TURNING THE PAGES: ADOLESCENTS, SCHOOLS AND READING

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on adolescents and reading. My premise is that adolescents develop a reading identity which is influenced by an existent reading culture to which they are exposed. This existent reading culture can be influenced in particular by schooling, family and the opinions of peers. One major influence is the classroom. Within the English curriculum, what criteria do English teachers use for selection of set texts and are there differences in criteria in all-boy/all girl and co-educational schools?

I reflected on the prevailing perceptions that relate to gender, masculinity and popular culture which can affect what it means to be a boy, literate, and a reader of fictional texts. My first folio piece examines adolescents’ reading within five secondary schools, including an all-boy school, to ascertain whether boys in single-sex schools read more fictional texts and whether they enjoy reading more than their counterparts in co-educational schools.

Authors are frequently invited to visit schools and work with students. My second folio piece investigates author visits in five secondary schools, from the perspectives of English teachers, teacher librarians and cohorts of middle school students. I wanted to find out why schools ask authors to visit and what are the expected outcomes of these visits, particularly in regard to adolescent reading identities.

The third folio piece examines authors’ narratives concerning school visits. Authors have certain expectations when working with students and talking about their writing. I wanted to discover how authors think they can provide maximum impact on students through their visits, by asking a cohort of authors to recount their ‘dream school’ visits and ‘nightmare school’ visits.

Interpretations of the research about boys and reading, and author visits from the schools’ perspectives are analysed using a form of content analysis. The third research project concerning authors’ narratives is interpreted using lexical networks.

Prominent elements of my study explore adolescent reader identities through the influences of schooling and through author visits. In the conclusion of this study, these elements are drawn together and broad recommendations are outlined that pertain to the encouragement of positive adolescent reading identities.
CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

1. SITUATING THE STUDY
1.1 ORIGINS

Dear Margaret Clark,

I want to thank you for getting me back onto reading. I am in year nine and I always loved reading, in fact, I spent most of my time after school curled up in a chair with my nose in a book. That was in primary school. I won the MS Readathon because I read over one hundred books! Year seven in high school wasn’t too bad, but in year eight I didn’t read much and particularly this year, I don’t read many novels at all, except the ones for school that I have to read. Sometimes I don’t like them, but even worse is having to answer questions about them. Somehow it’s put me off reading. And of course, what with homework and netball stuff, there’s not enough time. But I was looking on the library shelves in library period and I found your book Fat Chance. I started reading it and couldn’t put it down. Now I’ve borrowed all your books and I read them at night in bed, and have also started borrowing some books by other authors like Maureen McCarthy. Thank you for writing such entertaining books and knowing what teenagers want to read. I just wanted to know when your next book is coming out in the Lisa and Mandy series? I hope it is very soon. Thank you again for getting me reading again and keep writing your books forever.

From much appreciated fan Charlotte

The notion of adolescents and their changing reading identities intrigued me. I, too, was an avid child reader. I too, like Charlotte, got turned off reading novels at around year eight at high school, and certainly in year nine. Charlotte’s letter rekindled a curiosity. Why did I, such a passionate reader, get turned off reading to such an extent that I didn’t want to read novels any more? Was it for the same reasons as Charlotte? Television did not come to our household until I was sixteen, computers were not in households at all, so competing media was a non-issue. Charlotte did not mention television or computer as intruding on her time, although other adolescents sometimes cite these as detracting from the reading of novels when they write to me.

Charlotte’s letter was not in isolation. Other adolescents reported in letters and emails that they turned away from reading novels, and then, sometimes accidentally stumbled on an author whose novels stimulated them to read again. Informal chats with teaching colleagues about this subject confirmed that, yes, a number of students lost interest in
reading fictional novels at around fourteen, fifteen and sixteen years of age. The
teachers were unsure why this occurred. Further informal chats with the local librarian
also confirmed that, in her opinion, mid-adolescents borrowed less fiction from the
library than the pre-adolescents/early adolescents. She stated that ‘I don’t think they
have time to read for fun. These older students used the library to get information for
assignment work. I hope they get switched back onto reading again soon.’

Fortunately, I got switched back onto reading, but I can’t remember a defining moment
when this happened.

1.2 LOCATING MYSELF IN THE STUDY

My past professional career experiences as a teacher, a university tutor, an education
consultant in an alcohol and drug centre have continued to influence my life.
Interspersed have been roles of wife, mother, friend, student. For the past eleven years, I
have been a full-time writer, working from home. I have had to change notions of my
identity as my private life has changed dramatically, and so has my work life. Sorcellini
and Near (1989, pp.59-60), referred to a ‘continuous tension between the demands of
personal and family life and the requirements of professional success’.

Eleven years ago I held a well-paid and intellectually challenging and socially
stimulating job as an alcohol and drug educator. I was based at a counselling and
rehabilitation centre but worked in school-based alcohol and drug programs in three
hundred primary and post-primary schools in the Barwon/South Western region of
Victoria. I had been writing childrens and teenage novels on a part-time basis since
1987, and was becoming increasingly weary of juggling two careers. So, with
trepidation, I left my safe government-funded job to pursue my writing career.

In the forming and re-forming of my ‘new’ work identity, the pendulum swung from
that of me being a team member, having people from the disciplines of medicine,
psychology, social work and youth work around me, being visible fields, to working in
isolation, having no people around me and being ‘invisible’ behind the computer. And
from being a critical reader of novels for children and adults, I am now the creator of
fictional texts.

Initially, I had to travel interstate every month to promote my books. Without self-
promotion, it is difficult to make a good living as an author in Australia due to the size
of our population. The tyranny of distance becomes a problem, too, when many book
promotions are organised by the publishers in major cities and also in country areas. The author may travel great distances to accomplish school visits, book signings in shopping malls and book stores, television and radio interviews, and press interviews. Every new author in Australia seeks to establish himself/herself as ‘a known brand’. (For the study, only young adult/adolescent authors are under consideration). Some authors get their ‘brand name’ by writing one best-selling book that endures (Melina Marchetta’s *Looking for Alebrandi* is an example); others write a particular genre and become known for that genre (for example, Isobelle Carmody, Garth Nix are famous Australian fantasy writers); others seek to write a novel in a particular narrative style that ultimately becomes an English set text (Gary Crew, Brian Caswell, Jackie French, Morris Gleitzman, Sonia Hartnett, Libby Hathorn, John Marsden, James Moloney); others write what is termed popular fiction (Christine Harris, Andy Griffiths, Paul Jennings, John Larkin, Geoff McSkimming, to name a few).

For me as an author and a former educator, schools are very important places, because I can see for myself what the students prefer to read, which texts lie untouched on the shelves, I can talk to the teachers and the teacher-librarians about their needs and the students’ needs regarding appropriate literature, I can inspire the students to read through my motivational talks, I can help them improve their writing skills by being a mentor for a day, and I can receive vital feedback from them.

An author does not, cannot, work in isolation. With hints of Foucault’s (1984) notion of control through self-monitoring, Blackmore (1997) argued that ‘performativity encourages a process of individuation as teachers and individuals work in a ‘state of conscious and permanent visibility’ resulting in a form of self-surveillance which assumes the automatic functioning of power’ (Blackmore, 1997, p.11). In my profession of authoring, it can be argued that the efficiency principle also becomes the standard for judgement, both of self and from others, in fact, self judgement relying heavily on the opinion of others.

With questions of schools, teachers, librarians, students, authorship and texts running around like mavericks in my head, I was compelled to engage in doctoral research. I was initially interested in adolescents and their reading identities - how they positioned themselves as readers, particularly adolescent boys. I was interested in how schools ‘managed’ adolescent reading identities, particularly in English classrooms. I wanted to know why English teachers selected certain set texts for their literature programs and also why these and other texts that were regarded with such enthusiasm by English
teachers and teacher-librarians, appeared to be regarded much less favourably by the students. Indeed, did author visits to schools inspire students to enjoy their set texts and other texts?

1.3 MYSELF AS A RESEARCHER

A doctorate of education is about the researcher’s workplace. As an author of childrens and adolescent novels, my workplace is amongst a community of professional authors. As a result, I am positioned so that insights from the world of writing can contribute fresh perspectives to adolescents’ reading of texts.

In order to reflect about what I wanted to focus on as a researcher and how best to do this, I kept a number of sequential journals from 1996 until 2002 which related to my career as an author, an educator and as a doctoral student. These journals contain goals, plans, thoughts, reflections and information about the doctorate, my authorship, schools and the curriculum, marketing of books for adolescents, letters from adolescents and other relevant data, and can be considered a self-narrative of my journey through my doctorate as well as my work as an author.

Although Smythe (1989) recommends writing a journal on a computer, I preferred to carry notebooks and exercise books with me. There are times when it is not convenient to use a computer and a notebook is more immediate. Essentially, an accurate descriptor of my journals would be “journalistic scrap books’, because they contain not only personal writings, but newspaper cuttings, photocopies from magazines and academic journals, school bulletins, letters, faxes and emails from authors, teachers, librarians, students, parents and publishers.

The journals have a faintly musty smell. They have been carried onto planes and trains, into motel rooms all over the country, resided on my bedside table and on the armrest of the sofa, and subsequently stored in a cupboard. These journalistic scrapbooks are an integral part of my authorship and academic life.

Initially, the 1996 journal writing was used as a sounding-board to record my impressions of the taped interviews provided with the doctoral materials, to reflect on discussions held with my supervisor, and to attempt to formulate a plan for my research methodology and data collection.

My own journal writing has now changed in format and become more focused, because
I have progressed beyond those initial learning experiences and decision-making about my own research, and in addition, I have perused more recent research findings pertaining to journal writing which I am now utilising.

If a certain quality of reflection is to be the goal, then sustained personal reflection on professional experience and the value of journal writing is a method of achieving this goal. Indeed, it is crucial to regard journal-writing not as a chore, but as an important facet of working life.

As an author visiting schools, I developed a curiosity concerning author visits. In addition to the framework of my own thinking about authors and schools, I was curious to know why teachers and librarians asked authors to their schools, what their expectations were, what the students’ expectations were, and how the author visit was integrated into the curriculum.

2. THE FOLIO

My folio is composed of:

An introduction, the purpose of which is explain the structure of the folio and to outline the rationale for the dissertation and the research projects

A dissertation entitled Reading the Reader, which is the theoretical framework pertinent to the research projects. Within the dissertation, qualitative research is discussed, and my rationale for employing particular qualitative methodologies is examined.

The reports of three research projects:
   1. A research project on reading and adolescent boys.
   2. A research project on authors visiting secondary schools.
   3. A research project on the narratives of a cohort of authors who visit schools.

A conclusion
A list of references
An appendix containing examples of relevant documents for permission to conduct research in schools.

Figure 1 below indicates the relationship between myself, the dissertation, and the three
research projects that comprise the folio.

FIGURE 1: The relationship between myself, the dissertation, and the three research projects

2.1 THE RESEARCH PROJECTS

The folio is comprised of three research projects.

(1) Adolescent boys and the reading of fictional texts

This folio piece investigates adolescent boys and their reading of fictional texts. It contains an introduction, a literature review, a brief description of the method for collecting data, the findings, an analysis and a conclusion with recommendations.

(2) Authors visiting secondary schools

This folio piece investigates the reasons why schools invite authors to visit. There is an introduction, a literature review, a brief description of the method for collecting the data, a report on the findings from interviews with teachers and students, an analysis of these findings, and a conclusion with recommendations.

(3) The narratives of authors concerning school visits.

This folio piece contains an introduction, a brief literature review, the narratives
of four authors, an analysis of these narratives, and a conclusion with recommendations.

3. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

My past and continuing observation of adolescents’ reading preferences in school and beyond as recorded in my personal, professional journal, suggests that there is a dichotomy between the authorised literary curriculum and set texts as preferred reading. There are texts promoted by teachers and school librarians on the one hand, and the texts that adolescents might choose to read on the other. Research indicates that adolescent reading identities become fragmented and insecure (Alvermann, 1999; Luke, 2001; Moje, Young, Readence and Moore, 2000), and that many students become adverse to the reading of fictional novels, particularly in years seven, eight and nine.

For example, Bushman (1997), argued that a significant number of teachers have turned students off reading rather than making them interested in becoming life-long readers.

Schools have failed to choose literature that enables students to become emotionally and cognitively involved in what they read. If students are asked to read literature that is not consistent with their developmental levels, they will not be able to interface fully with that literature. As a result, students who do not interact with the literature are left with learning only about literature - this does not help students connect the text with their goals, level of development and experience (Bushman, 1997, p.38).

