using narrative data is challenged by the concept of validity as a criterion for determining the rigour of the process (Webster & Mertova, 2007). It is necessary to discuss the trustworthiness of the current research as Miles and Huberman (1984) assert that “we have few agreed-on canons for qualitative data analysis, in the sense of shared ground rules for drawing conclusions
and verifying their sturdiness” (p.186). Research rigour for this study was first maintained by identifying my prior relationship with three of the participants through attention to reflexivity as discussed earlier under ‘my perspective as a researcher’.

**Credibility**

Credibility involves an establishment of the data as being believable from the perspective of the reader (Trochim, 2006). Narrative research does not produce conclusions of certainty, it is more concerned with research being well-grounded and supportable by the data collected; it does not produce generalisable ‘truths’ (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 92). Words to describe incidents are taken from interview or observation transcripts. An outline of how I believe credibility was achieved in the research based on literature follows.

In this study, credibility arises from three applied techniques: first, the qualitative data gained through prolonged observations (between four and six hours) per participant in their classrooms; and secondly, credibility of the research was achieved through ‘member checks’ to ensure that what was recorded during interviews and observations was verified by participants. Member checks are a process in which participants verify data and interpretations made of that data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transcriptions of interviews were emailed to participants for comment. Only one participant (participant three in Table 5) made additional comments on assessment practices after viewing the transcript. At the conclusion of each observation, approximately 30 minutes was spent in discussion with each participant to verify and confirm the recorded material was accurate from the participant’s point of view. Thirdly, credibility was gained by including detailed descriptive data about the interviewed participants’ educational contexts (Gay et al., 2006). After each
observation, discussion of any factors that altered the ‘normal’ day-to-day activities was discussed. Such aspects including the number of adult helpers, changes in timetable or time of day were added by participants.

**Dependability**

The multiple forms of data collection in this study provide a multi-dimensional view into the pedagogical and assessment practices of the participants. Validity of data is assured in the triangulation methods used when multiple forms of data are compared and integrated from the mixed method approach (Robertson, 2009; Stake, 1994). In this study, the comparison of qualitative data against the quantitative survey data provided corroboration and confirmation of evidence; of itself this is a powerful form of triangulation (Rossman & Wilson, 1991; Silverman, 2000).

**Transferability**

Transferability in narrative inquiry implies that the researcher provides a “sufficient base to permit a person contemplating application in another setting to make the needed comparisons of similarity” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 101). The current research could be applied to the government or independent education sectors in WA or to any sector across Australia or likewise internationally. Punch (1998) states that generalisability in qualitative writing focuses on three aspects: is the sampling diversity, the context and the level of analysis which together permit application to other settings.

In this study, the sampling included the entire Catholic sector in Western Australia. The four interviewed and observed teachers were purposively selected to match research criteria as described earlier in this chapter. Thick description is defined
as “a detailed description of a phenomenon that includes the researcher’s interpretations in addition to observed context and processes (Stake, 2010, p. 49). Narratives depicting the daily professional lives of each of the four observed teachers detail their literacy practices followed by a discussion of each, including researcher interpretations. Lastly, the abstraction inherent in analysis allows data to be applied to other education contexts of similar year level. The collective narratives allow an analytical generalisation based on the similarities and differences in practices and contexts.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is described as “being parallel to objectivity” (Crawford, Marnie, & Arnott, 2000, p. 5). In this research, attempts to ensure confirmability were made through interviews being transcribed verbatim; researcher neutrality applied during interviews and clear tracking to all data sources. Confirmability is analogous to objectivity wherein the researcher is aware of individual subjectivity or bias (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). In this study, the prospect of bias in the handling of data is acknowledged. Johnson and Turner (2003, p. 307) discuss the importance of the interviewer remaining “non-judgmental to the responses” so as to avoid potential bias. In the interviews, after each question, no comment or approving or disapproving facial expressions were offered. This was particularly pertinent given my prior relationship with three of the interviewed participants. My aim was to obtain genuine responses from participants and thus I was consciously aware of the need for neutrality through interviewing. I was able to overcome any bias through this acknowledgement early in the research and through an understanding that I was viewing all data as a researcher and not as a teacher or university lecturer. The trustworthiness and authenticity of the
data gathered for the current study have been described in detail in the preceding sections and are further summarised with specific examples in Table 7.

Table 7

Summary of rigour in research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for judging qualitative data</th>
<th>Research technique/s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Transcriptions verbatim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-observation discussions (Member checking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time spent on data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All members in CEOWA invited to participate in survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed-methods design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>Longitudinal qualitative data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>System, school and individual profiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On-site observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age, qualifications and experience of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collective narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thick description-researcher interpretations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmability</td>
<td>Neutral interviewing style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perspective as researcher acknowledgment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table adapted from Krefting (1991)*

**Ethical considerations**

To conduct this research, I needed to be fully conversant with the ethical requirements inherent in working with human subjects. This was achieved initially by reading the *National statement on ethical conduct in human research* (National Health and Medical Research Committee, 2007). This document details all considerations which I have followed in this current research. Permission to commence research was obtained through Murdoch University’s Research Committee. Permission to research within the Catholic Education sector was obtained from the CEOWA Director after a letter had been sent outlining all research aims. Consent forms to enter school sites and conduct
observations were signed by each of the four school Principals and each of the four teacher participants. In addition, I possess a *Working with Children License*, which has required submission of a number of documents to the Department of Children’s Services for permission to work on any site with children as required by the Western Australian government law.

For each phase of data collection, participants were provided with adequate information (Appendices D and E), and assured of their confidentiality of their responses. In phase one, schools and participants were de-identified and no names or pseudonyms have been applied to refer to individuals. Instead, analysis was completed via narratives where titles of stories were given to refer to people and places. Participants were assured they could withdraw at any stage of the process. All participants agreed to the interviews being taped using a digital voice recorder and field notes written during observations. Names of participants and their school names on surveys were optional. All data are contained in sealed envelopes in a locked compartment.

In summary, this chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology underpinning this study. Consideration was given to the pragmatism which led to the mixed methods mode of research being applied. My perspectives as a researcher were discussed followed by an explanation of participant selection, instruments used for data collection and analyses. The research rigour were fully discussed before ethical considerations were discusses to complete the chapter. A summary of the research timeframe has been provided in tabular format to view the research activities.
CHAPTER 4
Survey

A survey to obtain information about literacy related pedagogical and assessment practices was conducted in term one of the 2008 school year. One survey package was sent to each of 130 primary schools with at least one Pre-primary class listed in the *Directory Catholic Schools in Western Australia 2008* (Catholic Education Office, 2008). The survey package, addressed to the Pre-primary teacher, included an information letter outlining the research aims and approval from the Director of the CEOWA to conduct such a research within the Catholic sector. Schools were encouraged to make further copies if required. A reminder email from a CEOWA administrative member was sent to all schools a few weeks’ after the initial mail dispatch. A total of 51 completed surveys (39 percent) were received by the end of April, 2008.

This chapter commences with a summary of demographics provided by respondents including: gender; age; number of years teaching; years teaching in Pre-primary; and formal qualifications. The next two sections present the findings on teaching and assessment separately, examining: frequency of literacy teaching and assessment regularity; confidence; teaching methods; time spent on teaching literacy; and teachers’ use of varying assessment tools. Respondents were categorised into various groups on the basis of self-ratings relating to literacy practices. From these summaries, a profile of each group was created to exhibit common practices, again creating a profile of respondents with similar responses. All survey data are summarised at the end of each section of analyses chapter conclusion.
Demographics

This section provides demographic profiles of the respondents based on the range of survey variables previously outlined. The provision of names and school location were optional for ‘follow up’ as stated on the survey questionnaire and respondents’ own name and contact details enabling eligibility to compete for the incentive prize (a book voucher). All respondents were female; a plurality of respondents (37 percent) fell in the 25 to 34 age bracket. No respondents were aged over 55. Figure 4 shows the distribution of ages of survey respondents.

![Figure 4. Age range of respondents](image)

Forty-nine respondents provided personal and school contact details, making them eligible for the incentive prize pool and for survey follow-up. About one-third of respondents give no contact details and 12 percent provided their own name and school name for survey follow-up, but not to be included in the incentive prize draw. Overall therefore, the location of respondents’ schools was known for 61 percent, of these: 71 percent were located in Perth, metropolitan schools; 29 percent were in rural locations (see Table 8).
The majority of survey respondents (73 percent) possess an early childhood specialisation (as part of their teaching qualification). The types of teaching qualifications indicated on surveys included: a four-year Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood (BEd, ECE); a four-year Bachelor of Education, Kindergarten to Year 7 (BEd, K-7); a one-year Graduate Certificate in Early Childhood Studies (Gr C, ECE) offered to teachers who currently possess a teaching qualification and who wish to gain an early childhood specialisation; a three-year Diploma in Teaching, Early Childhood (Dip T, ECE); a four-year Bachelor of Arts, Early Childhood (BA, ECE); a one-year post-graduate course the Graduate Diploma in Education, Early Childhood (Dip Ed, ECE). Those without a specialisation in early childhood (27 percent) possessed a teaching degree in education for the primary years (Years 1-7; see Figure 5).
Figure 5. Specialist qualifications in early childhood education

The next two sets of data pertain to total years of teaching experience and the portion of this experience within a Pre-primary setting. The data show that most respondents (87 percent), had 10 or fewer years’ total teaching experience, and of this, 57 percent had less than five years’ specifically in Pre-primary classrooms (see Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6. Number of years teaching (all respondents)
In summary, of demographics, all survey respondents were female and were largely posted in metropolitan schools. Many respondents provided personal and school details for survey follow-up, and to be eligible for the incentive. The greater number of respondents fell into the 25 to 34 age bracket with a dominance having an early childhood specialisation. A higher portion of the group had 10 or fewer years’ total teaching experience and a majority with fewer than five years teaching specifically in Pre-primary classrooms.

**Teaching practices**

To answer the questions posed in this study, survey respondents were asked to rate themselves with regard to their frequency of literacy teaching; confidence in teaching literacy; time spent on daily teaching of literacy; areas of literacy they judged as needing improvement through professional learning; and the organisational methods they used to implement literacy. Survey items 13 to 16 (see Appendix H), asked respondents to rate these items on a six point scale. A score of one indicated the highest level of performance relating to their literacy practices and six the lowest level of performance. In this section of data analysis, when respondents rated a score of one or
two in teaching frequency and confidence, they were categorised as the ‘high self-rated group’. A rating of three or four placed respondents into a ‘middle self-rated teaching group’ and a score of ‘five or six’ meant the ‘low self-rated teaching group.

The survey responses relating to literacy pedagogy were analysed by examining results from each respondent first, then in each of the high, middle and low self-rated groups. These data provide a profile of all respondents, then specifically about the respondents’ feelings towards confidence in teaching literacy and the various aspects of pedagogy they demonstrate in their classrooms. The data revealed that, from the total cohort, a plurality (45 percent) reported that they devoted between 30 to 60 minutes to the daily, explicit teaching of literacy; followed by 29 percent spending under 30 minutes; 22 percent spent 60 to 90 minutes; and two survey respondents indicated they spent more than 90 minutes daily on explicit teaching of literacy. Thirty percent spent fewer than 30 minutes per day on this aspect of teaching (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Time teaching literacy explicitly on a daily basis (all respondents)

The next segment of data analysis summarises responses about the organisational methods used to implement literacy in Pre-primary classrooms. Respondents were asked
to nominate as many of the organisational methods as needed and space was made available for additional methods to be recorded if required. Ninety-eight percent of the teacher-respondents used small groups as a teaching method; 92 percent applied whole group teaching methods; 80 percent used learning centres; and 70 percent stated they used individual teaching as a method for teaching literacy. Overall, the survey self-reported data indicate that more than half (55 percent) use at least four different organisational methods when teaching literacy. Another third (31 percent) used at least three different methods. It was clear that Pre-primary respondents were applying a range of classroom organisations to teach literacy at the time of participation in the survey (see Figure 9).

![Figure 9. Organisational teaching methods being used in teaching literacy](image)

The next section examines the data in terms of how many respondents were in RAISe schools during the year the survey was administered (2008), and if so, for how long. The RAISe initiative commenced in 2004, and so, respondents were asked to indicate the year in which their school joined. The majority of the respondents (59 percent) were in RAISe schools. Intake into the RAISe initiative has been steady since 2004 (see Figure 10).
One of the survey questions asked participants to state if there was a whole-school literacy plan (WSLP) if so: did they follow the WSLP; or were they unsure whether their school had a WSLP (see Figure 11). The results connote that whilst a large number (75 percent) knew of their WSLP and 71 percent of these followed the WSLP, nearly one third (29 percent) did not know follow their WSLP, stated their school did not have a WSLP or were unsure of whether there was a WSLP (see Figure 11).
With regard to the final open-ended survey question asking respondents to nominate an area within literacy practice (either pedagogy or assessment) they would like to strengthen, half (50 percent) chose teaching as the first choice followed by assessment (31 percent). Now that data about teaching practices from all respondents has been discussed, in the next section, further analyses of data begins by categorising results into three specific groups: high, middle and low self-rated groups.

**High self-rated group (teaching literacy)**

The survey data indicate that 71 percent of respondents self-rated as being in the ‘high’ group with regard to their regularity in and confidence in teaching literacy based on a score of one or two on the six-point scale. Of this ‘high group’, approximately equal proportions were aged between 25 to 34 and 45 to 54 years. Smaller portions (14 percent) were under 25 years of age qualification (see Figure 12). The majority of this group (81 percent) has an early childhood qualification and 19 percent were without a specialist qualification.