Whilst I do not agree that schools fail to select literature that the students will enjoy, it is logical to assume that student reactions to a set text sometimes differ greatly to the expectations of their English teachers. Therefore my study investigates opinions of English teachers and students regarding set texts and classroom reading, in addition to the opinions of students regarding their reading preferences and habits when reading for pleasure, particularly adolescent boys. Also under investigation was the impact that author visits might have on adolescent reading identities.

4. READING CULTURE AND CURRICULUM

My research was shaped by a curiosity concerning the different cultural contexts of schools in regard to adolescents and reading. A sense of culture encourages students to adopt the norms demonstrated by the school (Glathorn, 1994; Johnson, 1996; Leithwood, 2000). According to Leithwood (2000), a school culture can be formed not
only by the sociological influences of that particular school community, but also by the 
dictates of the curriculum and a school’s attempt to conform with the guidelines within 
its unique setting. I wanted to investigate if school cultures influenced their students’ 
reading preferences and habits.

4.1 THE PERTINENCE OF READER RESPONSE THEORIES TO THE 
TEACHING OF LITERATURE IN RELATION TO MY STUDY

A study of adolescents’ reading experiences needs to be positioned on a clear 
understanding of how meaning is made. In my research, I have adopted a reader-
response view of this process. In reader-response theory, meaning is as dependent as 
much upon the reader as it is dependent upon the text (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1964, 1968, 
1978). Studies on reader-response further support the notion that the reader brings a 
wealth of personal framework of reference to the reading experience (Purves and Beach, 
1972; Squire, 1984; Purves, 1990; 1991; Applebee, 1994; Alvermann, Weaver, Moore, 
Phelps, Thrash and Zalewski, 1995; Moje, 1996; Alvermann, 2001; Moje, Young, 
Readence and Moore, 2000).

The reader-response approach has been attacked by many critics (Belsey, 1980; 
Giddens, 1991; Crowe, 1998) as too realistic and of limited use in the classroom due to 
the unpredictable responses that could be elicited from the reader. However, the 
proponents of reader-response approaches argued that literature must work on a 
personal and emotional level to powerfully affect the reader. The readers must be 
allowed their personal and powerful reactions, but then must make appropriate 
responses relevant to an interpretative community and feministic views. This is 
congruent with other similar research findings by McKenna, Kear and Ellsworth (1995) 
and further work by Rosenblatt (1995). How this impacts on reader identities will be 
investigated in the dissertation.

I wanted to explore adolescent reading identities in relation to factors of culture, gender 
and class, and to investigate how and whether author visits were integrated into the 
curriculum and the particular culture of each school. In relation to adolescent boys and 
current debates about boys and literacy (Martino, 2001; Aird, 2002; Alloway and 
Gilbert, 2002; West, 2002), I wanted to find out whether the reading culture, and how 
boys viewed themselves as readers, differed in a private all-boy school from boys in a 
private co-educational school and government lower socio-economic and rural high 
schools.
In order to explore the reading preferences and habits of adolescents, particularly boys, I investigated a cohort of middle-school students in five different Victorian secondary schools - three independent schools and two government high schools.

5. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The central purpose of my study was to investigate middle-school students reading fictional texts.

Key research question:
How do English teachers and teacher-librarians maximise positive reading identities for middle school adolescents?

Subsidiary questions:
1. How is fictional literature promoted in the school to adolescent boys?
2. Why do schools invite authors to visit?
3. What do authors think about school visits?

6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The pedagogy of reading is intimately associated with what is read (Bradford, 1996). Despite the fact that set texts form part of a broader cultural discourse within the educational setting, they are often restricted to discussions of theme and content, and explicit and implicit ideological and moral concerns are discussed at a relatively superficial level (Moje, Young, Readence and Moore, 2000; Alvermann, 2001). Furthermore, recent debates concerning the standards of literacy in schools has highlighted many issues about adolescents and reading, such as imposed national testing (Luke and Luke, 2001; the STELLA papers, 2001). Learning to read fictional novels can be a negative experience unless a reader comes to value, enjoy and in some sense possess the books and stories they read. What texts do adolescents want to read? Do they want to read set texts at all? Do boys read differently from girls and respond to assessment tasks in different ways?

USA studies by Pollack (1998) and Wilhelm and Smith (2002) indicate that boys in particular are disadvantaged by oral classroom discussions and lengthy written responses to assignment questions about the classroom text, because these discussions and subsequent essay-style assignments focus on the expression of thoughts and feelings about the text, which most boys are reluctant to explore.
The inference that literacy levels are declining in secondary schools with both girls and boys is now a controversial topic. In fact, this supposed literacy decline has been the subject of much debate, and it has yet to be validated. There have been many recent studies conducted in regard to boys and readings, resulting in some interesting findings. In order to improve literacy and reading amongst adolescents, answers to these questions need to be found. This is the area in which my study makes its contribution.

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study did not intend to investigate teaching strategies or pedagogical practices within school settings, but rather investigated the selection of set texts and other fictional texts and the rationale for this selection. The opinions of cohorts of English teachers, teacher librarians and years seven, eight and nine students were sought in regard to set texts and other fictional texts read by students, and ways that these were promoted in the schools. The study also investigated the opinions of a cohort of middle-school boys to ascertain what they were reading and how they perceived the reading of fictional texts.

The opinions of English teachers and teacher-librarians were sought to explore the usefulness of author visits and how the schools in my study used these visits to enhance the English curriculum. Furthermore, a cohort of authors were asked to give their opinions on school visits.

The study was limited to a sample of Victorian schools in Australia, but there is an assumption by myself that this is reflective of national practices. To supplement the study of school-based practices, the narratives of four authors were collected in order to ascertain whether their views on the efficacy of school visits were the same or different from those of the English teachers, teacher-librarians and students. I selected authors who visited many schools nationally. However, due to the small sample, there may be other authors with different opinions. This could be further investigated in another study, being beyond the scope of this study.
CHAPTER 2 : THE DISSERTATION: PART 1
READING THE READER

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW

The purpose of this brief section is to introduce the dissertation. It identifies the area in which the problem is located and gives a succinct statement of the problem and the rationale for undertaking the investigation. This is followed by a concise statement of the overall aim of the research. A series of underlying contentions that concern adolescents and reading are discussed. This leads to an outline of the objectives of the three research projects and how they address the major research issue. The section concludes with an outline of the research approaches that were used in order to achieve the stated aim of the investigation.

1.2 THE PROBLEM TO BE INVESTIGATED

As an author of fictional texts for children and adolescents, through the course of my writing and many author visits and meetings with young people in and out of schools, I have come to believe that many adolescents are being ‘turned off reading’ in schools, and in this process, develop long-lasting and negative ‘reader identities’ which impact on their lives. Problematic is the fact that many adolescents struggle to decode, comprehend and make meaning of the various texts that they encounter in their schools. This assumption is supported in particular by the work of Gee and Green (1998), Mosenthal (1998), Vacca (1998), Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw and Rycik (1999) and Heibert and Taylor (2002).

Indeed, certain normative ways of reading texts may actually be disabling many of the adolescent readers whom the teachers are trying to help. My assumption is given credence through the work of a cross-disciplinary group of educationalists (Moje, 1996; Lankshear, Gee, Knobel and Searle, 1997; Muspratt, Luke and Freebody, 1997; Gee, 1999; Finders, 1998; Knobel, 1999; Alvermann and Hagood, 2000; Luke and Elkins, 2000; Alloway and Gilbert, 2002, Freebody, 2003), who postulate that the teaching of reading should be less concerned with skills development and more about access to cultural resources.

Central to my overall thesis is the premise that adolescents develop a reading identity which impacts on the rest of their lives. The school influence can promote a ‘good
reader’ identity, a ‘struggling’ reader identity, and many other identities in between this spectrum. Therefore, my research questions concern a number of issues. How can schools assist adolescents to develop a positive reader identity? What is the effect of the ways that schools approach the teaching of and the promotion of fictional texts on these reading identities? How can schools best promote fiction to their students? How can author visits promote the reading of fictional texts as an enjoyable experience?

1.3 AIM OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the world of adolescent reading in terms of adolescent reading identities. As Alvermann (2001, p.1) argues, ‘culture can construct what counts as reading and who counts as a reader’.

Our identities as readers are often decided for us when others label us as avid readers, slow readers, reluctant readers, struggling readers, mystery readers, crime readers, magazine readers and the like. By taking up one or more of these reading identities, we soon learn to recognise ourselves and others who are like us.

Experiences, particularly within the school culture are significant influences in establishing adolescent reader identity. McDermott and Varenne (1995), contend that culture constructs disability as well as ability, and that readers locked into ‘special’ identifications know all too well which side of the enabling or disabling binary they occupy and the consequences that such identities carry. It is these issues concerning adolescent reading within contexts of a reading culture which this dissertation will address.

My overall aim was to determine the genres and styles of fictional texts that middle-school students enjoyed reading, why teachers selected certain printed fictional texts to be studied in class, and why certain promotional activities were undertaken in schools, such as author visits. To gain a clearer insight into adolescent reading in schools, I undertook three research projects which comprise my folio pieces.

- The first folio piece examines adolescent boys as readers.
- The second folio piece investigates the impact of author visits to English teachers, teacher-librarians and middle-school students.
- The third folio piece explores authors’ opinions of middle-school visits and how
these might best be managed.

The research was limited to Victorian secondary schools, but appear to be representative of the bigger picture in secondary schools across Australia. Although these research projects are presented separately, they form part of the ‘bigger picture’ in my integral study on adolescent reading.

1.4 UNDERPINNING PREMISES

My dissertation and the three research projects are based on three major premises that are derived from my reading of the prevailing research, from my teaching experiences and from my work as a popular writer of adolescent fiction.

The first premise is that adolescents develop a reading identity which is influenced by an existent reading culture to which they are exposed. For example, English teachers select set texts to meet certain criteria which are, in the main, unknown to their students. The ability to read for information but more importantly for enjoyment, has a significant impact on the lives of everyone in the twenty-first century. English teachers in particular, are undergoing significant challenges to their ideologies and teaching practices, particularly in relation to the teaching of English fictional texts. Within these changes, it is paramount that adolescent readers have a sense of positive reading identity.

The second premise concerns adolescent boys and reading. My premise is that, overall, boys in single-sex all-boy schools are encouraged to read fictional texts through male role modelling, and other strategies. They feel more comfortable about reading fictional texts than their counterparts in co-educational schools, and are less inhibited about stating that they enjoy reading.

The third premise is that authors are invited to a school to enable the students to understand their literary works (particularly in regard to the set classroom novel), to assist students with their own fictional writing, promote reading as a worthwhile and enjoyable occupation, and to inspire students to read more fictional texts. From my viewpoint, as both an educator and an author, it is often not clear how such a visit is effectively integrated into the English curriculum.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 PAST TO PRESENT

2.1.1 INTRODUCTION

This section looks at some of the prevalent literary theorists and theories which form the foundations of the teaching of reading/literature today, and the reasons why English is a school subject with a focus on many facets of what is now referred to as literacies in their broadest sense. It considers the place of reading and literature within the English curriculum and the dominant pedagogies and debates associated with this.

Subsequently, this opens debate concerning adolescents’ reading of printed fictional text which is discussed within the framework of culture and gender issues. My main area of concern is ‘adolescent reader identity’ and how this is influenced within the school culture.

2.1.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A significant part of the philosophical foundations of literary thinking can be traced back to such ancient philosophers as Plato, Ovid, Homer and Aristotle. Aristotle wrote, ‘Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words.’ (Aristotle, cited in Derrida, 1982, *Differance*, in J. Derrida’s *Margins of Philosophy*, 1982, p.11). This quote is significant because it concisely explains the importance of written words in our cultural heritage.

2.1.2.1 The cultural heritage views of literature

Historically, theorists such as Matthew Arnold, I. R. Richards and F. R. Leavis assumed that texts possessed meaning in and of themselves. Matthew Arnold encouraged the study of literature by ‘the masses’ in nineteenth century England, assuming a pedagogical position which taught aesthetic appreciation, analytical skill and moral responsibility. He believed that literature was ‘the greatest power available in education’ (Matthew Arnold, General Report for Year 1871, in ibid, p.163, cited in Mathieson, 1975, p.44). According to Mathieson (1975), English educators throughout the 20th century have expressed admiration for Matthew Arnold, acknowledging his influence upon current 21st century views. One could argue that Matthew Arnold was, in a way, creating a reader identity. However, this was very much teacher-controlled, because the meaning within the text was context-bound.