![Figure 12. Age groups of high self-rated teaching group](image)

*Figure 12. Age groups of high self-rated teaching group*
With regard to the number of years teaching experience of this ‘high self-rated’ group almost a third (28 percent) had five to 10 years experience. Of this, 47 percent had less than 5 years specifically in Pre-primary classrooms (see Figures 13 and 14).

Figure 13. Number of years teaching (high self-rated teaching group)

Figure 14. Number of years teaching in PP (high self-rated teaching group)

The time teachers in this group spent on explicit, daily literacy instruction was also investigated. Almost half (47 percent) of these teachers attested that they explicitly taught literacy between 30 to 60 minutes daily. The other results show 22 percent spent
fewer than 30 minutes per day on explicit teaching; 20 percent spent 60 to 90 minutes’ per day; and 11 percent indicate spending more than 90 minutes’ each day on explicit literacy pedagogy (see Figure 15).

![Figure 15. Explicit, daily literacy instruction (high self-rated teaching group)](image)

The high self-rated teaching group used an array of organisational methods when teaching literacy. Every respondent in this high group applied the small group method; 94 percent employed whole-group methods; 81 percent utilised individual teaching methods; and 78 percent implemented literacy learning centres (see Figure 16). These types of organisational methods are listed in the literature as useful for implementation in early childhood classrooms (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001; Katz, 1995; Wasik, 2008). As this group was highly self-rated, their understanding of the need for a broad range of organisational methods is evident in their practice.
The last question on the survey asked respondents to consider their professional practice in relation to literacy teaching and assessment and then to nominate the area they would like to strengthen. The written responses were analysed to look for specific words relating to either teaching or assessment and these were then categorised accordingly. From the high self-rated teaching group, the findings point to 44 percent expressing teaching as the top area to strengthen followed by assessment (31 percent), and 25 percent do not respond. Lastly, more than half (53 percent) of the high self-rated group were employed in non-RAISe schools.

**Middle and low self-rated group (teaching literacy)**

The middle and low self-rated teaching groups were combined after data analysis showed only a modest 29 percent fell within these two groups. This section relates to respondents whose self-rated scores were between 3 and 6 in frequency and confidence in teaching practices. In the examination of survey responses for the middle and low self-rated group, similar analysis were conducted to those previously done for the high self-rated respondents. The analyses provide a profile of the 29 percent of respondents who feel less confident in teaching literacy. First, the group was aged mostly between
25 to 34 years (47 percent) and the majority (60 percent) had fewer than five years’ teaching experience including specifically in Pre-primary classes (see Figures 17, 18 and 19).

**Figure 17.** Age brackets (middle to low self-rated teaching group)

**Figure 18.** Number of years teaching (middle to low self-rated teaching group)
Of this group about half had an early childhood specialisation (53 percent). The data were further scrutinised to view results pertaining to time spent on explicit literacy instruction, showing the majority (60 percent) spent 30 to 60 minutes, 27 percent spent less than 30 minutes and two percent spent 60 to 90 minutes (see Figure 20).
In the combined middle to low self-rated groups, every respondent indicated that she used all methods to teach literacy. The most widely used organisational method being implemented were literacy centres (100 percent). Similarly high percentages (93 percent) of respondents employed small and whole group methods; and 73 percent used individual teaching (see Figure 21).

![Organisational teaching methods (middle to low self-rated teaching group)](image)

*Figure 21. Organisational teaching methods (middle to low self-rated teaching group)*

Additional survey data gathered responses as to whether respondents were in RAiSe schools and the areas of their own literacy practice they hoped to strengthen through professional learning. The middle to low self-rating teaching group displayed a majority (67 percent) were teaching in RAiSe schools and had been for various lengths of time since 2004. The area to strengthen nominated by this group fell into teaching (67 percent); 20 percent nominated literacy assessment; and 13 percent did not respond to this section.

**Teaching practices summarised**

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing data analyses. A preponderance of survey respondents suggested feeling highly confident towards literacy pedagogy and expressed that they taught literacy with regularity in their Pre-
primary classrooms. In contrast, a smaller proportion felt less confident teaching literacy and less frequently. Most respondents possessed an early childhood specialisation, but also had fewer than five years’ experience in Pre-primary classrooms. On the whole, a majority spent 30 to 60 minutes per day on the explicit instruction of literacy and preferred whole-group and small-group methods in day-to-day literacy instruction. Finally, the majority chose ‘teaching literacy’ as the key area they hope to strengthen through professional development. A summary of the teaching practices from all respondents and then from each self-rated group was given on the following page in Table 9.
Table 9

Summary of teaching practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data from all respondents</th>
<th>High self-rated group</th>
<th>Middle to Low self-rated group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51 (100)*</td>
<td>36 (71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age brackets</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25</td>
<td>9 (18)</td>
<td>5 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>19 (37)</td>
<td>12 (33)</td>
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<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>8 (16)</td>
<td>9 (25)</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt;45</td>
<td>16 (31)</td>
<td>10 (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specialisation</td>
<td>Yes 37(73)</td>
<td>Yes 29(81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 14(27)</td>
<td>No 7 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>years teaching</td>
<td>&lt;5 34(67)</td>
<td>&lt;5 9 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5-10 10(20)</td>
<td>10-28 5 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11-15 5(10)</td>
<td>11-16 3 (8)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>16-20 2(3)</td>
<td>16-20 1 (3)</td>
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<td>&gt;25 8 (17)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years teaching in</td>
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<td>&lt;5 17 (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary</td>
<td>5-10 12(24)</td>
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<td>11-15 3 (8)</td>
<td>11-15 3 (8)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>16-20 2(5)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time on explicit</td>
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<td>&lt;30 min 8 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching of literacy</td>
<td>30-60 23(45)</td>
<td>30-60 17 (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60-90 11(22)</td>
<td>60-90 7 (20)</td>
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<td>&gt;90 min 4 (11)</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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<td>Whole 47 (92)</td>
<td>Whole 36 (100)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual 41 (80)</td>
<td>Individual 29 (81)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lit. Cent 36 (70)</td>
<td>Lit. Cent 28 (74)</td>
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<td>RAISe/Non school</td>
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<td>Yes 17 (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 21(41)</td>
<td>No 19 (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area to strengthen (all)</td>
<td>Teaching 26 (51)</td>
<td>Teaching 16 (44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment 16 (31)</td>
<td>Assessment 11 (31)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nil response 9 (18)</td>
<td>Nil response 9 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Numbers in brackets denote percentages
Assessment practices

Surveyed respondents were questioned about their assessment practices, and these responses are now analysed in a manner consistent with the analyses of literacy pedagogy. Data about frequency of literacy assessment; confidence in assessing literacy; and assessment tools utilised for assessing literacy are examined. As in the prior section, respondents rated themselves on a six point scale. A score of one or two meant placement in the ‘high’ self-rated assessment group, a score of three or four meant placement in the ‘middle’ self-rated assessment group and a score of five or six meant placement in the ‘low’ self-rated assessment group. These newly formed groups were different to the teaching group as respondents’ ratings were seen to be independent of their scores on the specific teaching questions (refer to questions 13 and 14, Appendix H). Again, the middle and low groups were combined due to the small percentages registered. As before, the results related to the assessment practices of all respondents are discussed before those of the two groups (high and mid to low).

The first analyses examine respondents’ self-ratings in terms of their confidence in their assessment of literacy. Most participants (70 percent) self-rated as being highly confident in assessing literacy and 78 percent indicated they assessed literacy regularly. On the other hand 28 percent rated themselves as having mid to low confidence in their assessment practices and 26 percent indicated a mid to low frequency of assessment (see Figures 22 and 23).
All respondents reported using a range of assessment tools to assess literacy in Pre-primary classes (see Figure 24). Respondents were asked to indicate as many of the assessment tools they employ in assessing literacy. The most commonly utilised assessment tool was the checklist (C, 98 percent), followed by observational notes (ON, 92 percent); work samples (WS, 82 percent); Literacy Net Profiles (LNP) for individual students and the whole class (76 percent); oral conversations (O, 47 percent); WA First Steps Continua/Maps (FS, 45 percent); and other assessments (Oth, 6 percent). Items
listed within the ‘other’ category include phonemic awareness and early reading skills’ assessments. A number of respondents added the PIPS assessment to the list; however, these data were not included as this was a Catholic sector assessment requirement in the Pre-primary year.

Figure 24. Assessment tools used by all respondents

The data were examined to ascertain which respondents were consistent in their high, middle and low self-rated for literacy assessment practices. To be placed in the high group, a consistent rating of one or two should have been evident on the survey for both questions relating to assessment confidence and frequency, and similarly for the middle and low rated. Results showed that, of the total cohort, 67 percent rated themselves as both highly confident and high frequent assessors, while 33 percent rated themselves as middle to low with scores of three to six.

**High self-rated assessment group**

Most respondents in the high self-rating assessment group were in the 25 to 34 years group, with fairly equal proportions in the 35 and up brackets. A high proportion (76 percent) held an early childhood specialisation but most were not working in RAISE schools (see Figure 25).
Data revealed these respondents used all assessment tools listed on the survey and some indicated the used of other assessment tools. The assessment tools rank from the most commonly used to the least used were: checklists (C) and observational notes (ON) both 97 percent; work samples (WS) 91 percent; Literacy Net Profiles (LNP) 85 percent; Oral conversations (O) 70 percent; First Steps WA continua/maps (FS) 41 percent, and other (Oth) 26 percent of users (see Figure 26).

Figure 25. Age brackets of high self-rated assessment group

Figure 26. Assessment tools being used by high self-rated assessment group
As the final survey item was an open-response item, some respondents wrote a general comment unrelated to literacy; this was added to the no response figures. More than half (53 percent) state ‘teaching’ as the most common in which they wanted professional development, followed by assessment (26 percent); see Figure 27.

![Figure 27. Area to strengthen (high self-rated assessment group)](image)

**Middle to low self-rated assessment group**

In the middle to low self-rated group, 33 percent were aged 25 to 34 years; and fairly even numbers were evident in the 35 to 44 and older than 45 age range. Most (71 percent) had an early childhood teaching qualification and a majority (65 percent) were in RAiSe schools.

![Figure 28. Age brackets of (middle to low self-rated assessment group)](image)
The assessment tools used by this group in order of most common to least common were: checklists (C) and observational notes (ON), both 94 percent; First Steps Profiles (FS) 88 percent; work samples (WS) 82 percent; Literacy Net Profiles (LNP) 64 percent; oral conversations 58 percent; and, other (Oth) 5 percent (see Figure 29).

Figure 29. Assessment tools used by middle to low self-rated assessment group

All assessment practices are summarised in Table 10.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment practices (Frequency &amp; Confidence)</th>
<th>Data from all respondents</th>
<th>High self-rated assessment group</th>
<th>Middle to low self-rated group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age brackets</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25</td>
<td>9 (18)*</td>
<td>6 (18)</td>
<td>3 (17)</td>
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<td>8 (23)</td>
<td>5 (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood qualification</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 (78)</td>
<td>28 (82)</td>
<td>11 (71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6 (18)</td>
<td>5 (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment tools used by respondents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checklists (C)</td>
<td>50 (98)</td>
<td>33 (97)</td>
<td>16 (94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observational Notes (ON)</td>
<td>46 (92)</td>
<td>33 (97)</td>
<td>16 (94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work samples (WS)</td>
<td>42 (82)</td>
<td>31 (91)</td>
<td>14 (82)</td>
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<td>Literacy Net Profiles (LNPI)</td>
<td>39 (76)</td>
<td>29 (85)</td>
<td>29 (85)</td>
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<td>Oral conversations (O)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24 (70)</td>
<td>10 (58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Steps continua/maps (FS)</td>
<td>23 (45)</td>
<td>14 (41)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Oth)</td>
<td>3 (6)</td>
<td>9 (26)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent on daily, explicit teaching of literacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;30 min</td>
<td>8 (22)</td>
<td>7 (23)</td>
<td>4 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-60</td>
<td>17 (47)</td>
<td>14 (27)</td>
<td>8 (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-90</td>
<td>7 (20)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;90 min</td>
<td>4 (11)</td>
<td>2 (4)</td>
<td>5 (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominated area to strengthen</td>
<td>Teaching 18 (53)</td>
<td>Teaching 11 (31)</td>
<td>Teaching 13 (76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil response</td>
<td>7 (21)</td>
<td>11 (31)</td>
<td>1 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attached to RAiSe school</td>
<td>Yes 15 (44)</td>
<td>Yes 14 (40)</td>
<td>Yes 11 (69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 19 (56)</td>
<td>No 21 (60)</td>
<td>No 5 (31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Numbers in brackets denote percentages
Teaching and assessment practices

The data analyses to this point identified respondents who gave high, middle and low self ratings in terms of their regularity and confidence in literacy instruction and assessment. Each group was analysed accordingly. In this section, analysis is provided for respondents’ self-ratings to both literacy teaching and assessment practices combined. Data are therefore organised into those who:

1. Self-rated as ‘one or two’ on the six point scale in both teaching and assessment according to regularity and confidence. This group was named the ‘high self-rated teaching and assessment group’;

2. Self-rated as ‘three or four’ in both teaching and assessment regarding regularity and confidence. This group was named the ‘middle to low self-rated teaching and assessment group’;

3. Self-rated with a ‘five or six’ in both teaching and assessment for regularity and confidence. This group was named the ‘low self-rated’ teaching and assessment group’; and

4. Self-rated with scores of ‘one to four’ across both teaching and assessment practices. This fourth group was named ‘mixed’ if the members’ combine teaching and assessment data scored anywhere from one to four in both teaching or assessment regularity and confidence.