F.R. Leavis believed that engagement with literature gave a training in moral awareness
and sensitivity which reacts centrally to the problem of living (Leavis, cited in Dean, 1996, p.6). Furthermore, ‘the reader must closely read the texts, paying attention to semantic tensions that complicate meaning’ (Leavis cited in Dean, 1996, p.9). It is apparent that, within a Leavisite framework, the reader must ‘learn and apply the appropriate literary conventions that apply in any discourse -imagery, motifs, metaphor, symbols, irony, paradox, structural patterns, choice of narrative perspective, oppositions’ (Leavis cited in Dean, 1996, p.9).

In *Culture and Society* 1780-1950, Williams (1960) linked I. R. Richards and F.R. Leavis in his section ‘Two Literary Critics”, drawing attention to their likeness to Arnold in their equation of ‘culture’ with ‘criticism’ (Williams, 1960, p.261).

In her discussion concerning cultural heritage and English teaching, Mathieson (1975) identified four major influences upon the increasingly powerful ideology within subject English for students’ personal and social improvement. The influences she cited were: the growing official acceptance of progressive theories of education; the persistent anti-industrialism shared by most educators concerned with English studies; F.R. Leavis and the Cambridge school of English; and the coming together of concern about working-class children’s failure to achieve at school and the growth of socio-linguistics.

Within an Australian context, Corcoran, Hayhoe and Pradl (1994) argued that these practices which focus on a cultural heritage model can subordinate the cultural experiences of groups of students who may ‘leave school completely alienated from literary texts, and certain only of their inability to find the meanings that are so obvious to their teachers’ (Corcoran, Hayhoe and Pradl, 1994, p.5).

Expressive realist versions of literary theory focused particularly on the ‘cultural heritage’ status of the text, and since the teacher is cast in the role of custodian, the student is then cast in the role of ‘acultural’ acolyte. According to Peim (1993), the liberal humanist habits of thought were so firmly in place in the teaching of English even in the twentieth century that ‘only a thorough-going analysis of the politic of discourse will suffice to unmask the pretensions of the dominant liberal thinking’ (Peim, 1993, p.30).

It is difficult for many English teachers to conceive of curricula and classroom practices that do not assume the sufficiency of a Cultural Heritage model. Corcoran *et. al.* (1994), poses these questions. How is it possible to teach literature not as literary
works but as discursive events? How can we shift the emphasis from the author to the writing and its reconstruction in the reading? How do we help our students understand that meanings do not reside simply in the text but are produced in their reading? (Corcoran, et. al. 1994, p. 41).

The adherence to a Cultural Heritage model can be justified by many teachers. For example, a study by Johnson (2002) with Queensland secondary English teachers, one first year, mature-age teacher indicated clearly a commitment to a traditional discourse of literacy located within a hegemonic, cultural heritage pedagogy of English. The teacher strongly believed that, in addition to ‘a genre-based approach to reading and the recognition of the power of texts to position readers, a cultural heritage analysis on canonical text was important’ (cited in Johnson, 2002, p.51). The teacher justified his stance in terms of aesthetic attributes offered by a cultural-heritage model of English teaching in order to ‘pass on literary appreciation of literature’ (p.51), literature being defined as ‘a canonical body of texts used as a resource for distilling in finely crafted language, the thoughts of great writers about the human condition’ (Johnson, 2002, p.51).

2.1.2.2 Reader response theory

The reader-response theories of Rosenblatt (1978) and subsequently Fish (1979) Burke (1980, cited in Ashley, 1997) and Purves (1991) have had a substantial influence on current pedagogical ideologies and practices for the teaching of English. In their exploration of literary theories and theorists, Corcoran, Hayhoe and Pradl (1994) maintained that learning is as dependent upon the reader as it is dependent upon the text, the mainstay of reader-response theory.

Rosenblatt (1978) agreed with the New Critics’ emphasis on close reading, believing that reading is a transaction to which readers bring their world of experience to activate the text, while at the same time respecting the text on its own terms (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1964, 1968, 1978). However, Rosenblatt conceptualised reader response as a medium for cognitive and personal growth as the student learns that literature study is more than an analysis of formal structures, more than a search for the author’s intended meaning, and more that a study of a literary critic’s interpretation. In fact, Rosenblatt characterised literature as alive with human experiences, with the potential to be “lived through”, not simply studied.

Studies on reader-response by Bleich (1975), Purves (1990, 1991, 1999), Alvermann,
Weaver, Moore, Phelps, Thrash and Zalewski (1995) and Carico (2001) further support the notion that the reader is not passive and brings a wealth of personal framework of reference to the reading experience. Carico (2001, p.2) refers to the reader and the text and the work of making sense of the text as all being part of an ecology of a vital reading experience, not apart from it.

However, the reader-response approach has many critics (Belsey, 1980; Giddens, 1991; Crowe, 1998), contending that it is too realistic and of limited use in the classroom due to the unpredictable responses that could be elicited from the reader. Nevertheless, the proponents of reader-response approaches argued that literature must work on a personal and emotional level to powerfully affect the reader (Purves, 1991; Applebee, 1994). The readers must be allowed their personal and powerful reactions, but then must make appropriate responses relevant to an interpretative community and feminist views. This is congruent with other similar research findings by McKenna, Kear and Ellsworth (1995) and further work by Rosenblatt (1995).

Within an Australian context, Pradl (1996) employed the reader response approach in his classrooms. His theoretical stance was based on the premise that reading is a social act and therefore the teaching of literature is ‘one way of going about the difficult work of developing democratic relationships’ (Pradl, 1996, p. ix). He contended that his students did not like ‘living in this state of uncertainty’ (Pradl, 1996, p.152), preferring a hierarchical system in which the teacher-expert would tell them what they need to know in order to pass through the system. According to van der Hoeven (1999), Pradl ‘takes a swipe at those teachers who insist that interpretation be suspended until all the necessary cultural and historical referents are in place’ (Van der Hoeven, 1999, p.85).

Furthermore, Van der Hoeven (1999) postulated that many teachers are struggling to shift from New Critical paradigms espoused by Arnold, Leavis and Richards, in which they themselves were taught, to forms of reader response, and ‘of student (and parental) resistance to this’ (Van der Hoeven, 1999, p.87). On the relationship between constraints, Wilhelm and Smith (2002, p.48), echoed Rosenblatt when he argued that ‘if students don’t eventually exercise their own choices, they will inherit our own limitations, those of our education, and those of the culture. Instead, we would want them to transcend these limitations and become independent learners and democratic workers’.

Prevailing literary theories that have influenced the teaching of literature in Australian
TABLE 1: Prevailing theories and the impact of these on the teaching or reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEORY</th>
<th>NATURE OF TEXT</th>
<th>ROLE OF READER</th>
<th>ROLE OF TEACHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressive Realism</td>
<td>Cultural artefact of dominant group</td>
<td>Cultural ‘tabula rasa’</td>
<td>Cultural custodian and transmitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Criticism</td>
<td>Self-contained artistic object</td>
<td>Passive consumer of expert explanations</td>
<td>‘Master’ critic and linguistic problem-solver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structuralism</td>
<td>Conventionally structured genres</td>
<td>Possessor of literary competence’</td>
<td>Textual/structural architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader Response 1 Psychological/ Subjective theory</td>
<td>Subjective stimulus</td>
<td>Provider of ‘unique’ response statements</td>
<td>Facilitator of personal responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader Response 11 *Phenomenology</td>
<td>Aesthetic role in reader/text transaction</td>
<td>Active meaning-maker and producer of texts</td>
<td>Matcher of reader and textual repertoires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transaction</td>
<td>‘Readerly/writerly or Closed/Open’ documents</td>
<td>Intertextual meeting point</td>
<td>Instructor/guide in skilled act of reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post/structuralism</td>
<td>Site for competing discourses</td>
<td>Textually constructed subject</td>
<td>Provider of textual/ideological opportunities for appropriation and/or resistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(adapted from Corcoran, Hayhoe and Pradl, 1994, p. 4).

From Corcoran, Hayhoe and Pradl’s (1994) seven sketches of theory, it is apparent that text can never be reduced to a single reading, whether employing a New Criticism theory, or a reader-response theory or a poststructuralist theory to that reading, for each time the reader re-reads, especially if there is a time lag between readings, new meanings and nuances will emerge.

2.1.3 A SUBJECT CALLED ENGLISH

2.1.3.1 Introduction

As Mathieson (1975) points out, as a school subject, English first existed simply as instruction in the basic skills of reading and writing.

From its beginnings as two rudimentary skills (reading and writing) within the useful knowledge of the nineteenth century’s elementary school curriculum, English has come
to be regarded as ‘coexistent with life itself’ (Mullins, 1968, p.281), because English crosses all subject boundaries and is integral to an individual’s succeeding in our society today.

The Newbolt Report (1921) is a landmark on any survey of the subject’s development over the past one hundred and fifty years, because it expresses all the major anxieties about literature’s treatment in universities, schools and teacher-training establishments. Furthermore, it discussed all the certainties about the value of English which, according to Mathieson (1975, p.69), reflected the characteristic mood of the period which followed the First World War, ‘the sharp despair and the faith in the power of education to improve the future’.

In particular, the Newbolt Report has greatly influenced later discussion about English in schools; this document is still referred to in British schools today. Another important landmark in England was the 1944 Education Act and the movement towards comprehensive schools indicated interest in removing some of the inequalities in British social structure. Mathieson (1975, p.144) cited from the Newbolt report in 1963 (which echoed the Newbolt Committee’s assertion) that ‘until a child has acquired a certain command of the native language, no other educational development is even possible’. The importance of the Newbolt Report for Australian teachers was that it focused on the importance of English as a stand-alone subject.

The term English is certainly more importantly recognisable in secondary contexts, although there is some confusion as to what exactly the term English implies. For example, ‘Does the term English refer to literary education, broadly conceived along the lines of analysis such as that of Hunter (1988) and others?’ (Green and Beavis, 1996, p.2). Indeed, Green and Beavis (1996) contend that a distinction needs to be made between the emergence and consolidation of English as a school subject - something limited to little more than a century across the international teaching community - and what they refer to as ‘the peculiar nexus of popular schooling and literary education that runs across the (somewhat larger) history of institutionalised education’ (Green and Beavis, 1996, p.2).

Green and Beavis (1996) also emphasised two points that are important to my discussion. It is really only since the late 1950s to the 1960s in Australia that mass secondary school education has been the norm; previously most children attended primary (or elementary) schooling in a formal, albeit extended sense. And in the
broader sense, mass, compulsory State-sponsored schooling was originally focused at the elementary level. However, in the 21st century, students have the choice of leaving secondary school at the age of fifteen but most remain at school beyond this age. Not only are adolescents reading set texts, discussing these in class and doing assessment tasks on these texts, but they are also studying English in the form of mass media - stage plays, television scripts, videos and movies. English per se is much broader than as defined in the Newbolt Report (1921). In relation to my study, are adolescent readers gaining or losing their reader identities amongst the plethora of activities grouped under the heading of English?

2.1.3.2 Broadening ‘English’ into ‘English subjects’

In regard to my study, it is important to look at English as a number of subjects rather than one, for in the context of both primary and secondary schooling, it draws together a number of related areas such as spelling, reading, communication, reading comprehension, written and oral expression and literature. It is important to note that my study focused on the English subject of literature, that is the reading of fictional texts both in and out of the classroom.

2.1.3.3 Defining English in the twenty-first century

For my study, I deemed it useful to attempt to further define ‘English’. As Green and Beavis (1996, p.7) stated, ‘It is a complex signifier in that it refers both implicitly and explicitly to at least three matters: ‘English’ as school subjects; ‘English’ as the language, and hence both the principal medium for instruction and learning and a central mode of communication and practice; and ‘English’ as a national(ist) quality … implicated in issues of colonialism and imperialism’.

In terms of understanding English teaching, Elbow (1990, p.111) had this to say. ‘English has tended to stand for two things: the teaching of grammar and the teaching of literature’. My study is concerned with that facet of English which centres on the teaching of literature. However, an overt rejection of traditional models of literature teaching, with non-print and non-book works is being accepted into the English curriculum. However, my study did not investigate beyond printed fictional texts in relation to adolescent reader identities, although this could form the basis for further research.

The maintenance of both a literature-based English and the diversity of texts and related teaching and reading practices has placed the subject of English under increased
scrutiny and tension. As long ago as 1992, Boomer (1992, p. 102) stated, ‘If we do push out the boundaries to include a wider range of literature, will English finally disappear as a subject?’

An attempt to reconcile conflicting ideologies and the resultant confusion for literature in English, is demonstrated by the mid 1980s curriculum guidelines for primary and post-primary schools, the ‘Curriculum Frameworks’. Literature was consigned in the main to support thematic work through integrated curricula and language development.

Problematic for me as both a researcher and the writer of adolescent fiction was the notion that literature as taught in Australian schools extended beyond, not only the traditional boundaries of English as a subject, but the boundaries of printed text. After much deliberation, I decided to limit my research to printed fictional text and the opinions of teachers and students about the reading of such texts, hence the title of the overall study, ‘Turning the Pages’.

2.2 ADOLESCENTS’ READING IDENTITIES

2.2.1 INTRODUCTION

It is useful to examine some of the relevant terms and concepts that surround the adolescent reader and reading. Key terms include ‘literacy’, ‘literary’ and ‘culture’. What do these key terms mean within this context and are there other associated terms?

2.2.1.1 Defining literacy

What exactly is the definition of literacy? Literacy, as Paulo Freire, the late Brazilian educator, activist and philosopher always reminded us, is about learning to ‘read the world’. With a less postmodernist viewpoint, the editors of the International Reading Association’s *The Literacy Dictionary* (Harris and Hodges, 1995) decided to define literacy in a more comprehensible way. Justifiably, a long section was devoted to arguing against a single definition of literacy, and finally five definitions were offered. The first of those five defined literacy as ‘the ability to read’ (Harris and Hodges, 1995, p.140). Definitions of adolescent literacy generally acknowledge the demands of secondary text reading.

Secondary and content area literacy is typically defined with reference to the school and subject area classroom context. For example, Vacca and Vacca (1996, p.8) defined content literacy as ‘the ability to use reading and writing to learn subject matter in a
given discipline’. Similarly, Readence, Bean and Baldwin (1998, p.4) stated that ‘content area literacy is defined as the level of reading and writing skill necessary to read, comprehend and react to appropriate instructional materials in a given subject area’.

To gain a greater understanding of adolescents and their reader identities, it is useful to look at some of the more recent theoretical and broader stances that concern literacy. For example, sociocultural theorists view literacy as social practice rather than simply a cognitive process (Gee, 1991; Lankshear, 1994), and as such a social practice, literacy has ideological dimensions (Luke, 1995; Bean, Bean and Bean, 1999).

Sociocultural factors include gender, race, class and home life influence how literacy is practiced and the role it plays in achievement and identity development in adolescence. There is a need to better understand how adolescents view the functions of in-school and out-of-school literacy through their reading of texts.

2.2.1.2 Gender roles and literacy

To address this, my research projects looked at a cohort of male and female students aged between 13 and 15 years. Segments of the projects parallel the work of Christian-Smith (1991), who studied white, adolescent, middle class girls’ reading of popular romance novels, indicating that these novels mirrored an interest in a culture of consumption and beauty. Christian-Smith (1991) found that when teachers attempted to replace romance novels in independent reading assignments with what they considered quality young adult literature, the girls resisted by bringing their favourite romance novels to school. Christian-Smith argued that these girls were astute critics of the novels, recognising the disparity between idealised fiction and their own less glamorous and imperfect lives.

Cherland (1994) noted that adolescent girls learn gender roles through reading and discussing romance novels with their peers, whereas research by Martino (1994) and James and Johnson (1996) revealed that boys seldom discussed novels they had read, unless it was of particular interest to the peer group, because it is not considered ‘cool’. The Australian culture, according to Cherland (1994) tends to perpetuate a situation whereby girls are likely to read more than boys and emotional responses to texts remain the province of girls.

The literature that I perused in relation to gender and reading identities indicated that,
across many cultures and countries, girls tend to read and discuss their fictional texts and emotional responses to these, while boys are reading fiction but not discussing their emotional responses to their reading. Bean, Bean and Bean (1999) suggest that any sociocultural views of literacy pinpoint the need to transform literacy practices in schools through a curriculum of critique, thus broadening the literary canon, recognising the role of multiple literacies in adolescents’ lives and acknowledging gender differences.

2.2.1.3 Defining critical literacy

According to Hood, Solomon and Burns (1996), Auerbach (1999), Brown (1999) and Hull (2000), critical literacy encompasses a range of critical and analytical attitudes and skills in the process of understanding and interpreting texts, both spoken and written. Currently in adolescent (and adult) education, it is most often discussed in relation to literacy and language learning. It draws from a number of related theories concerned with the constant interplay of reader and text in the meaning-making process.

Lohrey (1998) argues that in its broadest sense, the term critical literacy refers to efforts to go beyond surface meaning of a text by questioning the who, what, where, why and how of its creation and eventual interpretation. However, I would argue that, depending on the ideas, approaches and pedagogies embraced by those employing it, critical literacy can take many forms in actual practice. For example, for those who realise that language use is not ‘neutral’, critical literacy can examine the interaction of language and power relationships. From my viewpoint as the author of many adolescent novels, I am conscious of the ways that printed text can be intended to persuade, justify, or entertain.

For theorists such as Peyton and Crandall (1995), Hammond and Macken Horarik (1999) and Hull (2000), text is also a means by which readers can decipher what makes a particular society/culture the way it is, and consequently be empowered to take social action. However, not every English teacher is interested in empowering their students in this way. Critical literacy may raise issues that the teacher feels are too difficult to deal with in class, or can be seen as an approach that does not allow other aims to be achieved.

I would argue that critical literacy in the classroom is important because adolescent readers should be encouraged to question the social, political and ideological elements in what they are reading in order to explore more fully the issues that affect their lives.
In this way, reading becomes more meaningful to each individual, and a positive identity can be established, even though he/she might be a ‘struggling’ reader. Class lessons which incorporate critical literacy perspectives can help adolescent readers examine the text, including its biases and purposes and question its veracity and applicability in terms of their own lives. These classroom lessons could contribute to the adolescent readers’ more comprehensive understanding of texts, the larger society and themselves within it.

However, I would also argue that how much the adolescent reader gains from this experience is dependent very much on the actual text that is selected by the English teacher. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter when examining literature about set texts.

2.2.1.4 Defining ‘literary’

The Collins English Dictionary (2000, p. 696) defines literary as ‘pertaining to letters or literature, versed with or acquainted with literature; occupied with literature as a profession; literary fame; a literary history; literary conversation, literary value.’ Tompkins (1999) explores an assumption that literary values are fixed, independent and demonstratably present in certain masterworks, arguing that ‘literary value is dependent on one’s beliefs’ (Tompkins, 1999, p.455). Literary values shape notions of what is recognised as literary canon. The Collins English Dictionary (2000, p.696) defines canon as ‘A group of literary works that are generally accepted as representing a field’. There are certain sets of texts that have historically been called part of the canon of High school English, these being the works of Shakespeare, Greek tragedies, epic poetry, mythology and parts of the Bible. More modern writers considered part of the canon include Steinbeck, Dreiser, Orwell and Bronte, to name a few.

Certain characteristics of texts enable them to be considered as worthy for inclusion in literary canon. With reference to texts such as *Moby Dick*, *The Scarlet Letter* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Tompkins explains that the characteristics (of these novels) have been made available by critical strategies that have not always been respectable but had to be explained, illustrated and argued for against critical assumptions embodied in other masterpieces that seem as unquestionably invincible as these do now. Such strategies do not remain stable and do not emerge in isolation, but are forged in the context of revolution, revivals, periods of consolidation or reform (Tompkins, 1999, p.455).
Particular texts are often included in English school curricula because of their perceived literary value. However, according to Tompkins (1999), the definition of literary value is connected to an individual’s belief system. Thus it would appear that there is no definitive way of deciding whether a text is of literary value to its readers or not.

2.2.1.5 Defining culture

According to Alvermann (2001, p.3), culture is ‘a much contested term among anthropologists. It includes the routines, artefacts, values and concerns that people produce, make meaning of and share as they work communally with others in their group’. This definition of culture as a bounded entity has its critics.

For example, McDermott and Varenne (1995, p.325) described culture as ‘containers of coherence that mark off different kinds of people living in their various ways, each kind separated from the others by a particular way of making sense and meaning’. However, I would argue that rarely are cultures so isolated. In fact although there are dynamic and permeable boundaries that mark the worlds of adolescents and adults, the adolescents’ contacts with adult family members in community institutions such as schools, youth organisations and clubs contribute to the shaping of both worlds.

Drawing on Bakhtin’s (1981) work to reinforce this notion of inseparability of adolescent and adult cultures, Cintron (1991, p.24) described the two cultures as ‘interanimating’ each other. In Cintron’s words, ‘they infect, disrupt and even discharge their differences during their interaction such as that each community’s beliefs, values and language system (including its way of speaking) are exchanged’. In other words, according to Alvermann (2001) cultures are ways of ‘doing life’, not simply products of that life.

When culture is understood as the working knowledge that people must have of one another if they are to live together in a productive manner, it is easy to argue for arrangements that take into account individual differences. McDermott and Varenne (1995) warned against the danger in assuming there is only one way to be in a culture, and that there is the potential for culture to act as a disabler among an adolescent reader’s identity (at least where school literacy is concerned).
2.2.1.6 Defining identity

The word ‘identity’ was coined around the 16th century during a period of history known as Enlightenment. Therefore the word carried much of the baggage of modernist Western cultures in that it evokes an image, according to Harre (1989) of a bounded, rational and unitary self. However, as Davies (1993) pointed out, adolescents are often positioned as individuals without agency or autonomy, particularly in instances where adults perceive them as being irresponsible and lacking in good judgement. Alvermann (2001) contended that so-called struggling readers whose identities are marked by unsuccessful efforts at (or perhaps by resistance to) ‘getting reading right’ may have decidedly different perceptions of how agency and autonomy work from those of their teachers and other significant adults in their lives.

As with culture, the concept of identity is contested. A postmodern critique of identity takes issue with the unitary or noncontradictory, nature of the term as defined by the Enlightenment period. Claiming that while the concept of identity is one that is needed and used, Davies (1993) and Weedon (1997) focused on the processes through which being a particular kind of person is achieved. In the context of this discussion, I refer to terms that were mentioned in chapter one, those being struggling reader, slow reader, avid reader, mystery reader, romance reader. I noted in my research projects that some adolescents constructed themselves as these types of readers, thus establishing for themselves a reader identity.

However, Gee’s (1996, 1999) concept of socially situated identities go further in defining identities. In order to avoid the constraints imposed by the more commonplace definition of identity, with its emphasis on the unitary self, I have adopted Gee’s concept which leaves room for multiple identity formations within different Discourses. Gee believed that these function as our ‘identity kits’ - that is, our ways of seeing, acting, believing, thinking and speaking that make it possible for us to recognise and be recognised by others like ourselves.

2.2.2 SOME SPECIFIC READER IDENTITIES

Readers acquire identities, but the term ‘identity’ should not be viewed as a ‘label’. Rather, a reader identity can assist teachers to guide their students’ reading of fictional texts.
2.2.2.1 The struggling reader

Alvermann (2001) postulated that ‘struggling reader’ is a term among reading professionals for adolescents who for whatever reason are unable to keep up with the reading demands of the school curriculum.

The term can also refer to adolescents with clinically diagnosed reading disabilities as well as those who are unmotivated, in remediation, disenchanted or generally unsuccessful in school literacy tasks (Moore, Alvermann and Hinchman, 2000). There is a possibility that we, as a culture, are creating struggling readers.

But the problem of struggling readers does not lie solely with schools. It is all inclusive. McDermott and Varenne (1995, p.331) pointed out that ‘it includes everyone involved in constructing ‘school’ … school personnel, of course, and parents, and let us not forget the philosophers, curriculum designers, publishers, testers and educational researchers … in other words, “Us”. What becomes worrisome to me is that ‘we’ (as educators and adults) have established cultural norms which outline particular identities for adolescents whom we then define as either struggling or not struggling with reading.

In attempting to pinpoint the variant reader identities, I have drawn from the work of Alvermann (2001), in which categories of cognitive processing abilities that include school reading have been measured by standardised, performance-based testing or by informal, teacher-based observations. There is usually a stable set of tasks with goals and outcomes developed by a particular culture to which all of its members must respond if they are to qualify as developmentally competent on those tasks. For example, being able to decode, comprehend and summarise informational texts would qualify as one of the tasks for adolescent readers, their teachers and their parents.