For analysis, the middle and low groups were combined in one as the numbers were low (see Figure 30). Again, the results need to be viewed in light of the self ratings and how teachers perceive themselves in regard to these related literacy practices.
Figure 30. Respondents in self-rated teaching and assessment groups

**High self-rated group (teaching and assessment)**

From returned surveys, 61 percent of respondent expressed high confidence and high regularity in pedagogical and assessment literacy-related practices. A greater portion of this group (58 percent) was not working within in a school attached to the RAiSe initiative. The majority (80 percent) possessed an early childhood specialisation and the bulk was aged in the 25 to 34 year-old age group.

**Middle to low self-rated groups (teaching and assessment)**

The middle to low self-rated groups together comprised only eight percent of the total research cohort. These respondents self-rated in the 3 to 6 range in both teaching and assessment practices. The group was predominantly in the 35 to 44 age bracket and 42 percent were employed in RAiSe school. Seventy-five percent had a specialist early childhood qualification.

**Mixed self-rated group (teaching and assessment)**

The mixed self-rated group was comprised of respondents who rated themselves from one to four on the six point scale for confidence and regularity in teaching and
assessment practices. This group comprised 35 percent of all survey respondents. The survey data indicated that the plurality (45 percent) of this group were: between the 25 to 34 years of age; teach in RAISe schools (63 percent) and mostly (61 percent) with an early childhood specialisation (see Figure 31).

![Figure 31. Age groups (mixed self-rated teaching and assessment group)](image)

**Teaching and assessment practices summarised**

In summary, many survey respondents asserted that they feel highly confident in teaching and assessing literacy, and do these regularly. The high self-rated teaching and assessment group were typically aged 25 to 34 years, possessed an early childhood qualification and were not teaching in RAISe schools. The two most commonly used assessment tools for this group were checklists and observational notes. Those who indicate they were less confident in both teaching and assessment of literacy practices mostly teach in RAISe schools, were aged 35 to 44, and with majority have an early childhood qualification. Research cohort members in the self-rated mixed group were mostly early childhood specialists; not in RAISe schools; and aged between 25 to 34 years. These data were summarised below in Table 11.
Table 11

*Numbers in brackets denote percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age groups</th>
<th>High self-rated group</th>
<th>Middle to low self-rated group</th>
<th>Mixed self-rated group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;25 25-34 35-44 &gt; 45</td>
<td>&lt;25 25-34 35-44 &gt; 45</td>
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<td>1 (50) 1 (50) - -</td>
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<td>Yes 3 (75) No 1 (25)</td>
<td>Yes 10 (63) No 6 (37)</td>
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<th>High self-rated group</th>
<th>Middle to low self-rated group</th>
<th>Mixed self-rated group</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Yes 25 (80) No 6 (20 )</td>
<td>Yes 2 (100) No -</td>
<td>Yes 11 (61) No 7 (39)</td>
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<th>Assessment tools rated in order of most commonly used by group</th>
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<th>Middle to low self-rated group</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Observational Notes (ON) 2 (100)</td>
<td>Observational Notes (ON) 18 (100)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Checklists (C) 28 (90)</td>
<td>Checklists (C) 2 (100)</td>
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<td>Work samples (WS) 2 (100 )</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Oral conversations (O) 2 (100)</td>
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<td>Oral conversations (O) 21 (68)</td>
<td>Literacy Net Profiles (LNPI) 2 100</td>
<td>First Steps continua/maps (FS) 11 (94)</td>
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<td>First Steps continua/maps (FS) 11 (35)</td>
<td>First Steps continua/maps (FS) –</td>
<td>Literacy Net Profiles (LNPI) 6 (33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Oth) 9 (29)</td>
<td>Other (Oth) -</td>
<td>Other (Oth) 2 (11)</td>
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Summary of survey data

In all, 51 female Pre-primary teachers across the Catholic sector (WA) responded to the survey. The two distinct age groups were the 25 to 34 and the 45 to 54 age groups. Many respondents provided specific details about themselves and their schools making it easy to identify school location for further follow up. Responses that relate to teaching and assessment practices were categorised into groups: high, middle and low dependent on respondents’ self-ratings. The data therefore allowed the creation of profiles of respondents who rated themselves as being highly confident in teaching; assessment; and teaching and assessment practices combined. The data show that most respondents teach and assess literacy regularly and frequently. Additionally, most respondents believed that they applied a range of assessment tools regularly and many felt confident in doing so. The majority teach literacy explicitly for 30 to 60 minutes each day and were working in schools that were part of the RAiSe initiative.

Further examination revealed that more than half of the respondents used at least four different assessment tools and almost all indicated small group teaching as the most common method for teaching literacy. The majority had 10 or fewer years in total teaching experience and fewer than five years’ experience specifically in Pre-primary classrooms. The group with the highest level of teaching confidence had less than five years’ experience. Those with the highest self-rating in confidence and frequency of teaching literacy were aged between 25 to 34 years, had an early childhood qualification, and used checklists and observational notes as the top two assessment tools; most were not in RAiSe schools. With regard to professional development, teaching was nominated as the top choice to strengthen across all groupings suggesting that they were open to continuing professional development in all areas of literacy to continue their own learning.
CHAPTER 5

Narrative accounts

In this chapter four narrative accounts developed from data collected from interviews, classroom observations, post-observation discussion and surveys are presented. Prior to the commencement of narrative accounts, I summarise these 4 participants’ individual and school profiles (see Table 13). Each participant represented by a narrative is briefly introduced by providing a demographic profile from survey data, their school’s setting, and CEOWA statistics. The narratives are written to capture the day-to-day professional experiences of four participants with regard to their literacy related practices. After each narrative account, a brief analysis follows. Each narrative has a title echoing the essence of the participant’s voice. These titles are referred to in the discussion of each narrative analysis.

Following the four narratives, the next section examines the constructs of the analytical framework. Consistent of the foci of this study, the constructs of the framework are: pedagogical practices; assessment; monitoring; and planning. These constructs are the key areas of the study’s focus. The analytical framework forms the basis upon which the data were examined. Following the constructs, elements of the constructs outline examples from each participant’s experience. After narratives were composed, the ‘elements’ of the ‘constructs’ were identified. These elements were included as they were common and repeated points within the interview and observation data. Each teacher participant’s story represents variation in these elements. Each construct has three elements. The elements in
pedagogical practices are rich demonstrations; stimulating environment; and adaptive instruction. The elements in assessment are professional confidence; systematic assessment; and multiple indicators. The final construct, monitoring and planning has the elements: iterative process and shared responsibility. These are summarised in Tables 13 and 14.

In Table 12 on the following page, the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value is included. The ICSEA is a composite measure that comprises a number of variables including socio-economic characteristics taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census collection district; school location; and proportion of Indigenous students enrolled at the school. The ICSEA “measures key factors that correlate with education outcomes as indicated by the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The average ICSEA value is 1000. Most schools have a value between 900-1100” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority; ACARA, 2010).
Table 12

*Interviewed and observed participants’ individual & school profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic data from 2007 (year of data collection- phases one and two)</th>
<th>Participant one</th>
<th>Participant two</th>
<th>Participant three</th>
<th>Participant four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant’s total student enrolment, 2007</td>
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<td>495</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>484</td>
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<td>Metropolitan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years of teaching experience</td>
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<td>nil</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of teachers with same years of teaching (all CEOWA teachers) in 2007</td>
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<td>269</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance rate (2010) * 2007 data unavailable</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ICSE) Value as per (ACARA) My School website for 2010</td>
<td>1002</td>
<td>1098</td>
<td>1121</td>
<td>1131</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Narrative account 1: Learning how to approach literacy

The first narrative, *Learning how to approach literacy*, tells about a novice early childhood teacher-participant who represents a portion of participants within the Catholic Education Department, WA. Her age bracket (under 25 years) places her in a group that includes 18 percent of survey respondents. This teacher’s early childhood specialisation grouped her with a plurality (41 percent) of survey respondents. The teacher is in her first year of employment placing her as one of the 14 percent of participants who commenced teaching in 2008. This participant is not employed in a RAISe school, resembling 41 percent of survey respondents. The school in which this participant commenced her first year of teaching is the same school in which she completed her final university teaching placement. She described her school as serving a low to middle socio-economic area, and as a large three-stream school.

*Learning how to approach literacy*

I started teaching this year; exciting to put my learning into practice. Teaching literacy is my responsibility and yet I do not feel pressure from my Principal. Early on, I realised many students did not know their letters and sounds. I started focusing on these. Sometimes it is hard because of the low socio-economic status of this school and the lack of skills students come to school with. Although I am a novice, I have some confidence in teaching literacy. I teach literacy for up to an hour per day across the curriculum. I do not apply much explicit literacy teaching as it is embedded curriculum-wide. The Deputy Principal takes my students for a half-hour literacy session each week; my school-based literacy support. The Principal is very supportive. He encourages me to attend professional development on a range of literacy topics. After attending many workshops, I have
gained new ideas. I have applied some of these into my classroom such as developing students’ fine motor skills to assist with writing development. I cannot tell you if there is a whole school literacy plan; I plan with the other Pre-primary teachers.

I am less confident in assessing literacy and would like professional development on using a variety of assessment tools. I would say I assess regularly but informally. I do not keep many paper records that I can share with you. It is in my head, more intuitive. My students were tested early in the year using PIPS. Receiving the PIPS results was excellent as before I saw these, I had no idea where my students were academically. The results highlighted specific areas in which my students had strengths and weaknesses in reading, maths and phonics. From the results, I grouped my students academically. I keep checklists as they are specific and I record student observations on a note pad; these eventually end up in the bin. I do not have time to formalise the records as I am observing every day. The most useful assessment tools to me are checklists. They are specific in terms of what I am observing. Although I do not feel any pressure to teach certain literacy, I would feel pressure if my students did not improve in their PIPS test at the end of the year. I guess this will be too late to respond to. I do think about this aspect throughout the year; I see it as my responsibility to provide a range of literacy activities to help students, rather than a burden. I know my students because I am with them all the time. I cater for individuals within small- or whole-group sessions rather than as individuals. Every teacher in this school keeps student portfolios on each child to show progress over the year. I have not included any examples of attempts at early literacy that I can share with you. If students do some writing, I tend to send this home at the end of the school day. The student portfolios include examples of students writing their name at the
start and end of year. You can see a variety of maths and art activities within the portfolio. Next year I will need to be more mindful of tracking literacy progress and provide evidence.

My school is a large, triple streamed school with two other experienced Pre-primary teachers, we plan together. I follow their ideas in this my first year; I do not feel I can contribute much. My school focuses on one letter each week using a commercial program called Language Time (pseudonym). My opinion is it does not cater for all students’ needs but it is what the other Pre-primary teachers’ use, so I do. If I had my own way, I would do more than the program allows. I read to my students each day, teach initial sounds, letters and rhyming. I have learning centres but have not thought to change these around much. The students seem happy with the materials in the room. I must alter the writing centre: it has been the same all year with just paper and pencils. You can see my students’ work placed around the room and numerous literacy charts hanging from the ceiling.

I do not do any planning with my teacher assistant as she is young and I do not think she is keen to be involved. Our relationship is friendly, but only at the school level. She prepares activities for me and helps tidy up. It is a shame because it means I do not have an adult to talk to during class time. I am not confident with parents and tend not to involve them to a great extent in the classroom even though I know it is important. I am learning how to teach first. Next year I will feel more confident about involving parents. One parent came in to ask what I was doing, not specifically related to literacy. I felt intimidated. Although I am not experienced, I spent four years studying to be a teacher at university. I expect parents to take responsibility for their child’s learning through reading and talking to them. One student was having a lot of trouble with his literacy and I asked his
father if he was reading to him. He told me he reads his accounting books. If
the book is not at the child’s level, or interest, it does not work. I think my
students have made gains over the year with their literacy, and I hope that
the PIPS results reflect this. Although I love teaching and my students, it is
hard work. I try my hardest to be positive but sometimes inappropriate
behaviour from some of the boys makes it difficult. I will be relieved when
the year is finished.

The teacher-participant portrayed in *Learning how to approach literacy* expresses her lack
of confidence in teaching literacy, how to specifically build on students’ skills and how to
monitor literacy systematically. This teacher lists aspects of her literacy pedagogy and
assessment she considers changing in her second year, namely: keeping observational
records, maintaining work samples and collaboration with parents. An awareness of her own
perceived teaching inexperience and the need to trial everything in her first year is noted.
The participant provides opportunities for students to learn literacy through a range
organisational methods mostly consisting of whole and small groups. Her pedagogical
practices are not linked to assessment, monitoring or planning. Little explicit literacy
instruction is implemented as the participant feels it is covered through other curriculum
areas. The writing centre has not been changed or updated during the year.

A lack of confidence in assessment and in knowledge of maintaining systematic
records is evident with little evidence of assessment records. No observational notes were
kept and only one student portfolio of work per child is maintained as required by the
school. Isolated literacy tasks are applied and planning is ad hoc. The participant relied
heavily on her colleagues to plan her program and she felt compelled to follow their ideas
rather than be an active partner in collaboration. A positive rapport between her and her
assistant has not developed in the year causing her to feel somewhat isolated. This novice teacher tried to remain positive in her communication with her students yet there are times when she felt frustrated by inappropriate student behaviours.

**Narrative account 2: Documenting learning**

The second narrative, *Documenting learning* is written from the point of view of another first year teacher. This teacher, however, was mature-aged and had completed her early childhood degree over more than six years as a part-time student whilst raising her three children and working in a primary school as a teacher assistant. She commenced a post-graduate education degree in the same year that she began teaching. This mature-aged novice is one of the 14 percent of first-year teachers in 2008, and one of the 37 percent of participants with fewer than five years’ teaching experience. The teacher is in the one-third of surveyed respondents in the 45 to 54 year old age group, one of the 41 percent of participants with an early childhood specialisation and one of the 8 percent of participants working in a RAISe school since 2007.