McDermott and Varenne (1995, p 334) observed that versions of this argument could be, ‘We have culture; you don’t’. Thus the struggling reader adopts the identity of part of a group of people described through achievement tests and by school personnel as the ‘have nots’ in terms of access to cultural capital through literate means. Unfortunately, these so-called struggling readers often become the recipients of what Finn (1997, pp.x) called a domesticating education - an education that stresses ‘functional literacy. literacy that makes a person productive and dependable, but not troublesome’.

2.2.2.2 Difference approach

This approach argues that the ways in which different people in different groups develop competencies for literacy will vary according to their particular cultures.
McDermott and Varenne (1995, p.335) defined this difference approach as ‘We have culture, and you have a different one’. This approach recognises that students learn at different rates, often due to their cultural and home backgrounds. Students are subjected to only a few predefined reading tasks and instead focus on literary activities that adults in their culture would regularly perform as part of that culture. These adolescents are encouraged to develop multi-layered identities and perspectives that might vary considerably from those of higher achieving peers and also vary among themselves.

Alvermann (2001) pointed out that one assumption underlying the difference approach is that an arbitrary set of reading tasks deemed important by one group of people may have little or no relevance for another group. This assumption is under scrutiny in one of my research projects which involves a cohort of adolescent students (referred to as middle-school students) and the reading of set texts. The research and findings will be discussed in detail in Section Two of my study.

Another important assumption in the difference reading approach is that teachers need the resources necessary for the implementation of instructional interventions that take into account the students’ varying cultural backgrounds and practices. For example, addressing the cultural differences represented by one group while ignoring the other groups could conceivably lead to difficulties and raise questions about disenfranchisement and quality of instruction for all of the students.

A third assumption of difference mentioned by Alvermann (2001) is that by focusing on what struggling readers can do (given a relevant set of cultural experiences) rather than what they cannot do (based on an arbitrary set of reading tasks), teachers will meet their educational needs.

However, I contend that this assumption can be problematic, because, as McDermott and Varenne (1995, p.335) have also pointed out, ‘despite a liberal lament that variation is wonderful, those who cannot show the right skills at the right time in the right format are considered out of the race for the rewards of the larger culture’. In my research project concerning the selection of set texts, I interviewed a number of students, many of whom described an apathy towards the reading of their set texts. Under the definition of Moore, Alvermann and Hinchman (2000), these students would be deemed struggling readers because they are unmotivated to read or disenchanted with the reading process, despite their teachers’ attempts to compensate for cultural differences (i.e. rural, lower socio-economic). This leads me onto the next area to be discussed, that
of the culture-as-disability approach.

2.2.2.3 Culture-as-disability

Some students are advantaged by culture, others are disadvantaged. In order to explore this issue, I have turned to the work of McDermott and Varenne (1995), Moore, Alvermann, and Hinchman (2000), and Alvermann (2001) in an attempt to define what this approach entails and the philosophical basis for the employment of such an approach when identifying the reader.

According to McDermott and Varenne (1995, p.336) ‘cultures offer a wealth of positions for human beings to inhabit’. For example, they argued that to inhabit the position of a ‘good’ reader, one must possess certain abilities that are verifiable and recognisable to others who occupy that same position. They also argued that culture disables some of its members by developing what is assumed to be ‘standardised measurements’. However, if adolescent readers do not ‘measure up’ they will be pushed aside. To pursue this notion further, Alvermann (2001) provided some enlightening assumptions.

One assumption underlying cultural disability is that groups are not isolated nor marginalised. Instead, ‘all groups -dominant and minority- stand in relation to the wider culture of which they are a part’ (Alvermann, 2001, p.9). In this approach, the old way of dividing adolescent readers into good readers and struggling readers no longer applies. Struggling readers, like good readers, stand in relation to the wider culture.

According to literary educators such as Sumara (1996) and Davis, Sumara and Kieren (1996) the ‘Us’ cannot be separated from what is thought to be ‘non-us’. They further contended that human beings somehow view themselves as ‘autonomous and independent beings, when we are in fact woven into the world that we perceive as the “other”’ (Sumara and Kieren, 1996, p.158).

I agree with this premise. For me, it means that adolescents who struggle with reading are part of the same fabric from which good readers come. Neither group stands alone in opposition to each other. As Alvermann (2001, p. 9) stated, ‘both are bound up in the cultural contexts they inhabit’.

Furthermore, McDermott and Varenne (1995, p.338) postulated that schools actively arrange for some adolescents to inhabit the position of struggling reader. ‘The
ethnography of schools is rich with accounts of teachers, students, administrators and researchers disabling each other in fully cultural ways’. Their work is not in isolation. Literature on struggling readers from research by O’Brien (1998), Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore (2000) and Moje, Willes and Fassio (2001) has indicated that school has become a primary site of reading resistance for some adolescents. When these adolescents discover that their school’s institutional practices of reading are irrelevant and at odds with their motivation to learn, they often look for ways to avoid such practices. Strategies for avoidance include absenteeism, neglect of homework and overall disengagement leading to failure.

Alvermann (2001, p.10) viewed that the student’s failure is ‘a display board for the problems of the system - a system whose members seem bent on labelling and documenting one another as failures’.

Yet another assumption of the culture-as disability approach as discussed by Alvermann (2001, p.10), is that culture is ‘a politically charged arrangement of hopes and aspirations about how the world should be as well as how individuals should be in it’. Following on from the work of McDermott and Varenne (1995), Alvermann suggested that there is little evidence to support the notion that literacy is difficult to acquire and best learned in classrooms., although some societies work hard to sustain this very idea. The more that people believe that literacy is difficult to acquire, the more they find reasons to explain why some read better than others, why some do better in the economic and political measures of society. This assumption is made visible in the work of McDermott and Varenne (1995, p.341) who contended that ‘the more people believe that literacy is best learned in the classrooms, the more they ignore other sources of literacy, and the more they insist on bringing back to school those who have already failed to develop school literacy’.

However, if the school system is failing adolescents, how can they become good readers?

2.2.3 THE NEEDS OF ADOLESCENT READERS

2.2.3.1 Introduction

My belief is that often the reading materials in classrooms do not match the needs of adolescent readers. My opinion is grounded in the recent work by Moje, Young, Readence and Moore (2000), who investigated common definitions of ‘content reading’
and ‘reading instruction’ that is confined to the in-school literacy of printed fictional texts. They believed that in cases of the reading of fictional texts for content, instructional methods or materials might not match the needs of adolescents.

2.2.3.2 Adolescent readers

In my research project concerning boys and reading, I attempt to discover whether the needs of adolescent male readers are met. However, I think it is important to firstly examine a broader view of the literature concerning adolescents as readers. For example, my focus on adolescents takes literacy beyond the constraints associated with secondary reading and content reading. To this aim, I was guided by two principles cited in the work of Alvermann (1998). The first principle is that adolescents want to be viewed as already possessing knowledge and skills and plans for the future. The second principle is that they want to participate in literacy practices suited to the way that they view their daily lives.

Moje, Young, Readence and Moore (2000) established that literacy plays a vital role in the development of adolescents’ individual and social identities. Readers act upon cues from what they read and how they perform in school to shape their emerging sense of self. That is, reader identity shapes the whole self. The implications of this mean that adolescents need spaces in schools to explore and experiment with texts and receive feedback from peers and adults. In many cases as cited by Alvermann, Moon and Hagood (1999) and Moje et al. (2000), this does not occur. However, just by using the phrase ‘adolescent literacy’, Moje et. al. (2000) contend that this permits professionals to leave behind some of the baggage that secondary literacy and content literacy bring with them. It also highlights the role of the adolescent in the teaching and learning of literacy.

Problematic for me is the notion that ‘adolescent literacy’ in relation to reading identity could become another trendy buzzword. Simply focusing on adolescents will not address all issues involved in the teaching and learning of reading in secondary schools. Focusing on the secondary school as an institutional context and on the content areas such as epistemological contexts in which adolescents learn and use literacy is just as important as understanding how adolescents use literacy, and in particular, reading, in their lives. Teaching and researching with adolescents must continue to examine how the contexts of secondary schools and content areas shape adolescent reading identities and beyond to complete self identities.
2.2.4 REDEFINING ADOLESCENT LITERACY

2.2.4.1 Best practice and adolescent literacy

Optimum teaching in adolescent literacy should emphasise how reading (and writing) relate within the world.

Moje, Young, Readence and Moore (2000) believed that this can be likened to ecological ways of thinking which consider plants in relation to soil, climate, wildlife and other factors. Ecological ways of thinking emphasise relationships, and likewise these same ways of thinking can reinvent adolescent literacy for new times by shedding light on best practice and what works (Davidson and Koppenhaver; 1993; Mastropieri and Scruggs, 1995; Truscott and Watts-Taffe, 1998; Moje et. al. 2000). In particular, Moje et. al. (2000) contended that any unqualified claim that an educational practice is effective, is like claiming that watering plants is effective. The value of watering plants depends upon the circumstances. The value of best practices in the teaching of reading depends also on the circumstances.

One way to address best practices ecologically is to link specific practices with generally accepted principles of teaching and learning. For example, one of the general principles that the International Reading Association adopted for school programs is that ‘adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of materials that they can and want to read’ (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw and Rycik (1999, p.101). My own contention has been that this has not been happening, particularly in the area of class set text selection. I have examined this issue at great length in my research project on the reading of set texts by adolescent readers.

To elaborate further on the work of Moore, et. al. (1999), their principle offers a base for reader-friendly practices without sanctioning specific ones. For instance, research by Alvermann, Moon and Hagood (1999), and Bean, Bean and Bean (1999), has indicated that school mandated sustained silent reading programs are sometimes counterproductive due to conflicting expectations and experience among students and school personnel. By expressing a general principle regarding wide reading, it was found that relevant practices were generated which fitted the local settings. This is not to say that sustained silent reading programs should be abandoned, but rather run in conjunction with other practices such as literature across the curriculum, book clubs and book conferences. Linking practices with principles, is, according to Moje, Young, Readence and Moore (2000), an ecologically sound way to guide adolescent literacy.
Indeed, Moje, Young, Readence and Moore (2000, p.5) have promoted a second ecologically minded approach to best practice which involves critical consumerism. ‘Critical consumers situate recommendations, determining where they are coming from and where they would like teachers and students to go’. Critical consumers continually question claims. They analyse, compare and evaluate what is told to them or what they read.

A critical stance towards adolescent literacy recommendations is especially important because a teaching practice that seems effective for all ages might not be so. For example, the USA National Assessment of Educational Progress (1999) reported that US fourth-grade students who read self-selected books in school on a daily basis averaged higher reading scores than those without such opportunities. However, this outcome did not hold for students at Grades 8 and 12. Moje et al. (2000, p.5), argued that this national finding level complicated decisions regarding adolescent literacy programs and ‘compels additional investigation’. Whilst not putting forward any suppositions as to the causes, Moje et al posited that adolescent literacy deserved a closer scrutiny where daily self-selected reading in the upper grades was concerned. Attention to the personal dimensions of literacy learning is crucial because it is wholly enmeshed with the individuals’ commitments, efforts and identities. The most promising programs for struggling adolescent readers develop adolescents’ personal resilience to factors that limit their academic success, which are often culture-based. Best practice therefore recognises that there are many and varied cultural differences. However, it goes further than that. As Moje et al. (2000) argued, who says a practice is best? What is the philosophical orientation of the author? What is the basis for the claim? How is effectiveness determined? Who does the practice benefit? Can all parties gain all of the time? These are some of the questions that my study will address within the three research project discussions that will follow later in this dissertation.

2.2.5 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

2.2.5.1 Introduction

My study is concerned with adolescent reader identities within school cultures and beyond. For me, it was important that I gain insights into different school cultures in terms of socio-economic and gender factors. Some of these cultural differences are defined by Owens (1995) as ‘regional’. Would a rural secondary school English teachers, for example, teach the same fictional texts and expect the same responses as English teachers would in an inner city school?
2.2.5.2 Rural adolescents and idioms

Concerning rural secondary schools, Roberts and Kreuz (1994), Nippold and Taylor (1995), Kerbel and Grunwell (1998), Reed, McLeod and McAllister (1999) and Qualls, Blood, O’Brien and Hammer (2003) postulated that rural adolescents have their own idioms, and that literacy is linked to idiom comprehension. One example of this is the research into rural adolescents’ idiom knowledge within the area of fictional reading, which was conducted in Pennsylvania by Qualls, O’Brien, Blood and Hammer (2003). The study by Qualls et al. (2003) did not set out to examine regional differences of rural adolescents within reading, idioms and literacy, but they found that these, in fact, do exist. Social and regional culture influenced idiom understanding when adolescents were reading.