**Documenting learning**

I am almost 50 years of age and feel comfortable with my educational choices. My role is to build a belief in my students that they can all achieve. I concentrate on developing students’ speaking and listening skills, as this is where literacy begins. A lot of time is spent allowing students to share their thoughts on any aspect of learning whether we are doing an experiment or they are playing. I help students use descriptive words to extend their language. In my opinion, many Pre-primary teachers are not following a true early childhood philosophy. These days there is too much emphasis on pen and paper tasks; the impression I have from talking to other teachers.
Teachers seem to be providing home readers and getting students ‘ready’ for Year one instead of allowing them to be natural young learners. This pressure comes from primary teachers who expect students to write full sentences from day one. Additional pressure arises from administrative aspects, expectations have gone too far. Where is the time to teach and enjoy the joy of students’ learning?

I am in a RAiSe school with a literacy block that goes for 90 minutes, twice weekly. Parents are invited to assist with activities. RAiSe has not impacted much on this school. Something similar has been running in this school for the past decade. The transition into a literacy block has not been too different. There was a recent decision to commence a whole-school commercial early literacy program from next year. We were all able to discuss the benefits and whether we agreed with its introduction. I have been to a number of the professional development sessions from this program and I like what it offers. The structure of Pre-primary should not be formal. I am firm that students need time to learn in a constructivist manner and engage as learners rather than as adults dictate. I want my students to learn through play and the natural environment.

I encourage literacy through the classroom environment and in my approach to teaching. I explicitly teach a range of literacy skills such as: sounds, rhymes, language conventions; and I provide a stimulating environment for students to learn. Together with the class, I focus on English conventions such as sentences, full stops and capital letters. We often write letters to the school Principal and she writes letters back. I have a ‘message centre’ where each student has their own pouch on a large quilt. I encourage them to write letters to each other, which they do daily and thoroughly engage. These are relevant and authentic experiences that assist literacy development.
My classroom is spacious and I create a safe, homely atmosphere. My reading area has a couch with cushions creating a comfortable space for reading. I have a fish tank which creates a lot of interest. I have whole-wall displays for students to view and learn. Our theme at present is ‘living and non-living’. Posters are at eye level to encourage students to view the information. Numerous books (fiction and non-fiction) are available to students to look through to inspire them when creating their own art pieces. Today, the students were making their own bugs and using the words: head, thorax, abdomen, leg, antenna, eyes and wings. I use the correct language with students as this is how they learn vocabulary.

Students are capable; we often underestimate how much they can do. I am active in my classroom and treat my students with the upmost respect. I speak to them in the same tone I would to adults, and ask questions to encourage thinking. Individual and group efforts are regularly praised and encouraged. Learning is extended in various ways; a parent has been helping once a week to teach the students how to play various board games. The students are getting better each week and enjoy the interaction. I have a large daily timetable written for the students with the times and what is scheduled. Students use it regularly. It is another way of making the classroom their own.

To assess literacy, I use a class journal. This consists of photographs and transcripts of the students’ conversations. I do this twice weekly. I add tags of outcome statements from the WA Curriculum Progress Maps. The students are used to being photographed; they now take no notice, unless it is a special shot. I take photos and they keep on working. It is easy while students are engaged in tasks. My photos sometimes capture aspects that are unplanned. The students love reading the journal kept in the reading centre. I have spoken to curriculum writers and am concerned about no
mention of play, and how the assessment criteria might be interpreted. It seems that unless there is evidence on paper it doesn’t seem to be accepted as ‘doing literacy’. Consequently, I do not keep any other formal assessments; I am with the students to see what their needs are. I have spent many years learning about students’ development and best practice in early childhood. I use literacy profiles as a monitoring mechanism but do not complete these in pen; they are a guide. I monitor and plan using the class journal as it is a record of what I do and how much the students are progressing. It is the assessment tool I use for planning. Teachers face many pressures from upper school teachers to fill the curriculum with content; I do not agree.

In Documenting learning, the participant emphasises her belief in a student-centred and play-based approach rather than more formal teaching and learning. Although this teacher-participant has this belief she is able to provide explicit teaching of content through a twice-weekly literacy block where she incorporates explicit teaching of a range of literacy skills through a range of organisational methods (whole group, small group, individual and, learning centres). Her classroom is rich in literacy resources with learning centres, murals, books and manipulative and interactive tasks for students to engage with during independent playtime. This early years’ educator teacher has adopted documentation as defined in the Reggio Emilia approach. Photographs, work samples and transcriptions form the basis of her monitoring and assessment presented in a journal. The participant adds to the journal regularly with a twice weekly update. This is however, the one and only tool used for monitoring, assessing and planning literacy.
The participant is able to show students’ progress and development in literacy over the year through the journal. She does not like to keep formal checklists or profiles. Her planning for individuals and groups of students is based on the journal records. However, in this participant’s opinion, the journal is adequate to monitor literacy progression and plan for individuals and groups. In conclusion, this participant is aware of how she teaches, what she teaches and how she wants her students to engage with literacy practices. She is proactive in engaging parents of her students and other adults into her curriculum program to assist in extending students’ skills. However, she uses only one method of assessment.

**Narrative account 3: Embedding literacy development**

The third narrative account named, *Embedding literacy development*, is written from the point of view of a mature-aged experienced teacher-participant. This teacher has the greatest number of years’ experience of the four observed participants, yet has the least formal teacher training. Her teacher training was completed more than 30 years ago when only two years of teacher training was required. Since then, the participant has completed a number of units of study to equate to a three-year qualification. She commenced teaching in early childhood with no prior experience or specialised early childhood training. The participant is representative of a number of the minority groups to emerge from the survey data. She is one of the 29 percent in the 45 to 54 age group; one of the 21 percent of surveyed respondents without an early childhood specialisation; one of the six percent of survey respondents with more than 25 years’ teaching experience and; one of the 10 percent with 16 to 20 years experience in Pre-primary. She is teaching in a RAISE school.
similar to the majority 59 percent. The participant is teaching in a large, double stream high socio-economic area.

**Embedding literacy development**

More than half of my career has been in public and Catholic, early childhood and Pre-primary classrooms even though I was not trained in this area. I fell into early years’ teaching after getting married and moving to a small country town. I was thrown into the deep end. I have studied a number of early childhood units over the years but these are not recognised formally and I am not bothered by this. The school in which I teach is in a high socio-economic area. Most parents work as professionals, value education, are highly involved in their children’s education and like to be informed and involved. I do not have any behavioural issues to deal with. I can get on with my role, teaching. My last school was horrendous in terms of students’ behaviours.

Learning literacy is enjoyable, exciting and relevant. I have attended countless professional development days in my career. I use this collected knowledge to decide what works best for students. Others say I am exhausting to watch because I am always talking and moving. My classroom may look chaotic but it is productive. I use modelling as an instructional tool each day several times to illustrate expectations with short, simple discussion and examples. I do this often. When Rashmi came to do a classroom observation for her research, I did a mini-grammar lesson on adjectives. I asked my students to think of words to describe her. I modelled first by saying ‘clever and uncomfortable’ because she had broken her ankle and was wearing a leg boot. The students gave other responses such as: ‘friendly, interesting, sore and happy’. I went on to explain that Rashmi was from a university. To illustrate what this meant, I
drew a chart on the board showing school, high school, university, TAFE and work. I explained how people make differing choices about what they do. The students were genuinely interested. I use these ‘teachable moments’ all the time as it is learning in context.

My classroom is a space where life experiences are embedded. I am committed to teaching literacy explicitly and the need for spontaneity and using those teachable moments. Teaching literacy has to be enjoyable and exciting. I keep my students active and intellectually engaged through numerous hands-on activities. I use anything I feel works: magnetic letters; a bag of felt letters, three dimensional block letters that students can manipulate and learn through, and songs. You can see students in the writing corner, book corner, drama area, block area and students playing educational games on the computer and both inside and outside. It is noisy but that is okay as it reflects me. I teach a range of skills including rhyming, decoding, language conventions, book conventions and syllables to name a few. I celebrate ‘Book-week’ every year. Language learning is fun and exciting in Pre-primary; this is the most important aspect to me. I aim to provide this element in numerous ways.

We go on many excursions and parents are involved in the learning process as partners. I invite them to share their knowledge and skills. This term the students are learning about ‘community’. Many parents have come in to discuss their own roles. This provides further opportunities to extend students’ literacy development. Last term when we were learning about ‘living and non-living’, one parent, a microbiologist, came in. He brought in his microscope and we set it up as one of the day’s activities. The students looked at various items: a leaf, a piece of hair, and a fly. He worked with the students during small-group time explaining each item and what to look for. My students are academically strong and need
extension of their learning. Parents contribute items from home to fit in with themes. These make language relevant and the classroom a living experience. Excursions provide a springboard for an array of literacy experiences.

Students are capable if you provide the right types of opportunities and ask the right questions. Today in Science I emphasised correct vocabulary such as: energy, characteristics, investigation and function. It is important to use subject-specific words. I use the words in whole-group discussion then I might write the words on the board for everyone to read and view. This is a natural way to involve students in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Oral language is a trigger to prompt students’ writing. Students draw, paint and create and I scribe for them if needed. I do not have a single free spot on my walls. They are saturated with students’ work. You have to duck and weave to walk through. It looks nothing like the Pre-primary adjacent where not a single thing is out of place, everything is labelled and each student’s work is presented immaculately.

A teacher assistant in Pre-primary can make or break a teacher. Unfortunately, I have had issues with mine this year. After many years’ experience it has been stressful. I have gone home crying many days. I could be teaching the students and my assistant will call out and interrupt my lesson. She does not follow my instructions. I have complained to the Principal to say I cannot work with her. She undermines me in front of the students. It is a no-win situation. This has been the worst experience in my entire career. My relationships with my students are special to me and a priority. I encourage them, play jokes and laugh with them. I am sure they think I am mad.
I keep a range of assessment records: anecdotal records, learning profiles, student portfolios, annotated pieces of writing, a limited number of checklists and individual education plans (IEPs) and informal conversations to gauge understanding. All these assist to document and monitor learning. I use the PIPS data results received early in the year to group, cater and track students. I observe students and a lot of this is in my head in addition to the formal assessments. A speech therapist comes in and she picks up gaps in some students that I had missed. I work closely with her to plan my program accordingly for the students who need more and less assistance.

I collaborate with the teacher next door but we have different approaches. We work differently and that is a reality of my teaching. If I see for example that a student needs extra work with their phonemic awareness, I build this in to small and whole-group tasks. I am aware of that student’s needs at all times and go back to check on their progress frequently. I discuss results openly with parents as honesty is the best policy. They need to know where their child is academically to enable supporting the learning process. Assessment is necessary but we have gone overboard with teacher expectations. Here is my evidence. I wonder if this is necessary.

The participant in *Embedding literacy development* is experienced, mature-aged and aware of her role in teaching, monitoring and assessing students’ learning over the year. She uses multiple pedagogical approaches and assessment tools to track progress. A strong link is evident with her teaching plan. Students are engaged in a variety of active listening tasks, dialogue and critical thinking and hands-on tasks. Demonstration of keeping literacy relevant is evident through the experiences both in and out of the classroom. This teacher-
participant keeps her students engaged through the relevancy of the learning opportunities. She uses her eclectic and extensive experience to provide experiences-planned and spontaneous.

Rigour is present in this teacher’s systematic approach to maintaining records. She works collaboratively with her teacher colleagues and other professionals; however, a relationship break-down has occurred with her teacher assistant. The strained relationship is causing her great stress. Parents are seen as invaluable partners; this is evident in how she communicates openly and includes their input to a high level. The participant expresses that her students are her priority and she works hard to maintain high-level relationships through her humour and positive approach. Students’ work is displayed regularly in the classroom to the point of saturation. In conclusion, the participant in Embedding literacy development provided an intellectually stimulating program included a range of other adults in the teaching and assessment processes and is cognizant of students’ needs.

Narrative account 4: A diagnostic approach

The fourth narrative, A diagnostic approach, describes another mature-aged, experienced teacher-participant’s way of implementing literacy in her Pre-primary classroom. This specialist, early childhood educator has more than 20 years’ experience specifically in early childhood classrooms. She recently upgraded her qualifications to meet Catholic Education requirements bringing her teaching qualification to the equivalent of four years. During the period of data collection she taught in a very high socio-economic area, more so than in the previous narrative. This participant is representative of the 16 percent of research participants in her age group (35 to 44) and of the 41 percent with an early
childhood qualification. Her extensive teaching experience (more than 20 years), grouped her with the top 12 percent of surveyed respondents. The participant is not teaching within a RAISE school, similar to most surveyed respondents (59 percent). She spent more than an hour on daily, explicit literacy teaching placing her in the small group (4 percent) of survey respondents who spent a similar amount of time.

**A diagnostic approach**

I have spent the majority of my teaching career in Pre-primary classrooms, 10 years of this overseas. Recently, I completed an upgrade to my qualifications, now required for teachers who initially completed a three-year teaching degree. I teach in a high socio-economic area where the parents of my students are mostly professionals. The majority of my students travel internationally on holidays annually. I use a diagnostic approach to literacy instruction and assessment. I do not make assumptions about where students are in their literacy development. I assess my students’ skills regularly from the start of the year. I constantly build on their skills and know where to focus my teaching specific to their needs. This year I have three children with specific learning needs that impact on literacy development. I have needed to plan for their skills very carefully with a focus on particular outcomes. Whilst their needs are catered for specifically, I plan for all students’ development.