Although my own research project did investigate the reading preferences and reading habits of rural adolescents, I did not conduct any research on regional, cultural idioms, although I believe that this could become an important research study within an Australian context, because my work as an author writing adolescent texts acknowledges that different Australian states have different idioms, for example, ‘loser’ is a common school-yard term in NSW, Victoria, but you are a ‘squid’ in Western Australia.

2.2.5.3 The bigger picture

Idiom differences are a small example of the bigger picture. Delpit (1995, p.25) pointed out that both spoken and written texts are powerful tools that maintain a social hegemony where ‘the rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have the power’. As mentioned previously, when students are encouraged to share responses to text, this can become problematic unless the teacher is aware of individual cultural, racial, social and gender differences (sometimes tensions) and is able to negotiate these in a positive and constructive way that enriches all of the reader identities. This process becomes one of ‘negotiated meaning’, according to Carico (2001), whereby classrooms become social settings with great potential for meaningful communication.

Belenky et al. (1986, p.144) described this meaningful communication as ‘real talk’, stating that ‘really talking requires careful listening; it implies a mutually shared agreement that together you are creating the optimum setting so that half-baked or emergent ideas can begin to grow. “Real talk” reaches deep into the experience of each
participant; it also draws on the analytical abilities of each’.

However, I would argue that many adolescents remain disenchanted with this ‘real talk’ concept and in any communication in classrooms that might motivate them to accept school. For example, Freeland (1996, p.7) constructed adolescence as ‘a stage of life between childhood and adulthood. Childhood was defined by Freeland as ‘physiological immaturity, emotional and economic dependence and primary ties with parents and siblings’ and adulthood as ‘physiological maturity, emotional and economic autonomy and primary ties with the adult partner and children’, with adolescence as a transitional process which ‘involves attempts to resolve a range of questions relating to personality, morality, sexuality, politics and economics, all of which contribute to one’s personal identity’. Discourses of adolescence mobilise a form of problematic thinking about certain preferred of ideal adult futures and the present behaviours and dispositions of adolescents.

Wexler (1992, p.8) in his analysis of the ways in which identity is constructed for and by adolescents within a culture in the intense ‘interactional economy of schools’, argued that against the backdrop of ‘seemingly shared mass youth culture’ a youth culture (re) produced within a ‘mass electronic image production apparatus’. He also contended that what adolescents struggle for in becoming ‘somebody’ and how they engage that interactional life project during secondary school is different depending on where their school is located in ‘the larger societal pattern of organised social differences and inequalities’ (Wexler, 1992, p.8). In other words, the ideal and the route to becoming somebody in the suburban white working class is not the same as becoming somebody in a secondary school in a professional middle class suburb. The relevance of this will be examined at length when I discuss my three research projects later in my study.

Within the Australian context, Fitzclarence (1993), postulated that the media fuses life in different geographical areas and different social class locations. Or, as I would more bluntly put it, ‘Kids from Broadmeadows and South Yarra live in the same worlds in that they are linked by popular image culture.’ A further Australian study by Wyn and White (1997) and Wyn, (2000) suggested that geographic time, space and bodies continue to place boundaries around the activities of adolescents. Identity work continues to take place within contexts and relations embedded within concrete, place based relationships. In fact, Wyn and White (1997) argued that a class analysis must have a central place in any rethinking of youth as a category which can be useful in theoretical and political discussions.
2.3 GENDER AND READING

2.3.1 GENDER ISSUES AND ADOLESCENT IDENTITY

2.3.1.1 Introduction

My contention is that gender differences have a significant impact on adolescents reading identity and that this must be taken into account when the study of fictional texts is occurring in the classroom.

2.3.1.2 Discussion

The work of Bourdieu and others offer some highly useful ways of interpreting the interaction between forms of schooling and forms of identity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1989; 1992; Lash and Urry, 1994; Grenfell and James, 1998; Bourdieu, 1999). Bourdieu emphasises the productive and dynamic relation between institutional practices and processes of self-formation (habitus) arguing that:

The notion of habitus … is relational in that it designates a mediation between objective structures and practices. First and foremost, habitus has the function of overcoming the alternative between consciousness and unconsciousness … Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself ‘as a fish in water’, it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted.


There already exists a considerable body of research on the production of gender identity and difference in educational settings, for example, Gilbert and Taylor (1991), Davies (1993), Kamler (1993), Thorne (1993), Skeggs (1997), Hey (1998) and Kenway & McLeod (2000). Much of this research has been influenced by feminist theory and by poststructuralist accounts of the discursive construction of subjectivity. In terms of adolescence, psychological and the popular and academic sociological literature on youth adolescence is usually presented as a period of rebellion, dislocation and of redefinition of self (for a review of representations of youth (Lesko, 1996). Indeed, Lesko stated that:

Adolescents … occupy border zones between the mythic poles of adult/child, sexual/sexual, rational/emotional, civilised/savage, and productive/unproductive … on the terrain of adolescent bodies is a struggle for what will count as an adult, a woman, a man, rationality, proper sexuality, and orderly development’ (Lesko, 1996, p. 455).
In a continuing longitudinal study interview with young people in school as they enter and move through adolescence, Kenway and McLeod (2000) found evidence of their liminal position and of their self-conscious struggle with new forms of identity. Kenway and McLeod (2000) believed that these predicted disruptions to their sense of self are usually assumed to happen because of developmental imperatives and the emotional and physical/hormonal upheaval of ‘maturity’. This kind of explanation is frequently drawn upon by students themselves when describing their passage through adolescence, suggesting the extent to which social psychological discourses have penetrated young peoples’ self-understanding and experience of adolescence as an inexorable drama.

While the dominant discourses of adolescence emphasise dislocation and discontinuity, the interviews also suggest that the students’ sense of self, in the present, past and future, and their orientation to the social world ‘are developing in a kind of dialogue with the discourses of their particular school’

(Kenway and McLeod, 2000, p.5).

Gender is extremely significant in my study because it is actually one of the ‘lenses’ through which my study is to be viewed. That is, adolescent boys’ reading identities, and adolescent girls’ reading identities. However, the gender issue goes beyond the classroom and continues through each person’s life, because, as Blackmore and Kenway (1993, p.1) argued, ‘gender is a phenomenon which helps shape our society’.

According to Flax (1987, p.627) ‘the most single important advance in feminist theory is that the existence of gender relations has been problematised. ‘Gender can no longer be treated as simple, natural fact’.

Gendered behaviour is constructed in a dynamic way, and may vary according to given contexts and over time (Itzen and Newman, 1995). In agreement, Schuck (1996, p.348) suggested that at an individual level, if educational reform is to occur, ‘researchers, theoreticians and practitioners must recognise that gender must be considered as a relevant variable in the lives of girls and boys and women and men in schools’.

An Australian study of note is the work by Ailwood and Lingard (2001), which looked at gender equity nationally. Their work tracked two themes, the construction of gender and discourse education for girls and boys. The authors have argued that there is a substantial shift from focusing on girls and boys in relation to girls, to both boys and
2.3.2 ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND READING IDENTITIES

2.3.2.1 Introduction

For girls, in particular, the onset of adolescence is said to prompt a crisis of physical and emotional confidence and the loss of personal ‘voice’ and power (Gilligan, Lyons and Hammer, 1990). In order to regain personal power and status, Pollack (1998) suggests that girls tend to gain power and status through building and maintaining relationships, being nice and sociable, dressing well and looking good, speaking articulately, scoring well on tests, reading difficult books and pleasing teachers.

2.3.2.2 Discussion

In my opinion, this desiring to please is in itself a stresser. According to research by Debold (1995) ‘adolescent girls experience greater stress, are twice as likely to be depressed, and attempt suicide four or five times as often (although boys are more likely to be successful)’ (Debold, 1995, p. 23). Girls’ depression has been linked to negative feelings about their bodies and appearance. Poor body image and eating disorders, including obesity, are much more prevalent in adolescent girls than boys. Although it is difficult to find specific causes for these difficulties, stereotypes of female beauty and behaviour in television, movies, books, and the toy and fashion industries pose obvious challenges to girls’ healthy psychological development (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; McDonald and Rogers, 1995).

In her article ‘Girls at the back - critical literacy, gender and educational disadvantage’, Gilbert (1995) attempted to draw connections between discourses on gender, critical literacy and educational disadvantage. She outlined her involvement in a project, which involved adolescent girls in four Australian state high schools in 1993, whom Gilbert stated ‘have experienced the effects of inequality, injustice and oppression in their lives’ (Gilbert, 1993, p. 75). In order to gain the optimum in their reading experiences, Gilbert suggested that these girls needed the opportunity to experience readings which give alternative family life situations similar to their own experiences which would then allow them access to discourses concerning political injustice, deprivation, gender relations and female sexuality. I would also argue that girls from middle-class backgrounds need to read about girls from lower socio-economic, ethnic, cultural
backgrounds as well as girls from similar backgrounds to themselves, so that they gain a wider understanding of femaleness in other life-worlds. However, I agree with Gilbert (1995) that the English classroom is most suitably placed to give this access to critical reading. This is born out by Gilbert’s further (2001) work which refocused on the broader equity picture by taking a closer look at the critical issues facing girls in the twenty-first century. In a paper entitled ‘Redefining gender issues for the twenty-first century: putting girls’ education back on the agenda’ Gilbert examined two themes; the economics of curriculum choice and the increasing significance of girls’ relatively poor participation and representation in information technology domains within the secondary school curriculum, which ultimately impacts on their critical literacies. Research by McLeod and Yates (1996), Kenway (2000), McLeod and Malone (2000), Gilbert (2001), Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert and Muspratt (2002), and Collins, Kenway and McLeod (2002), found that girls perform better academically in single-sex schools with curricula that concentrates on critical literacy. However, there is current debate about the issue of single-sex schools and achievement, given that the majority of single-sex schools are the domain of middle-upper class students with access to computers and instructional materials, including fictional texts, in their homes as well as their schools.

A study of girls’ novel reading in upper secondary schools in Queensland by Percy (1993) aimed to discover whether girls (age 15-17 years) were reading both inside and outside the classroom. A questionnaire was circulated to twelve different educational institutions (State, Catholic, interdenominational, community college, grammar) and a total population of 464 female students completed the survey. The study showed conclusively that the gender of a central character of a novel did not matter to girls of this age group and they were not interested in heroines who played the ‘traditional’ social role’. They preferred intelligent, strong and independent heroines. The girls interviewed were also not interested in the women’s movement as a political movement, but were concerned with women’s rights and autonomy. Most of those surveyed read novels outside the school curriculum, with mystery and adventure novels the most preferred genre both inside and outside the classroom, and women authors were most popular. Horror was also a popular genre. Many of the enjoyed novels had been made into popular films and it seemed that the viewing of these films and the reading of the novels had become closely interlined (Percy, 1993).

Another Australian study of note focused on teenage girls’ reading of magazines at an Adelaide girls’ school (Lyon, 1999). The aims of this research were threefold: to investigate ways that teen magazines constructed adolescence in relation to adolescent
girls; to investigate how girls between Years 7 and 10 read teen magazines; and to explore pedagogical possibilities in using teen magazines as texts in English and Social Education classes. This research, informed by poststructural feminist theories, aimed to examine the nature of gendered texts in the classroom, with key questions addressing the following issues. Which girls are reading teen magazines? How are the girls reading them? What messages have been conveyed in the texts? Which pedagogical approaches and analytical approaches might provide girls to be critical readers of magazine texts? Thirty one students from years 8 and 12 took part in the research. The findings suggested that teen magazines are read extensively by girls and they play a role in their construction of themselves as young women, and that the construction of gender by the magazines is a part of the construction of girls as a lucrative market.

UK researcher McRobbie (1991, 1994) argued that teen magazines are forms of social control that create limited and construct options for young women. Microbe’s (1994) study provided a more textual analysis of the issue, highlighting the spaces for negotiation within such magazines. Such nuances are characteristic of other research with teen magazines. For example, in a Toronto study conducted in Canada, Currie (1999), noted the contradictory messages of teen magazines, which on the one hand encourage girls to make themselves desirable for boys, but on the other encourage girls to “be yourself.” These contradictory messages, Currie argued, resonate with the lived experiences of being a girl in a patriarchal culture (Currie, 1999). This work was collaborated by the work of Norton (2000) and Adam (2001) though their research in Canadian schools.

In a Dutch study by Zeijl, Du-Bois-Ryemond and Te Pole (2001), the leisure activities of adolescents (and preadolescents) was studied. 927 Dutch youth aged between 10 and 15 were given a questionnaire. It was found that 10-12 year old girls engaged in reading and creative activities in their leisure time whereas the 10-12 year old boys spend most time playing outdoors. However, the 14-15 year old age girls read less than they had done, as a leisure-time activity, becoming more preoccupied with self image and peer acceptance through verbal communication or chatting on the internet.

The implication of the Australian, UK and Dutch research findings suggests that girls read more fiction than boys, but that it is more often in the form of teenage magazines which promote conflicting information about what it is to be a girl in the 21st century.

One of the most important contributions that feminist poststructuralism has made to the
scholarly world, at least, is that the human notion of the self as essential, coherent and unified is no longer tenable. Weedon (1997) and Davies (2000) have argued persuasively that the self is multiple, changing and the constant site of a struggle. Further, they have argued that identity is created within the context of relationships of power that are frequently unequal. Such insights have had a powerful impact in research in education from language learning (Norton, 2000) to critical literacy (Harper, 2000). However, I also contend that gender difficulties in the establishment of an identity, and in particular to my study, a reader identity, are not necessarily confined to the girls’ arena. One of my research projects looked at boys as readers, and the development of a positive adolescent male reader identity.

2.3.3 ADOLESCENT BOYS AND READING IDENTITY

2.3.3.1 Introduction

Adolescent boys appear to have their own set of problems when it comes to masculinity and reading, according to recent studies. (Browne and Fletcher, 1995; Martino, 1995; West, 1999; Wilson, 1999; Love, 1999; Power, 2001; Aird, 2002; Wilhelm and Smith, 2002). This section of the literature review focuses on boys and reading, which is pertinent for my research project on boys and reading.

2.3.3.2 Reading, gender and concepts of masculinity

Of particular interest to me was a USA study Wilhelm and Smith (2002) which involved forty nine 12th grade adolescent boys of different ethnicity, social class and school success at four diverse sites in three states: an urban high school; a comprehensive suburban high school; a rural school; and a private all-boys school. Approximately one-third of the boys were regarded as high achievers, one-third as average achievers and one-third as low achievers. My own research project examined boys from four diverse schools, the schools being also an suburban high school in a lower socio-economic area, a government rural high school, a private co-educational school and a private all-boy school. I was interested in the Wilhelm and Smith study from a comparative perspective, even though they studied older adolescent boys.

In the USA study by Wilhelm and Smith (2002), the boys, who chose pseudonyms for the project, ranged from Mick, a non-reader who subscribed to trade magazines about cars and mechanics, to Zach, an honours student whose literacy activities outside school focused on an elaborate role-playing game with friends.
Instead of being totally disinterested in school, the boys recognised the necessity of schooling for future success and the real-life goals they desired - freedom, possibilities and achievement. The boys valued the information they took from their reading, but not necessarily the experience of reading. Rather than floundering, the boys were goal-oriented and accomplished in various areas of their lives.

For many, literacy was part of that accomplishment. They enjoyed popular culture texts, including comics and cartoons. They knew and talked about music. They liked video games, movies and TV shows. Many read sections of daily newspapers to keep up on their areas of interests, subscribed to speciality magazines, searched the Internet and communicated electronically with friends.

In essence, Wilhelm and Smith (2002) found that none of the boys in the study rejected literacy. What they did almost universally reject was “school literacy.” For example, Rev, an 11th grader, maintained that he hated school so much that it depressed him to attend, and he dismissed English as being about ‘nothing.’ Yet he watched the Discovery and History channels, and wrote lyrics music in a different style for the three bands in which he played. Indeed, Wilhelm and Smith (2002) contended that literacy, construed broadly, had an important place in the lives of all the boys in the study. However, they found that the ways schools use literacy did not align with the ways boys use it.

An Australian study by Browne and Fletcher (1995), looked at boys, literature and schooling and perceived that some boys thought that they had a strong tradition of masculinity that thrived on ‘opposition and destructive self-images.’ (Browne and Fletcher, 1995, p.58), and that reading fictional texts and enjoying these threatened that perceived tradition of masculinity. The notion that boys believed ‘real men don’t read’ was prevalent throughout their research. The impact of this notion is one possible reason why MacCann’s (1995) Australian research revealed a widening gap in boys’ and girls’ school leaving scores in NSW, particularly in the subject English, where girls demonstrated much higher academic scores than boys.

Another Australian study in a co-educational school by Martino (1995) indicated that the boys saw reading as ‘uncool’, ‘posh’ and ‘bullshit.’ Martino surveyed 156 year 10 and year 11 students about their attitudes to English and literature in school. These boys’ comments were negative in regard to both English as a subject, and reading. In his subsequent paper, ‘Boys and Reading: Investigating the impact of masculinities on
boys’ reading preferences and involvement in literacy’, Martino (2001) postulated that particular versions of masculinity inform boys’ reading preferences and involvement in literacy. His smaller study with 62 boys over a two-year period in a Catholic co-educational high school in Western Australia revealed that 28.6% enjoyed reading and some saw it as an escape from the ‘real world’. Another group (42%) rejected reading and claimed that it was ‘boring’. This group set reading against more preferred activities such as watching TV, playing sport, but stated that they enjoyed reading surfing/sport magazines/comics. Another group (28.6%) responded that they enjoyed only certain types of texts such as sub-genres of action, fantasy, science fiction, horror and stories involving humour.

An investigation was conducted as a response to concerns about the reading abilities of Australian boys and their reading. In a study conducted at Scotch College in 1997, (a private boys’ school in Hawthorn, Victoria), a survey was taken of all available adolescent boys from years seven to ten. Comments from the boys included: ‘I don’t think people enjoy reading as much because they find it hard to visualise what’s going on, so they watch TV instead,’ (Barry, 1999, in La Marca, 1999, p.115), and ‘Starting a book is my main problem … I have to tell myself that once I get into it I’ll enjoy it.’ (Barry, 1999, in La Marca, 1999, p. 124). However, their general responses were more positive than those from the co-educational school in Martino’s 1995 study, as were responses from a study by James and Johnson (1999) of adolescent boys in Victorian all-male Catholic college. The James and Johnson work indicated that boys were, in the main, positive about reading and held positive attitudes about masculinity and reading. My opinion is that social class differences can influence findings, as most studies about boys and reading have been conducted in private colleges.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls achieved better in literacy tests than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys in an Australian study by Teese, Davies, Charlton and Polesel (1995). And it does seem from other evidence in studies by Rotundo (1993), Dutton (1996), and Leal (1999), that gender, class and race compound each other, so that girls from wealthier homes do better than working-class Anglo-Australian boys, and than boys from some ethnic groups (Teese et al. 1995; West, 1996). The McGaw Report (1996) on school leaving results in NSW, supported these findings. In 1991, males were over-represented at the top and bottom of the Tertiary Entrance Ranks, while the females were over-represented in the middle ranges.

In regard to class and private schools, the leisure reading practices of a cohort of
Australian boys in a single-sex private school were examined by Love and Hamston (2001) in which boys identified themselves as committed readers. The boys’ construction of themselves as readers was examined in terms of Luke and Freebody’s (1999) four reading practices, those being decoding, semantic, pragmatic and critical practices. Love and Hamston (2001) found that while the boys in their study were aware of their reading competence within decoding, semantics and pragmatic practice, their discursive comments did not make reference to critical practice as a valued component of competent reading. I assume that the boys were not familiar with the term, had not been taught principles of critical practice, or if they had, did not see it as relevant to their reading competence.

It is worth mentioning at this juncture that most research concerning boys and books (apart from Martino’s 1994 study mentioned previously) was conducted in private colleges, the respondents being from the ‘privileged class’, which has possibly influenced attitudes and outcomes, because the findings from all-boy private schools has been, in the main, positive about boys as readers.

English teachers in co-educational schools usually have a dilemma with gender differences concerning text selection. In a co-educational school study in Australia by Power (2001, p.49), it was revealed that teachers strove to ‘provide texts that would appeal to boys more than girls in a concentrated effort to promote reading as a worthwhile life skill’. Her study echoed the findings from other international and Australian studies by Nichols (1994), Hearn (1996), Ujiie and Krashen (1996), Gilbert (1997), Yates (1997), Alloway and Gilbert (1998), Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) and Moss (1998), which revealed that boys poor performance in literary-based subjects is not new, and that challenging and interesting literary programs and critical practice can move boys beyond their normal textual selection to include more narrative fiction and to enjoy reading texts as well as cartoons, comics, magazines and non-fictional texts.

Whilst I agree that critical practice is a valued component of competent reading, I believe that the social practices in which boys’ reading occurs is even more important, because in my opinion, this is more relevant to a positive reading identity. For example, within a New Zealand context, current discourses regarding male literacy ‘under-achievement’ has led to an exploration of the social dimension of boys’ reading practice by Barwood (2001). Four Year 10 classes were surveyed about their social reading practices. Barwood (2001) found that the practice of reading is gendered: reading was seen as a female activity, with males reporting less involvement in social and family
reading practices than females, and a less positive attitude towards their reading. I suggest that critical literacy in the classroom could help these boys understand more about their attitudes to reading with possible changes to prevailing attitudes.

In this respect, Barwood’s study agreed with other previous studies by Cherland, 1994 and in particular, the UK study by Millard (1997), which investigated the reading habits of 255 Yorkshire students. The results showed that there were three areas of influence: the peer group in school; the friendship group; the family.

In a Tasmanian study, Aird (2002) argued that boys tended to see English as a subject which required them to express their emotions, and they clearly felt threatened by this. They did not regard English as manly -it conflicted with the dominant image of masculinity which emphasises being tough, strong, aggressive and in control. To express emotion is perceived by boys as a sign of effeminacy, of being girlish, which is considered to be a put down (Aird, 2002).

Recent work by Rowan, Knobel, Bigum and Lankshear (2002) has examined ways in which various adolescent male mindsets relating to gender, masculinity, gender reform, literacy, technology and popular culture can either open up or close down new conceptualisations of what it means to be a boy, and what it means to be literate. They argued that the intertwining of discourses about boys, girls and schooling has two immediate effects - it generates a sense that boys and girls must now compete for a finite set of positive schooling outcomes; and attaches an urgency to the discussion through the implication that something must be done to stem the tide as quickly as possible. The challenge is to:

... let go the belief that boys are naturally uninterested in literacy [literature and to recognise that just as society helped to teach them to reject certain kinds of activities, so too can we help them to embrace these same activities.


This anti-essentialism thus perceives differences in behaviour produced by some boys and some girls as being produced in particular social and cultural context, and therefore not as natural. Rowan, Knobel, Bigum and Lankshear (2002) contended that the debate that surrounds boys and reading is complex.

We need to understand that we are not just dealing with boys a single
we’re dealing with them as a very diverse group - diverse in terms of their cultural background, language ability, sexuality and a whole range of differences.

(Rowan, Knobel, Bigum and Lankshear, 2002, p.32)

A British study by McQueen and Henwood (2002) attempted to look at how boys made sense of their experiences within the cultural context of their lives. By drawing upon contemporary theories of subjectivities, McQueen and Henwood (2002) focused on how gender and traditional masculinities can constrain and influence everyday practices such as schooling, reading, language and attitudes to these as well as attitudes to life in general.

It would seem, from the literature on adolescent boys as readers, that there are differences in attitude amongst boys who attend single-sex all-boy private colleges and those who attend co-educational schools. Taking research such as this on board, I investigated boys’ attitudes to reading in one of my research projects, presented as folio three.

2. 4 SETING THE STANDARDS, CONFRONTING PARADOX

2.4.1 INTRODUCTION

Impacting on the teaching of literature in UK, the United States of America and Australia, in particular, is the implementation of national standardisation systems. According to Parr (2000, p.1) ‘Being a literacy teacher has never been simple’, but what impact does standardised testing have on adolescents, teachers and reading?

2.4.2 THE INTRODUCTION OF STANDARDS OF LITERACY IN SCHOOLS

In the UK almost a century ago, the Newbolt Report (1920) was the first official commentary on the teaching of English in England. Over the century there were other key documents that have influenced curriculum and the teaching of English, and more recently the introduction in England and Wales, of a National Curriculum in 1990, Goodwyn (2001) characterises the initial period between 1989-1993 as an important and chiefly positive move towards more professional accountability and collective responsibility. Goodwyn (2001) contended that this was positive because it promoted the questioning of the Leavisite Cultural Heritage model and began to develop the notion of Cultural Analysis which he likened to Critical Literacy. However, the period between 1993-1997 became more dominated by a bitter struggle over the English curriculum in England as students were tested at the ages of 7,11,14 and 16 and ranked
into League Tables which were published in local newspapers. A new National Curriculum for English was introduced in 2000 and, according to Goodwyn (2001) this embodies an essentially conservative Cultural Heritage model of English, but also provides space for teacher autonomy.