I use a variety of assessment tools such as: PIPS; individual and class profiles; anecdotal records; checklists to some degree but I am not a fan of these; student portfolios; and, I spend a lot of time talking with students to gauge where they are both formally and informally. I involve my teacher assistants (I have two) in the observations as I greatly value their input. They are with the students as much as me; their perspectives are
necessary. I closely observe a different four students each week to ensure each student receives individual attention in the assessment process. I collect many work samples throughout the year on early writing or early literacy skills I implement to view progress. This iterative process continues all year. Although I assess regularly, not every assessment is formal. There is enough for me to make a judgment about a student’s literacy development. Information about students’ progress is shared with the parents through student portfolios in terms one, two and three. A final formal school report is written in term four. In addition, I have a ‘learning journey’ one evening per year. This involves parents coming in to my classroom to view their child’s work. The students explain their learning processes to their parents. It is like a one-on-one ‘show and tell’.

I personalise my curriculum program to cater for individual student’s needs. For example, this year I have three students on an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for their specific language development. One student had limited awareness of letter names and only knew one sound. I worked closely with his mother to discuss his development. Together, we have supported the student with additional tasks being sent home for him to work on with his mother. I assured her that collaboratively, we could build the student’s confidence and skills. I worked with the whole class on phonemic awareness, but I was sensitive to his particular needs in these sessions. I praise students’ efforts and encourage them to have a go at reading, writing and oral language. The PIPS results reflect students’ literacy weaknesses and strengths and needs. Being aware of students’ needs is vital for planning. I link my observational notes, profiles and other assessment records to my teaching.

I include my teacher assistants in the planning process and value their input. I negotiate the curriculum with my students because they have
to initiate what they would like to learn. I brainstorm with students the
areas they want to explore then we take a class vote. Recently, the boys
wanted to learn about dinosaurs and others about the human body. I
planned for both. A large group of boys became deeply engaged with the
topic of dinosaurs. Many can tell you multiple facts about each dinosaur.
Other topics we have looked at this year include: ‘Australia’, ‘pirates’,
‘small animals’ and Christmas. If a certain topic goes on for a long time it is
fine. These last as long as students are engaged. I find out what students
know before they commence. On conclusion of a learning program, I ask
students to reflect on what they learnt, how they learnt and how they felt
about the topic of interest. This is an important aspect of learning students
need to know.

My classroom is print-rich. I aim to develop with my students a love
of books and reading. When I arrived in this classroom there was no
reading centre, a first for me. I immediately set up a reading corner and
included a variety of texts: fiction, picture, non-fiction and pamphlets etc. I
regularly update the learning centres around my room. This week, the
writing corner has cards and coloured pens. I have laminated cards with
words on them that students may refer to when in the writing centre. I
alter the centres each fortnight to reflect what we are learning. I work hard
on developing speaking and listening skills because these are the
foundation for further literacy development. Specific literacy skills I
encourage in here are: speaking and listening, phonemic awareness, letter
recognition, syllables, concepts of words, vocabulary, book conventions,
writing skills and story construction. One way I encourage phonemic
awareness is to ask students to rhyme a word back to me from picture
cards before morning tea.
I am lucky that I have a large amount of assistance in my classroom because of the heavy parental involvement in this affluent area. Today I have two parent helpers, including one grandparent and two teacher assistants. The roster is always full. With many adults in the room, individual attention can be given. Adults can engage in extended conversation; a real luxury. Parents and grandparents regularly offer many of their own skills and knowledge such as teaching French and singing songs in a number of non-English languages. The end of year PIPS testing is valuable. I gather the results both from the PIPS data and from my own assessments and together with my literacy support teacher; we look at the students who will require more support the following year in Year 1. I spend a reasonable amount of time with the Year 1 teachers discussing students’ development so they can start teaching from day one.

In the final narrative, *A diagnostic approach*, the teacher-participant was highly confident in implementing literacy pedagogy and assessment. She provided a high level of daily, explicit literacy instruction and included integration across the curriculum. This teacher’s learning programs are written in collaboration with students through a process of brainstorming and group discussions to include students’ interests. Positive relationships are developed and maintained with the students’ parents and her colleagues who participated in the learning process. She is inclusive of colleagues in the processes of teaching, monitoring and assessment and demonstrates the value of their input. This ensures a smooth and continuous thread of learning. Numerous and engaging literacy resources are provided to students within the classroom to heighten opportunities for literacy development.
A highly positive environment is maintained through use of positive language, humour, praise and encouragement. Literacy centres are frequently updated and linked with broader learning concepts being implemented. This teacher is able to carefully monitor students; plan according to assessment results and execute a thorough, student-negotiated curriculum. The educator has several students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) proceeding concurrently within her whole class program. A highly systematic approach is applied to assessment, monitoring and planning. Multiple assessments are used through the year with monitoring and planning linked to assessment evaluations. Instruction is adapted to meet the needs of learners. Her approach to teaching is a mix of teacher-directed and child-directed negotiated curriculum, and a range of varied organisational methods implemented throughout the year when teaching literacy. This participant felt that the high socio-economic school allowed her more opportunity to provide a carefully tailored and individualised program where her students are given greater attention and broadened experiences because of the large amount of parental and family support in her classroom.

**Narrative Analyses**

In this section I analyse the 4 narratives against the constructs and elements of the analytical framework described in Table 13 and in Table 14 the elements are matched to examples from each of the 4 narrative accounts.
Table 13

*An analytical framework for analysis of the narratives*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs of analytical framework</th>
<th>Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Practices</td>
<td>Rich demonstrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stimulating environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptive instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and Monitoring</td>
<td>Professional confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Systematic assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Iterative process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 14

**Analysis of construct elements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Learning how to approach literacy</th>
<th>Documenting learning</th>
<th>Embedding literacy development</th>
<th>A diagnostic approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stimulating environment</strong> Limited literacy resources; learning centres remain same for long periods. Poor rapport with assistant and parents. Positive rapport with students. Use of positive language, praise and encouragement with students.</td>
<td>Numerous literacy resources regularly changed to suit learners’ needs/interests Learning centres evident and frequently updated. Strained relationship with assistant yet positive with parents. Posters, charts and wall murals at students’ eye level and interactive resources at students’ eye level. Very positive rapport with students. Uses regular positive language, praise and encouragement.</td>
<td>Numerous literacy resources regularly changed to suit learners’ needs/interests Learning centres evident with intellectually stimulating tasks and frequently updated. Poor rapport with a teacher-assistant Positive rapport with parents Posters, charts and wall murals at students’ eye level and interactive resources at students’ eye level. Highly positive rapport with students—highly regular use of humour, praise and positive language.</td>
<td>Numerous resources; Learning centres with intellectually stimulating tasks and frequently updated. Positive relationships with assistants and parents. Posters, charts, wall murals and interactive resources at students’ eye level. Extremely positive rapport with students—highly regular encouragement, humour, praise and positive language evident.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14 continued…

Analysis of construct elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs:</th>
<th>Learning how to approach literacy</th>
<th>Documenting learning</th>
<th>Embedding literacy development</th>
<th>A diagnostic approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment  and Monitoring</td>
<td>Professional confidence Limited</td>
<td>Professional confidence High</td>
<td>Professional confidence High</td>
<td>Professional confidence Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regular and systematic assessment Irregular and spontaneous application of assessment with limited evaluation of data. Monitoring is minimal and ad-hoc/on the go.</td>
<td>Regular and systematic assessment Regular (twice/week) assessment and regular evaluation of data including detailed transcripts of students' language. Monitoring-comprehensive but only one main source.</td>
<td>Regular and systematic assessment Systematic recording and management of assessment maintained. Monitoring- comprehensive with various sources.</td>
<td>Regular and systematic assessment Highly regular and systematic recording and management of assessment maintained. Monitoring comprehensive, detailed planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple indicators Minimal evidence of assessment records and tools used for documenting learning</td>
<td>Multiple indicators Little evidence of multiple assessment records and tools, instead, one main assessment tool (journal).</td>
<td>Multiple indicators Comprehensive evidence of numerous assessment records and tools.</td>
<td>Multiple indicators Comprehensive evidence of numerous assessment records and tools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Iterative process Planning-in isolation of monitoring Minimal planning for the whole-class, small-groups and individuals. Very few links to teaching and assessment. Minimal and passive collaboration with colleague. No parent involvement.</td>
<td>Iterative process Planning- based on evidence from one source. Good level of planning evident for the whole-class, small-groups and individuals linked to teaching and assessment. Some collaboration with colleagues. High parent involvement.</td>
<td>Iterative process Planning-based on evidence from multiple sources. High level of planning for the whole-class, small-groups and individuals linked to teaching and assessment. Some collaboration with colleagues. Very high parent involvement.</td>
<td>Iterative process Planning comprehensive and regular from evidence. Very high level of planning for the whole-class, small-groups and individuals linked to teaching and assessment. Comprehensive evidence of individual, small and whole group planning and monitoring linked to teaching and assessment. Highly collaborative with colleagues. Maximises parent involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared responsibility Very limited sharing of responsibility with parents regarding student progress</td>
<td>Shared responsibility Good shared responsibility regarding student progress with colleagues and parents</td>
<td>Shared responsibility High level of shared responsibility regarding student progress with colleagues and parents.</td>
<td>Shared responsibility Very high level of shared responsibility regarding student progress with colleagues and parents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Narrative accounts summarised

In this chapter, I presented four narrative accounts constructed around the perspectives of four teacher-participants. Each of the four narratives discusses the ways in which each teacher approaches literacy instruction, assessment, monitoring and planning. Similarities are evident across all participants’ classrooms in terms of daily organisation, instructional methods and assessments. However, teacher-participants vary in the extent of their literacy related practices correlated in each of the four classrooms. The young, novice participant in *Learning how to approach literacy* provided minimal literacy instruction with isolated learning experiences and no links to assessment. Her lack of confidence and experience impacted her practice. In *Documenting learning*, although the participant used one assessment tool, she felt this was adequate because of the depth of documentation.

In contrast, the teacher-participant in *Embedding literacy development* used her considerable experience and eclectic knowledge to apply a stimulating literacy program with multiple assessments. In a *Diagnostic approach*, it was clearly evident that the most academically qualified of the four participants held a high level of confidence in her approach to literacy pedagogy and assessment, with a systematic approach to record-keeping and monitoring of student development evident. This teacher demonstrated an understanding about how to link pedagogy, learning, assessment and monitoring, and planning. The literature reflects the need for a systematic approach to literacy instruction, regular and multiple assessments and the need for a stimulating and engaging environment. Teachers are required to monitor student development consistently to cater for individual student needs.
CHAPTER 6
Discussion and conclusions

Overview

This study set out to determine the ways in which Pre-primary teachers in Catholic schools approach literacy pedagogy, monitoring, assessment and planning practices and how teachers link these together. Each aspect of literacy practice was viewed in the context of the extent to which factors such as stage of career development and level of qualification relate to these practices.

The current study has produced a number of findings that focus on the ways in which teachers conceptualise literacy pedagogy and assessment practices. In general, substantial differences were observed in how teachers practice various dimensions of literacy. Specifically, the study has documented how these teachers provide literacy pedagogy, and monitoring and assessment that range from insufficient to optimal. This chapter first discusses these findings examining pedagogy, and monitoring and assessment. In the next section, the limitations of the study are noted, and some recommendations made for further research. The chapter closes with a discussion of a number of implications for practice and policy development.

Discussion

Pedagogical practice

Effective teachers implement a variety of pedagogical methods thereby providing balance between teacher-directed and student-directed activities (NAEYC, 2009a) and flexible
grouping (Katz, 1995). No single method or approach “is likely to be effective for all children, at all times” (NAEYC, 2009a, p. 1). Pressley, Rankin and Yikoi (1996) found that effective teachers utilised a combination of whole class, small group and individual teaching. The teachers in the current study revealed that they implement a wide range of teacher- and student-directed activities and a mix of whole, small and individual grouping through the organisation of their classrooms. Literacy centres, considered an excellent way to encourage literacy development in the early years of education (NAEYC, 2003; Neuman et al., 2000; Wortham, 2001) were being used by all surveyed respondents. Almost all (93 percent) of respondents used small- and whole group methods, and three quarters (73 percent) of the respondents use individual self-directed learning. Specific examples in the current study, expressed through the narrative accounts in Chapter Five, illustrate the ways in which the teacher-participants applied flexible-grouping to meet individual student needs. The range of student-groupings employed by teachers in the current study is consistent with the range described in recent literature on effective teaching of literacy in the early years of schooling.

Effective teachers are intentional in what they do, including applying various instructional strategies within the chosen student-groupings as stated above (NAEYC, 2009a). Pressley et al. (1998) in their study on effective literacy instruction in the first year of school revealed effective teachers were those who favoured balance in teaching practices. The authors state that a balance in literacy approach requires varied instruction, a classroom environment that is supportive of literacy, diversified reading groups, teacher modelling of low-and high-order skills and extensive monitoring. In this current study, two examples of this balanced approach being applied were observed in experienced teachers’
practice. In *Embedding literacy development*, an example of a teacher-participant being intentional and applying a range of grouping strategies was found in her collaborative approach with parents. This teacher took advantage of parents’ expertise and planned her program so that students would benefit. In one example, she set up a science learning centre to stimulate an interest in living things (the learning theme at the time) and asked the parent of one of her students who happened to be a microbiologist to assist with the activity. The teacher asked the parent helper to use the metalanguage around the scientific terms to extend the students’ vocabulary. This teacher reinforced this learning by continuing to use the new scientific language with her students in small and whole group discussions during the school week and beyond.

A second example of a teacher being intentional and applying various instructional strategies was observed in *A diagnostic approach*. Here, the teacher-participant varied literacy instruction in her morning literacy block: commencing the session with teacher-centred modelling of writing skills then allowing students to work in small-group reading comprehension tasks, small-group writing tasks, small group listening tasks or to work as individuals reading in the literature centre. Each literacy experience was planned to meet specific literacy goals of the class and of individual students. This teacher used extensive monitoring to continue planning for a balanced classroom. As Teale (2003) noted, good early childhood teachers “make principled insightful decisions for individual children and orchestrate effective instruction for the group of children being taught rather than apply learned procedures for instruction or follow scripted lesson plans” (p.35). The use of intentional and varied instructional strategies is consistent with the recent literature on effective teaching of literacy in the early years of schooling.
Effective teachers of literacy use explicit teaching through teacher-modelling with clarity of meta-cognitive explanations (Louden et al., 2005b). The terms ‘systematic’ and ‘explicit instruction’ appear numerous times within the National Reading Panel Report (2000). This report states that teachers demonstrate and explain precisely what and how they want students to learn encompassing everything from skills to strategies to meta-cognitive processes. More recently, in a meta-analysis of studies that examined ‘direct-instruction’ as an instructional strategy Hattie (2009) reported an effect size of 0.59 which can be considered as high. Direct-instruction is commonly understood as a teacher-centred model for instruction for part of a lesson. Direct-instruction is described as having seven key elements: the teacher has learning intentions; knows the criteria for performance success; builds student commitment and engagement in the task; shows students examples of what is expected and checks for understanding; models expectations; guides practice; closes the lesson; and allows for individual practice (Hattie, 2009).

Little debate exists around the effectiveness of using explicit direct instruction as part of one’s teaching repertoire (MacNaughton & Williams, 2009). In this current study, teachers who demonstrated effective teaching and documented effective student outcomes were the teachers who regularly applied explicit literacy instruction alongside student-centred tasks. In *A diagnostic approach*, the teacher spent 25 minutes at the commencement of a literacy session introducing her students to letter writing. The letter being constructed had a purpose, to thank their peer-class for their recent work with the Pre-primary students. During the session, the teacher modelled the letter’s structure and articulated the metacognitive processes as she demonstrated writing a complete letter whilst physically seated in front of her students to observe the expected writing behaviours demonstrated.
Students were fully engaged for the modelled session as the teacher invited student
discussion with peers and the teacher whilst keeping the emphasis on explicit teaching.
Both teachers in *A diagnostic approach* and *Embedding literacy development* used the
seven elements described by Hattie (2009) when implementing direct instruction as in the
previous paragraph. The survey used in this study sought information about the time spent
on daily, explicit literacy instruction, revealing that a plurality of teachers (47 percent)
spent between 30 and 60 minutes each day on explicit literacy instruction. The use of
explicit instruction is consistent with the recent literature on effective teaching of literacy in
the early years of schooling.

Effective early years’ teachers spend regular, consistent and significant classroom
time on literacy instruction (Brophy & Good, 1986). In this study, although 47 percent
spent 30 to 60 minutes on the explicit, daily instruction of literacy, what is less known from
these results is the exact nature of what occurred in these explicit teaching sessions. The
results however, are positive in that teachers were self-reporting spending significant time
on literacy instruction. Evidence from the four observed teacher-participants showed that
the teachers who were able to articulate their linking of pedagogy, assessment and planning
spent considerable time on literacy instruction and up to 30 minutes on daily explicit
instruction. I argue that it is not necessarily extended periods of time that increase
effectiveness in literacy; rather it is the quality of instruction in any given time that seems
most important.

Accomplished teachers are able to implement a more sophisticated approach than
novice teachers in an equivalent amount of time (Leinhardt & Greenho, 1986). It is
important to note that instructional quantity alone is not a measure of instructional success
and that time on instruction is also not necessarily a measure of time spent learning (Wray et al., 2000). In this study, survey data illustrated that when teachers were asked to report on their literacy teaching regularity and confidence, 71 percent reported high regularity and confidence. However, almost one-half of these teachers (47 percent) had less than five years’ experience as Pre-primary teachers, in contrast to Leinhardt and Greenho’s (1986) research. Consistent with Leinhardt and Greenho’s research, however, of the four observed teachers, the more experienced teachers were indeed able to provide more sophisticated and effective literacy instruction in equivalent or less time. For example the two teachers in *Embedding literacy development* and *A diagnostic approach* were systematic in their planning and spent regular and consistent time on literacy instruction. The teacher in *Documenting learning*, although a novice teacher, had over 10 years classroom experience as a teacher assistant to draw upon. The application of regular and consistent time spent on literacy is consistent with the recent literature on effective teaching of literacy in the early years of schooling.

In summary, effective teachers of literacy, as documented in the literature and in this study, demonstrate a number of characteristics. They are cognisant of their students’ needs for balanced grouping arrangements as well as balance between teacher- and student-directed tasks; they make use of explicit demonstrations to model literacy skills and meta-cognitive processes; and, they spend regular and consistent time teaching literacy. Effective teachers of literacy in the early years are those who provide maximum opportunities for students to learn (Silcock, 1993).
Assessment and monitoring practices

Teachers in the early years are effective when they assess regularly, strategically and with purpose (NAEYC, 2009a). As Sloat et al. (2007) emphasise, by applying a rigorous monitoring system, tangible evidence can be used to strengthen pedagogical practice. The position statement of two major professional bodies, the NAEYC and the IRA, reinforce the need for teachers to use multiple assessments regularly and systematically to guide teaching (NAEYC & IRA, 1998, NAEYC, 2003; NAEYC, 2009a; NAEYC, 2009b).

Effective teachers regularly review and reflect on assessment insights to develop a clear focus about each student’s progress and to plan accordingly (Ratcliff, 2001).

In this study, three of the observed teachers demonstrated assessment regularity, a systematic approach and assessment with a purpose. In *A diagnostic approach*, the teacher described how she used diagnostic assessment data results received from the PIPS assessment early in the year to plan an individualised program for her students. In contrast, the teacher in *Learning how to approach literacy* did not implement a systematic approach, nor did she assess regularly, leaving her in doubt about her students’ literacy progress and with no documentation to demonstrate or verify literacy gains. Three-quarters (74 percent) of the surveyed respondents stated that they were regular in assessing literacy in their own classrooms. The application of a systematic, regular, strategic and with purpose approach is consistent with literature on developmentally appropriate and effective literacy assessment in the early years of schooling.

Teachers in early childhood are effective when they use assessment data to inform pedagogy (NAEYC, 2003). Assessment to guide instruction is a primary purpose of early
childhood programs and is regarded as a component of a high quality program (NAEYC, 2003). Assessment embedded in practice to inform teachers of future planning directions goes hand in hand with intentional and effective pedagogy, a critical component of effective teaching and learning (Barclay & Breheny, 1994; Cobb, 2004). Additionally, the teacher “is the primary agent of assessment” (IRA & National Council of Teachers of English, 1994, p. 16). This study presented examples of variation in the effectiveness and confidence of assessors. In *Learning how to approach literacy*, the lack of a systematic, regular and varied approach with few links to pedagogy and planning for development proved an ineffective approach. The teacher-participant had stated she felt the least confident in literacy assessment. In contrast, the teacher-participant in *A diagnostic approach* was able to carefully connect literacy pedagogy and assessment, providing a well-balanced approach. The application of assessment as a guide to inform pedagogy is consistent with literature on developmentally appropriate and effective literacy assessment in the early years of schooling.

A high-quality early childhood program includes multiple authentic assessment types including observations, teacher-made tools and standardised tests for the benefit of students and improved planning (Bowman et al., 2000; Wortham, 2008). Cambourne and Turbill (1990) argue that data generated from multiple sources using teacher observations and judgments can be considered as trustworthy and scientific as measurement-based approaches to assessment. Antonacci and O’Callaghan (2004) assert that observation is one of the most powerful tools early childhood teachers have for gathering data about literacy development. This study explored the range of assessments being applied and illustrated how surveyed participants used a broad range of indicators. Across the six assessment items
listed on the survey, 100 percent of surveyed participants used at least four of these. The
top three assessments used by participants were: checklists, observations and work samples.

The two experienced teachers in *A diagnostic approach* and *Embedding literacy development* adopted a multidimensional approach to assessment. In contrast, the teacher in *Documenting learning* used only one intensely detailed journal to assess her students, consistent with documentation as suggested by the Reggio Emilia approach. Although this teacher lacked in multiplicity of assessment tools, she was able to demonstrate a high-level of monitoring, assessment and planning. In her case, photographs with detailed transcriptions and teacher comments provided the basis for her planning. Most, but not all, study participants applied multiple assessments that are consistent with the literature on developmentally appropriate and effective literacy assessment in the early years of schooling.

Effective teachers monitor literacy through applying an iterative approach where monitoring is central in the teaching, learning and assessment model (Anstey & Bull, 2004). Monitoring allows teachers ownership of the pedagogy-assessment process to foster literacy growth (Cooper, 1997). One such five-stage cycle describes how literacy assessment is an integral part of the teaching, learning cycle. In this cycle, teachers (i) identify goals, (ii) collect evidence, (iii) describe evidence, (iv) interpret evidence and; (v) apply new instruction (Jones, 2003). This cycle is repeated regularly for effective monitoring. In *A diagnostic approach*, the teacher used early assessment screening tools such as the PIPS data to group students, to plan Individual Education Plans (IEPs), implement effective instructional tasks to student needs and monitor learning. This process was repeated regularly over the year in a systematic and organised manner. In contrast, the
teacher in *Learning how to approach literacy* did not understand or enable an iterative process; hence a disjointed and disconnected literacy program was in place. The approach to an iterative process in literacy instruction is consistent with literature on developmentally appropriate and effective literacy assessment in the early years of schooling.

In summary of assessment and monitoring practices, teachers in the early childhood years are effective when they assess regularly, strategically, with purpose and when assessment is used to inform pedagogy. A high-quality early childhood program includes multiple assessment types such as observations, teacher-made tools and appropriate standardised tests that benefit students through improved monitoring and planning that are central in the teaching and learning process. This current study identified teacher-participants with rigorous, systematic assessments who were able to demonstrate monitoring practices to inform this planning and instructional intervention.

**Planning**

Effective teachers in the early years are those whose literacy curriculum plan is characterised by intentionality (Epstein, 2007; Slavin, 2000). When teachers are intentional, they act with purpose and plan to achieve goals. Intentional teachers apply their knowledge and expertise in organising learning experiences and take advantage of teachable moments that may arise unexpectedly (Epstein, 2007; Slavin, 2000). This notion of intentionality was clearly evident in *Embedding literacy development*. During the first classroom observation, on my arrival in a leg boot due to an ankle break six weeks’ prior, the teacher used that as an opportunity to explain to her students how the break had occurred which then led to a brief grammar lesson on adjectives. The teacher-participant asked: “Who can think of an adjective to describe Mrs. Watson? I think uncomfortable”.
On my second observation visit to the teacher portrayed in *Embedding literacy development*, another example of intentionality was observed. The teacher-participant gave a verbal explanation about my professional role as a university lecturer by drawing a visual representation on the whiteboard describing how people progress from primary school to high school then make choices to attend to work, university or TAFE. She explained where my role fitted in the visual example. These two examples highlight opportunistic moments in teaching where a teacher recognises the opportunity and uses it in practice (Epstein, 2007). This intentionality in teaching was seen in most of the observed participants and is consistent with literature on planning in a developmentally appropriate manner and effective literacy planning in the early years of schooling.

When teachers in the early years share responsibility regarding student progress in collaboration with colleagues and families, they are effective (Early Childhood Australia, 2006; Rosenberg, Lopez & Westmoreland, 2009). Numerous learning programs exist across all school years to promote positive collaboration between schools, students and parents as there is a clear relationship between school success and levels of parental involvement (Cairney, 2000; Feuerstein, 2000). In the current study, three of the observed teacher-participants were active in building parent partnerships. Their parent rosters were filled each day with a minimum of two adult helpers on most days. “Parents and grandparents regularly offer many of their own skills and knowledge such as teaching French and singing songs in a number of non-English languages” (*A diagnostic approach*). Individual student learning plans were discussed through parent-teacher conferences to achieve continuity of the literacy program and tracking student success: “I believe that being honest to parents about
their student progress is the only way” (Embedding literacy development). These two quoted teachers taught in high socio-economic areas; and both commented that their parents highly valued education.

The shared-responsibility approach to improving literacy outcomes was evident in almost all of the observed teachers with the exception of the teacher-participant depicted in: Learning how to teach literacy. This particular teacher-participant was not ready in her beginning year to make the home-school partnership. She stated: “I am not confident with parents and tend not to involve them to a great extent in the classroom even though I know it is important. I am learning how to teach first.” In contrast, the other three observed teacher-participants exemplified high levels of parental involvement in their classrooms.

In summary of planning practices, a number of attributes of effective planning have been identified. Effective teachers are those whose literacy curriculum plan is characterised by intentionality, apply an iterative approach to teaching literacy and when there is a shared responsibility regarding student progress and where a home-school partnership is fostered.

**Research conclusions**

In the preceding discussion, I compared and contrasted the findings of the current study with the research literature. Based on these comparisons, frequently recurring indicators of effective literacy practice were observed and noted across the three dimensions: pedagogy, monitoring assessment, and planning. Key ideas within the three areas were extrapolated to uncover and elevate consistencies in effective practices. As shown in Table 15, the analysis found a number of terms used within each dimension when examining the practice of
effective teachers of literacy. The terms common to all three dimensions were: ‘explicit’; ‘intentional’; ‘adaptive’; ‘collaborative’; ‘strategic’; ‘systematic’; ‘regular’; ‘opportunistic’; ‘consistent’ and; ‘interconnected’. Teachers implement a broad range of pedagogical, assessment, and planning practices in their classrooms. They may apply these in varying degrees of practice as outlined above in Table 15.

Table 15

*Dimensions of literacy practice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of literacy practice</th>
<th>Characteristic practices</th>
<th>Characteristics common to all dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Flexible; explicit; intentional; strategic, systematic; varied; modelled; collaborative explanatory; adaptive; meta-cognitive; regular; iterative; interconnected; consistent; significant; opportunistic; safe; nurtured</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intentional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strategic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment &amp; Monitoring</td>
<td>Explicit; intentional; strategic, systematic; varied; adaptive; meta-cognitive; regular; iterative; interconnected; consistent; significant; opportunistic; iterated; interconnected; varied; multiple; safe; nurtured</td>
<td>Systematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Regular</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunistic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Flexible; explicit; comprehensive; collaborative intentional; strategic, systematic; regular; adaptive; iterative; interconnected; consistent; significant; opportunistic; safe; nurtured</td>
<td>Interconnected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nurtured</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A depiction of the three dimensions of literacy practice as discrete entities is represented in Figure 32. In this model, a teacher’s literacy-related practices are shown as being unrelated. This would portray a teacher who is at the lower level of effective literacy instruction due to the separation of literacy dimensions. A teacher, whose practice resembled this model, is possibly strong or weak in one or all literacy dimensions (pedagogy, monitoring and assessment and planning). In this model, a teacher would focus on one aspect of their literacy practice at a time with little connection among the three. The
omission of an iterative process is also evident in the model. Teachers might hone their skills in one of the areas, for example, attending professional development on understanding one dimension, for example, the use of assessment data, teaching strategies or using a new method of grouping students. The teacher in *Learning how to approach literacy* could be categorised as one of these teachers. I argue that such skill development in the three dimensions is useful and necessary but it is not sufficient for optimal literacy teaching and learning.

![Figure 32 Dimensions of teaching practice as discrete entities](image)

In the second figure displaying teacher literacy practices (Figure 33), the three dimensions of literacy practices are represented as a process. In this case, a teacher may be effective as a teacher of literacy being strong in one or more of the three literacy dimensions and may use a process approach where one dimension leads to another; yet, an iterative process and interconnectedness is still not apparent.
In Figure 34, the three dimensions of literacy practice are depicted as an iterative process. In this model, the teacher could be effective in all of the literacy dimensions and apply these with a recursive process where the process becomes habitual. In this model, interconnectedness to some degree may be evident but not necessarily sufficient to provide maximum opportunity to students. The elements of effective literacy practice as outlined in Table 15 in each dimension may not be evident. I argue that this level of development is useful and necessary but not yet at a sufficient level for optimal teaching and learning.
I now put forward a model (see Figure 35) which represents effective literacy practice based on this current study. This model depicts the three literacy dimensions of pedagogy, assessment and monitoring and planning as each being intentional as discernable in practice. The term intentional is applied as defined by Epstein (2007), where teachers act with purpose, plan to achieve goals, apply expertise in organisation of learning and are opportunistic in implementing learning experiences as they arise. The three dimensions are represented as an iterative process in which interconnectedness exists and facilitates overlapping. Good intentions or skills in each dimension alone are not sufficient. The common characteristic practices listed in Table 15 are evident within each of the three allowing the replication of practices in each. Here, such teacher development is useful, necessary and sufficient for optimal literacy teaching and learning in early childhood. It is the synthesis of these factors which allows positive, effective literacy practice to be attained.

*Figure 35 Model of provision for effective literacy practice through interconnectedness*
In conclusion, a number of factors afford students opportunities to achieve necessary literacy skills during the early years of their education. Teachers require sophistication in their own skill set within pedagogy, assessment and monitoring, and planning. Through a deep understanding about how characteristic practices within each dimension are necessary for interconnection and synthesis, effective literacy practice is enabled. It has been observed both in this study and in the literature, that good understanding in one or more of the dimensions is necessary but not sufficient for effective teaching. Teachers who elevate literacy teaching to the ‘interconnected’ stage of development move from a ‘discrete entity’ model with no interconnections to a higher level of intentionality and interconnectedness. The consequences of integrating the dimensions and characteristics as portrayed in Figure 36 are necessary factors for teaching and learning. Effective teachers of literacy implement these characteristic practices in their day-to-day literacy teaching.

**Limitations**

All research suffers from limitations associated with time and depth. Three limitations from the current study are identified: a low survey return rate, the consistency of data gathered on explicit teaching and the fairly short duration of time invested in classroom observations. The goal to achieve an 80 percent survey return rate was not achieved despite putting into place key measures such as email reminders to principals and an incentive for returned surveys. A poor return may have occurred for a number of reasons such as: teachers’ time involved in completing the survey or personal reasons not to respond. Secondly, data information obtained from surveys may have been better designed to gather more specific information. For example, questions about specific knowledge and skills demonstrated during the ‘explicit-teaching time’ and what the term ‘explicit’ meant to
participants (question 11, Appendix H) may have helped to ensure that participants were answering questions as intended. The survey responses are subjective, as is to be expected with any given survey and thus findings should be viewed accordingly. Thirdly, a total of four to five hours were spent on each teacher observed. It could be argued that this is not extensive; however, it did seem sufficient in gathering enough data for discussion in the current study.

**Recommendations for further research**

This study has highlighted the potential for extended research in the area of early childhood literacy pedagogy and assessment. Three key areas recommended for further research: (1) investigations into teachers’ understanding of meaningfully linking pedagogy and assessment, monitoring and planning; (2) in-depth, ethnographic studies producing case exemplars of teachers who exemplify the characteristic practices necessary for effective literacy practice as outlined in the findings of this study; and, (3) investigations into the specific content knowledge and skills being implemented during literacy.

The first recommendation for further research looks at an investigation into what teachers’ understanding is around linking pedagogy to assessment and monitoring, and planning against the findings of this study. There is assumed knowledge about teachers’ understanding of the three literacy dimensions discussed in the current study. A further questionnaire of all Pre-primary teachers to capture understanding of linking across the dimensions of literacy practice and whether they link would assist curriculum staff in planning useful professional learning.
Secondly, in-depth ethnographic studies producing case exemplars of teachers at varying stages of career development who exemplify the characteristic practices necessary for effective literacy practice as outlined in the findings of this study is another recommendation for further research. Through case exemplars, professional learning becomes linked to real practices which are localised. Cases of the ways teachers interact with students in literacy sessions; use assessment data to inform practice and planning and provide an adaptive environment to suit the learner’s needs would be highly useful in better understanding teachers’ literacy practice development.

The final recommendation for further research is an examination of content. A database of which early literacy skills are being taught in early childhood education programs and the resources teachers are using would likely prove useful for early childhood practitioners. At present, the implementation of a National Curriculum (ACARA, 2010) means changes to teachers’ use of curriculum documents. For example, information under the learning area of English for early childhood teachers is listed from ‘Years K-2 (typically 5-8 years), ACARA (2010). A further breakdown of year by year is yet to be developed. The statements in the draft National Curriculum are broad and open to variation in interpretation. This leaves the implementation of these open to teacher interpretation. Although this study did not focus on the content being taught, a large body of literature focuses on the literacy skills necessary in early literacy education. This combined knowledge of content with effective pedagogy, assessment and planning would seem to have a high potential for positively impacting literacy practice.
Implications for practice

Two implications for practice arise from the current study. The first is the development of a set of guidelines articulating how to ‘facilitate effective early childhood literacy pedagogy, assessment and monitoring, and planning’. The second implication for practice involves the dissemination of this information, implementation of the information within the guidelines, and the ongoing support to teachers through a professional learning framework.

To address the first implication for practice, the development of a document with a set of guidelines explicitly articulating how to ‘facilitate effective early childhood literacy pedagogy, assessment and monitoring, and planning’ could first be initiated by interested stakeholders, namely key early childhood representatives from all education sectors. In this document, the elements of Figure 35 could be discussed and explained explicitly as a model of effective literacy teaching practice. In the development of such a document, a working party could be established with representatives including: early childhood teachers, curriculum and policy staff members from the CEOWA and a group of principals. There is an opportunity here for those currently working on the Review K/P/1 from the Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning at state level to take ownership of such guidelines and build it in as part of the recommendations that emerge from the Review K/P/1 which has been in place for the past two years. The working party would establish content; engage in discussion around a strategic approach to its dissemination and implementation and long-term support to teachers; and develop case exemplars through research.
The guidelines being recommended would include: definitions of key literacy related terms; several case exemplars; tables outlining effective literacy and assessment practices and opportunities for representation of these in the classroom; a website with a list of recommended resources; links to websites related to early childhood information, organisations and position statements such as those on the ECA and NAEYC websites; and, the opportunity for early childhood educators to make comments and provide feedback through online discussions and posts. From the development of a set of guidelines, a subsequent professional learning program would follow and be available to early childhood teachers to engage with such content. Support from school leaders is an essential component of such a professional learning program and its sustainability.

To address the second implication for practice involves: the dissemination of the guidelines; implementation; and the ongoing support to teachers articulating how to ‘facilitate effective early childhood literacy pedagogy, assessment and monitoring and planning’, through a professional learning framework. In a recent review about professional learning, Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphason (2009) found that it “should focus on student learning and address the teaching of specific curriculum content”. The proposed professional learning framework would address a strategic- and systematic-approach to increase grounded understanding of effective early years’ pedagogy, assessment and monitoring and planning, and their interconnections as outlined in this study. Neuman and Cunningham (2009) assert that teachers must show deep understanding of the content area being taught and an appreciation of the differing approaches which may be applied in teaching the content area.
Gaining an understanding of effective early years’ literacy pedagogy and assessment requires a long-term commitment to increase knowledge and practice. A recent study by Neuman and Cunningham (2009), which systematically compared professional development, found benefits to practice when course-work and on-site learning was combined. A link between quality teachers and their professional development has been found in the literature on professional development (Meiers & Buckley, 2009) as was shown in this current study. In light of this study and a review of others by the U.S. Department of Education (2010), a number of factors for effective professional development are offered for promoting children’s early language and literacy skills. These are summarised as: establishing goals and objectives; understanding the current classroom context; the provision of resources; engaging a cohort of educators; and, assessing the fidelity of implementation including follow-up on-site professional development.

In a professional learning framework that supports early childhood teachers in their literacy practices, a recommendation to involve all teachers and school leaders, including school principals, is proposed for its sustainability. The role of leadership is imperative in the long-term success of continued professional growth of teachers, whole school outcomes and sustainable teacher practice (Baker & Smith, 1999; Dickinson & Brady, 2000). The current study showed that almost 30 percent of teachers did not follow, or even know, whether there was a whole-school literacy approach in their own schools. Whilst most pre-primary teachers who responded to the survey in this study knew about their whole-school literacy approach and followed it, one-third of teachers stated they did not have a whole-school literacy approach or were unsure. Measures of accountability to ensure all teachers
participate are recommended in the policy development of such a framework recognising those elements outlined in Figure 35.

The implementation of a professional learning framework in the Catholic sector is possible given the current structure of the Collaborative Professional Learning Model (CPL), started in 2009 at the CEOWA, aimed at improving practice through professional learning. Thus, wider implementation is possible if the Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning takes this opportunity to embed this current study’s findings with their Review K/P/1 findings. The implication being recommendations of this current study gives the CPL a focus on early years’ literacy education within the model already in place. In the CPL model, the three domains of teacher knowledge are: content, pedagogy and student learning (Catholic Commission of Western Australia, 2010). The current study fits within the knowledge of pedagogy domain and a system-wide approach would address a strategic and systematic approach to increase grounded understanding of effective early years’ pedagogy, assessment and monitoring and planning, and their interconnections. An explicit school- and system-wide approach around the necessary conditions for effective literacy practice is possible.

The proposed professional learning framework for early years’ teachers being proposed should include mixed-grouping of experienced and novice teachers. This study’s findings showed that teachers with less than five years’ experience self-reported feeling confident in their approaches to literacy and teaching; however, the more experienced teachers were the ones who demonstrated—through observed evidence—knowledge of embedding effective pedagogy and assessment. Including teachers of different age groups
and experiences in professional learning assists in “developing a professional culture and sustainability of new techniques and skills” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 85).

Greater support through the development of a set of guidelines around effective literacy practice with a supportive professional learning framework on the dissemination and application are two avenues to enhance the pedagogical and assessment practices in early years’ literacy. A grounded understanding of intentional pedagogy, intentional assessment and monitoring and intentional planning is necessary for early years’ teachers regardless of teaching experience. To achieve this across schools and school systems, professional development within these key dimensions of literacy is forthcoming.

As previously noted, the CEOWA has invested a number of years of professional development in raising standards of achievement using literacy as the vehicle to address change with the RAISe (literacy) and now with the CPL initiative to improve school outcomes. However, a system-wide review of the approach may now be useful in light of the introduction of a National Curriculum. In support of such an approach Scott et al. (2001, p. 142) say that, “using assessment effectively must involve the entire school or district”. In their discussion on assessment, these researchers suggest that: “It may take several years for all teachers to understand assessment practices. Consensus is built upon regular reflection and discussion among teachers” (p.144). The professional learning framework would explicitly outline knowledge as outlined in Table 15. An approach to understanding what these mean and what appropriate application of these in early childhood practice would likely prove to be highly useful information for teachers.
**Implications for policy development**

Two policy recommendations are put forward at the sector level. First, the implication for a policy to be developed around early years teachers to be cognisant of a set of guidelines outlining the ‘principles of effective literacy practice in early childhood’ is recommended. The second implication for policy development is towards a policy on early childhood teachers and principals to have an understanding of the characteristics of effective literacy practices (for novice teachers within the first twelve months of their employment with the CEOWA), based on the guidelines as mentioned above and being supported in the application of the guidelines.

The policy on the guidelines being proposed would provide suggestions about means and processes in achieving effective classroom literacy practices with case exemplars. The guidelines would specifically cater around the practices to improve literacy in a WA context. A set of principles becomes the basis for grounded and embedded best practice. A number of policy statements in the CEOWA (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2002a, 2002b) around early childhood practice and literacy education currently exist but these are not explicit in terms of what might be regarded as best practice in early years’ literacy instruction or assessment. In the existing policies, there is no mention about how a teacher might attain effective outcomes for students through pedagogical or assessment and monitoring practices. A revision of the current policies to reflect these will better support those staff that are bound by these. The recommendations enable this to occur.
Thesis conclusion

The current study has produced a number of insights around the literacy practices of early years teachers in Western Australia. I have compared and contrasted findings of the current study and the research literature, and found a number of frequently recurring indicators of effective literacy practice across three dimensions: pedagogy, assessment and monitoring, and planning. From these I developed a model outlining what literacy practice might look like when all of the elements are combined effectively. These findings cannot be generalised to all early childhood teachers but can be examined within the contexts of this study. The CEOWA could strengthen their current initiatives by marrying the findings of the current study to provide opportunities to increase effective practices.

This study’s limitations were noted followed by a number of implications for policy and practice. The implications for practice are practical and manageable given the current structure of the CEOWA professional learning models in place, namely the CPL. Current literacy practices are varied with teachers being largely left to their own decision-making about critical factors that support or block effective practices. This study has shown that early childhood teachers in the CEOWA are actively applying a range of instructional and assessment practices in their own contexts and are open to increased awareness and professional learning in the areas of literacy pedagogy and assessment. Greater dissemination of information around effective literacy practice through interconnectedness as outlined in Figure 35 could assist early childhood teachers in their classroom practices. Thus, the continued growth and development of literacy education in Western Australian schools could be bolstered by attending to findings and recommendations of this research, to better ensure positive outcomes for all stakeholders.
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Developmentally appropriate practices for young children. *Young Children*, 53(4), 30-46.


APPENDIX A: Information to participants (to be interviewed)

Title of Research Study: Linking assessment and pedagogy: Pre-primary literacy monitoring practices in Catholic schools, Western Australia.

Name of Student Researcher: Ms. Rashmi Watson

Name of Program in which enrolled: Doctor of Education

Dear (insert name),

I am conducting research into the monitoring of literacy in pre-primary classrooms across the Catholic system in Western Australia as the final part of my Doctor of Education (EdD) with Murdoch University.

The aim of the study is to explore what current literacy monitoring practices are in place and how teachers’ link assessment to pedagogy as this is an area in which there is much research needed. The proposed study will look at practices from teachers with differing years of experiences and qualifications. Your involvement in this research involves an interview, three visits to your classroom where I can complete observations and completion of a survey. All information gathered will remain confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the research. The potential benefit to you is that you will have the opportunity to reflect upon your own practice and share vital information with your pre-primary colleagues within your education sector.

You need to be aware that you are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time without giving a reason. Any questions or concerns can be answered prior to you making a decision by contacting me either on my email: rwatson1@nd.edu.au or by phone on 9204 3701 (h) or (mobile) 0408545626. Many thanks in advance for your participation.

Yours sincerely,

Rashmi Watson

Student Researcher
APPENDIX B: Interviewee participation consent forms

Title of Research Study: Linking assessment and pedagogy: Pre-primary literacy monitoring practices in Catholic schools, Western Australia.

Name of Student Researcher: Ms. Rashmi Watson

I ……………………….(the participant) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Interviewee Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any stage. I agree to be recorded via audio recording and understand that research data collected for this study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me or my school in any way.

Name of Participant: ………………………………………………………………………

(Block letters)

Signature ………………………………………………………………………………… Date…………..

Signature of Student Researcher …………………………………….. Date ……………
APPENDIX C: Interview protocol

1) Name:                                                      Phone contact:
2) Gender:                                           Female    Male
3) Age:
4) School Name:
5) Number of years teaching:
6) Number of years teaching Pre-primary:
7) Educational Qualifications: Grad Cert / B Ed/ MEd/ PhD/EdD
8) How many pre-primary classes in your school?
9) How would you describe the socio-economic make-up of your school?

Now let’s move on to talking about literacy in PP…..

10) What do you think the roles and responsibilities of pre-primary teachers (generally) are in relation to teaching literacy?
11) Can you tell me about your thoughts on how you think PP teachers teach literacy?
12) What current literacy assessment tools do you use in PP? Please tick
    a. Primary (PIPS) online assessment
    b. First Steps Reading Map of Development class profile
    c. First Steps Reading Map of Development individual profile
    d. Literacy Net profile
    e. Checklists
    f. Observations - anecdotal notes
    g. Work samples
    h. Informal/formal conversations
    i. Other - please state

13) Can you tell me what you do with the information gathered from the assessment tools you have mentioned?

(Classroom Practices)

14) Is your school a part of the RAISE project? Yes/No
15) Can you describe the influence of RAISE (if yes?)
16) What types of literacy skills do you focus on in your PP class? E.g. Letter recognition / Phonemic and phonological awareness

(My school)

17) Is there a whole school approach to the teaching of literacy that currently exists that you need to follow? Yes-please explain or no
18) Do you feel there are any pressures on you from your school to meet literacy outcomes? Please elaborate….

19) What teaching practices in the teaching of literacy have you found to be highly successful in your PP class?

20) Do you think PP has changed since being part of the whole school? Can you give me an example?

(Wider influences)

21) Has the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy had any effect on the teaching of literacy in your class?
No-I haven’t heard of it or yes. How?

22) Are there any other factors that influence your effectiveness in the teaching of literacy?

23) Are there any other concerns you have in the teaching of literacy?

24) What literacy support do you have currently on a school and system base?

25) What other support would you like to assist you in meeting literacy outcomes?

  a)  Professional development in literacy
  b)  Assistance from colleagues
  c)  Assistance from senior teachers
  d)  More time to work in small groups/individual children
  e)  Information how to better plan for literacy outcomes
  f)  Other-please state:

25) Can you tell me how you think parents can contribute to literacy development at home?

26) Could you tell me how parents contribute to literacy education in your classroom?

27) What are your personal expectations of parents regarding literacy at home? Can you give me an example?

28) Do you have anything else you would like to add to our conversation today?
APPENDIX D: Information to schools to conduct classroom observations

*Actual letter was printed on Murdoch letterhead

**Title of Research Study:** Linking assessment and pedagogy: Pre-primary literacy monitoring practices in Catholic schools, Western Australia.

**Name of Student Researcher:** Ms. Rashmi Watson

To the Principal,

I am conducting research into the monitoring of literacy in pre-primary (PP) classrooms across the Catholic system in Western Australia as the final part of my Doctor of Education (EdD) with Murdoch University. The aim of the study is to explore what current literacy monitoring practices are in place and how PP teachers link assessment to pedagogy as this is an area in which there is much research needed. I have attached a letter of support from the Director of the Catholic Education Office Western Australia (CEOWA) who has endorsed the study because of the potential benefit to the Catholic sector and wider community.

I am writing this letter to gain informed signed consent to attend your school once a term during 2007 to conduct observations of the pre-primary teacher who has agreed to be involved in the study. Those taking part in the Study will be advised of this visit well in advance, so enabling re-scheduling if necessary. I have Police Clearance and current membership with the Western Australian College of Teaching (WACOT).

All information gathered will remain confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the research. Your school name will in no way be mentioned in any published documents or discussed with any persons outside of the research context as required. If you agree to me attending (*insert school name*) to conduct observations please sign the attached consent form. Please contact me if you wish to discuss any details on 9433 0167 (work) or on 0408545626 (mobile)

Yours sincerely,

Rashmi Watson
APPENDIX E: Consent form from school to conduct observations

*Actual letter was printed on Murdoch letterhead

Title of Research Study: Linking assessment and pedagogy: Pre-primary literacy monitoring practices in Catholic schools, Western Australia.

Researcher: Ms. Rashmi Watson

I ______________________, have read and understood the information provided in the ‘Information to schools for observations’. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to allow Rashmi Watson to conduct observations in the designated pre-primary classroom (room number ___), throughout 2007. I realise that I can withdraw at any stage. I agree that research data collected for this study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me or my school in any way.

Name of Principal: …………………………………………………………………………

(Block letters)

Signature ……………………………………………….. Date …………………..

Name of Student Researcher: Ms. Rashmi Watson

Signature of Researcher ……………………………………………….. Date ……………..
APPENDIX F: Observation protocol

Date and time of observation: Teacher name: School name:
Number of students: Environmental factors/issues on observation day:
No. of students:

1. **Communicating to students** *(Note that space to write comments on each statement was provided)*

   Makes it clear what students are to learn (content)
   Encourages students to achieve during literacy session
   Reinforces the belief that all students can learn what is being taught
   Reinforces the importance of what is being taught with students
   Maintains a positive approach (verbal/non-verbal) during lessons with individuals & group
   Regularity of teacher repeating instructions
   Teacher manages individual and group behaviour to maximise learning experiences

2. **Pedagogical Practices and detailed examples**

   Instructional activities are targeted to lesson outcomes
   Explicitly models literacy task/s
   Implements shared, guided and independent activities to meet students’ needs
   Literacy centres present for students to self-direct learning and interests
   Encourages student collaboration and discussion
   Teacher monitors development during activities
   Teacher asks and responds to questions

3. **Assessing students and providing feedback**

   The teacher provides clear feedback
   The teacher applies a variety of assessment tools on a regular basis
   The teacher involves students in self, per assessment and feedback
   The teacher evaluates students’ work in a consistent manner
   Maintains a system of recording this information
APPENDIX G: Information letter to pre-primary teachers regarding survey completion.

*Actual letter was printed on Murdoch letterhead*

To The Pre-primary Teacher

I am conducting research about how pre-primary teachers in the Catholic system, Western Australia, teach literacy and link assessment as part of my Doctor of Education (EdD) studies with Murdoch University. The aim of the study is to gather information from a range of sources about literacy pedagogy and assessment including the attached survey to all pre-primary teachers in WA. Your response is greatly valued and imperative to the study so that the wider community may become aware of the experiences faced by teachers. All information is confidential and only to be used for the purpose of the research.

Please send the completed survey in the reply paid envelope by March 31 to be eligible for a prize as indicated on the survey. If you have questions about my request, please feel free to contact me by phone on 0408545626 or by e-mail at rwatson1@nd.edu.au.

Thank you for your assistance. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Ms. Rashmi Watson

Doctoral Supervisors: Associate Professor Helen Wildy & Dr. Andrew McConney
School of Education, Murdoch University.
APPENDIX H: Survey to pre-primary teachers in the Catholic Education System, WA

*The following is a saved Word document from the original PDF thus extends to three pages. Actual survey was one A4 page and double sided.

Survey form
Pre-primary (PP) Teachers

1. Name (optional) for follow up: ..........................................................................................................................................................
   ..........................................................................................................................................................

2. School (optional): ..........................................................................................................................................................
   ..........................................................................................................................................................

3. Gender: □ Female   □ Male

4. Is your school a part of the RAISE literacy project? □ Yes   □ No
   If yes, which year □ 2004   □ 2005   □ 2006   □ 2007   □ 2008

5. Age: □ Under 25 years   □ 25-34 years   □ 35-44 years
   □ 45-54 years   □ Over 55 years

6. Number of years (full time equivalent) teaching: □ Under 5   □ 6-10   □ 11-15
   □ 16-20   □ 21-25   □ Over 25

7. Number of years (full time equivalent) teaching Pre-Primary: ..............................

8. Do you have a specialised early childhood qualification? □ Yes   □ No
   If yes, what is the qualification? E.g., BEd(ECE), Graduate Certificate in ECE etc.) ..........................................................................................................................................................

9. Is there a whole-school approach or plan in relation to teaching and assessment of literacy which you follow? □ Yes   □ No   □ Unsure

10. Which classroom organisations do you use to teach literacy? (Tick as many as
required)

☐ Whole class  ☐ small group  ☐ individual  ☐ learning centres

☐ other

Please specify: ................................................................. ..........................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

11 About how long do you spend on explicit, literacy teaching each day?

☐ Under 30 min  ☐ 30-60 min  ☐ Over 90 min

12 Which of the following literacy assessment tools do you use? (select as many as you use)

a. ☐ Literacy Net profile  ☐ Class profile  ☐ individual profiles
b. ☐ Checklists

☐ Observational notes
d. ☐ (First Steps-reading/writing WA )  ☐ Class profiles  ☐ individual profiles
e. ☐ Work Samples

f. ☐ Informal/formal conversations  ☐ Other-please state:

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
Using the following six point scale, place a tick in the box that represents most closely, your current experience.

13 I feel confident about what to teach in relation to literacy in Pre-Primary.

14 I regularly and frequently teach literacy in Pre-Primary.

15 I feel confident in assessing literacy in Pre-Primary.

16 I regularly and frequently assess literacy in Pre-Primary.

17 Considering your professional practice in relation to literacy teaching /assessment, which areas or aspects would you like to strengthen? Please list:

............................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................

Thank you for completing the survey.

Please return the completed survey in the enclosed, reply paid envelope by March 15, 2008.

* If you wish to be eligible to go in the draw for a $100 voucher to Angus & Robertson’s Bookstores please provide contact details below.

Contact Name and Number:
............................................................................................................................................
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