The United States has developed similar national curriculum, and standardised testing. In an article entitled Standards-based reform- is this the way? Petrosky and Delanshere (2001) cited developmental goals for schools, such as the rewriting of school curricula to align these with national curriculum and assessment standards, the redefinition of teaching through professional teaching standards and the design of assessment systems and policies to ensure and monitor the standards’ implementation. This standards-based reform movement began in the 1980s as a response to a perceived crisis in the educational system.

In agreement, Meier (2000), an educator and the principal of a large public school in Boston, argued that standardisation prevented teachers from formulating their own questions, from conducting inquiry into their students learning and from considering plausible educational alternatives that might better suit their particular contexts and that this standardisation was contrary to democratic ideals, a stance collaborated by others such as Berliner and Biddle (1995), Kirst and Mazzeo (1996), Cizek (1998), Lockwood (1998) and Marzano and Kendall (1998).

2.4.3 STANDARDS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH IN AUSTRALIA

As in England and the United States, in Australia the standard of literacy and its teaching have become part of a political debate. For example, in 1996, Kemp (the then Federal Minister for Education) announced in a press release, that ‘about a third of 14 year olds in Australia have inadequate basic literacy skills …[and research] shows the problem is getting worse’ (Kemp, 1996). Thus the notion of a nation in crisis was at the forefront of debate. Then, through the introduction of a National initiative, Kemp (2000, p.15) then stated in a press release to The Age, 9/6/00, that ‘there is now a national system in place so those that need help can be identified at the earliest stages’.

Sawyer (1999, p.76) suggested that the concept of a national literary ‘crisis’ was of a manufactured nature, and that ‘schools continue to be active in literacy development’. Indeed, as Parr (2000) pointed out, longitudinal studies have yet to be produced which demonstrate that the reforms promoted lead to improved outcomes, and whether, in any case, these outcomes are worth achieving when they are described simply in terms of
narrow, functioning definitions of literacy. It has been argued that rather than standards declining, there are increased demands on literacy (Luke, Green and Hodges, 1996; Luke & Luke, 2001).

The literature about ‘literacy change’ repeatedly refers to New Times, characterised by ‘accelerating change, cultural diversity, technical complexity, national insecurity and scientific uncertainty’ (Hargreaves, 1994, p.3). For Gee (1996, p.22), this notion is even more simplified as being ‘less certain of certainties’. This notion of uncertainty, or ‘shifting frames and moving foci’ (Parr, 2000) means that critical readers are operating beyond simple functional paradigms where language inherently signifies meaning irrespective of social values. Parr (2000) further postulated that, within this reductive functionalist paradigm, reading is presented as a matter of finding the right ‘keys’, unlocking the words, or ‘cracking the alphabet code’ (Lankshear, Snyder and Green, 2000, p.27). If, though, language and reading are more than functional matters and are complex social phenomena, I believe that working towards the outcome of standardised testing will not achieve a desire in adolescents to want to read for pleasure. When adolescents read for pleasure, not only is it an enjoyable pastime, but skill of reading improves (Lankshear et. al. 2000) and reading identity is more positive (Alvermann, 2002).

Parr (2000) argued that the teaching of literacy is filled with intellectual and professional tensions, beginning with increasingly powerful public discourse arguing for a simpler version of literacy. This, coming from economic rationalist policy makers, from the mass media and from certain parents and corporate interests in schools is often at conflict with educators wishing to develop and enact increasingly complex pedagogies for literacy ( Parr, 2000).

I would also argue that reductive visions of literacy directly threaten the culture of critique. I believe, as do Lankshear et. al. (2000) that teachers must be proactive in ‘opening up the narrowness of the public debates against the forces which would seek to reject such a culture’ (Lankshear et. al. 2000, p.51).

2.4.3.1 The STELLA project

The STELLA project, with its formal brief to develop professional standards for English teachers P-12, and its specific task to articulate what English literacy teachers should know and be able to do, is grounded in and part of this history of the profession’s need to define itself ( Green and Beavis, 1996, Doecke and Gill, 2001).
‘Any set of teaching standards must represent the profession’s thinking and description of its own best practice’ (English in Australia, May, 2001, p.127).

Groups of English teachers in Australian states have been exploring the question, ‘What is it that good English/Literacy teachers believe, know and are able to do?’ in a series of forums. These teachers have compiled a list through discussion and the writing of their narratives which identify the key principles of English literacy teaching. This list has become a framework which has identified the broad dimensions of teaching (believing, knowing, teaching/learning) that are combined with groupings of related attributes (The STELLA Project, 2001, p.127). The STELLA project is of relevance to my study because it investigated issues such as the ideology that informs the teaching of English literature, the range of curriculum materials and resources (the texts), classroom dialogue about learning goals, processes and outcomes, assessment strategies for monitoring, managing and evaluating student learning in relation to texts, and the provision to students of texts that have personal cultural significance.

However, Doecke and Gill (2001) postulated that the word ‘standards’ evokes a range of competing views, some of which are anti-ethical to the interests of English literacy teachers, and the reclamation of words like ‘literacy’ and ‘basics’ and ‘accountability’ that have become part of the political and populist rhetoric is harder to do than it looks. They further argued that the word ‘professionalism’ casts the teachers in a curious role, citing reform movements such as the Victorian Government’s “Schools of the Future” program, documented in Caldwell and Hayward’s (1998) account of those years. Doecke and Gill (2001) pointed out that the ‘individual professional’ is a paradoxical notion for teachers whose work is, by nature, collaborative.

I would argue that the implications for the introduction of narrowly defined national standards for teaching of English literacy on students are critical, and in my view, are a backward step. The research discussed in previous sections of my dissertation indicated that there is a need for teaching the ‘individual’ student in the classroom, and even for set texts to be selected by adolescents themselves according to their interests. And, as Doecke and Gill (2001) pointed out, meaning does not reside within the texts but is constructed in the process of responding to them, when readers read and then talk with others about their readings. As teachers engage in interpretative discussions, the complex connections between language and meaning are exposed, promoting the need to ‘rethink’ the relationship between standards and the specific instances of professional practice which standards are designed to encompass. Doecke and Gill (2001) argued
that the orderly form of current standard statements - the genres in which they are typically written may seem a long way from collections of classroom narratives and teachers’ discussions of them.

Luke and Luke (2001) summed this up by suggesting that many of the solutions being offered by the government now are not solutions at all. They contended that as a nation, we could invest millions of dollars in standardised achievement tests, as was the case in UK and the United States which will not assure or generate excellence or equity in the system. In fact, Luke and Luke (2001) went so far as to suggest there’s a risk that standardisation does precisely the opposite.

2.4.3.2 Victorian English Curriculum and Standards Framework

A further factor impacting on my study is the official policy document pertaining to English teaching in the schools I visited. As my research projects were conducted in the Australian state of Victoria, it is also important to examine the influence that this curriculum document has on the teaching of literacy.

The Victorian English Curriculum and Standards Framework (2000), is part of a set of curriculum documents that cover the key learning areas of curriculum in Victorian schools, and are intended to guide the implementation of curriculum in Victorian schools. These documents, Curriculum and Standards Framework, are commonly referred to as the CSF. Each key area of learning is divided into strands. In the English CSF, the text strand is defined to include speeches or conversations, novels, story books, newspaper articles, personal letters, hand-written stories and reports, posters, performance of plays or films and advertisements. Texts also include the communications composed on, or transmitted by, computers or other technological tools’ (Victorian English CSF, 2000, p.11). In my study, I focused on one type of text, that being the novel. I focused on the ways the novel is used as a reading requirement for a student/students as part of the English curriculum, in particular its use as a set text.

The Victorian English CSF (2000) is divided into seven levels of learning. For example, level 4 pertains to years seven to eight, while level 5 pertains to years eight and nine, the area with which my study is concerned.

In her introduction to Choosing and Using Literature (Curriculum Corporation, 1995), Connor explained the special place of literature in the English curriculum, contending that English teachers ‘teach’ set texts in the classroom to expose students to texts they
might otherwise not encounter (Connor, 1995). Furthermore, through the sharing of set texts in the classroom, Connor postulated that the students learned ways to interact with the text, including a language to talk about text; they discussed important issues and ideas; they learned how language and style contributed to meaning; they learned that texts had multiple meanings; they developed beliefs and understandings, values and experiences of others; they examined the ideologies of texts and considered the way that they, the readers, are constructed, positioned and manipulated in order to reflect on their own values and experiences and consider alternative positions.

In summary, the Victorian CSF (2000) provides a guide for what should be taught in the subject of English. However, the actual teaching of classroom novels or set texts is not mandatory for years seven, eight and nine students, so why do English teachers use set texts

2.4.4 MIDDLE SCHOOLING INITIATIVES AND THE TEACHING OF TEXTS

2.4.4.1 Introduction

Middle Schooling is a term describing a phase of schooling that bridges the conventional primary/secondary divide with a view to responding more efficiently to the needs of young adolescents from 10-15 years (Barratt, 1998, p.1). In terms of my research projects, it will refer to students aged 13-15 years (Years 7, 8 and 9 in the Victorian secondary school system). In other words, a cohort of middle-year students in the secondary school.

2.4.4.2 Effective middle schooling

Effective middle schooling is underpinned by a set of common goals and agreed beliefs and principles (Cormack, 1996; Dwyer, 1996) which promote the tenet that learners must be active agents in their own learning. While middle schooling should be based on sound educational practices, the need for adolescents to explore their own and group identities, and to develop productive relationships is paramount (Barratt, 1998, p.3). Therefore, effective middle schooling is characterised by school-based practices, with students taking greater responsibility for their own learning through the negotiation of certain aspects of the curriculum, as postulated by Chinn, Anderson & Waggoner (2001).

Following on from a number of national forums, referred to by Barratt (1998) as Research Circles, Australian schools have committed to student negotiation in the
construction of an integrated curriculum. ‘Student negotiation of the curriculum is also possible within an integrated framework and is a way to involve the students much more in their learning via ownership of the content’ (Integrated Curriculum: Classroom Materials for the Middle Years, 1998, p.28). Of significance for my study is that Middle School initiatives have instigated changes in the English curriculum in terms of pedagogies and ideologies (Giroux, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Cumming, 1998; Ivey 1999). In relation to English, the Leavisite/New Critical view are familiar to most teachers with a tradition of cultural heritage texts, and the privileging of some genres. Currently, English teachers have been requested to make changes in the way they teach and think and to become familiar with key tenets of contemporary literary theory (Beavis, 2000; Doecke and Gill, 2001).

According to research by McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth (1995), many middle school students have negative attitudes towards reading. An important principle of middle school reading is an emphasis on students as individuals, yet studies by Tomlinson, Moon & Callahan (1998), and Ivey & Broaddus (2001) indicated that teachers rarely differentiated instruction to meet student needs.

In an article entitled ‘Negotiating Meaning in Classroom Literature Discussions’, Carico (2001) argued that, as literature is composed of living words, then the meaning of literature is dynamic rather than fixed, and literature study as a search of meaning may then be viewed as an enterprise of negotiation between text, reader, and often, the author. Carico further postulated that, in schools, the relationship configures somewhat broadly to include negotiations between teacher and students and among students themselves. This is a pivotal component of middle school learning - that much negotiation and discussion should take place within the classroom.

Another issue that affects learning is a lack of critical thinking by middle school students when reading texts. Alvermann & Moore (1991) contended that students were assigned to read increasingly complex texts but were not taught the strategies to understand these. Furthermore, as part of the English curriculum, Worthy, Moorman & Turner (1999) found that Middle school students were expected to read a wide range of texts, yet in the classroom they were often limited to teacher-selected class novels (often award-winning fiction) and texts. Ivey & Broaddus (2001) reported that teachers wanted their students to read critically but seldom allowed them to initiate conversations about the texts.
Middle school students’ reading preferences

In a study by Worthy & McKool (1996), it was found that competent adolescent readers who were reluctant to read in school indicated that they would read more if given more time and access to personally engaging materials. Worthy, Moorman & Turner (1999) reported that, in general, what middle school students liked to read was difficult to find in school classrooms. Even avid, proficient readers who excelled in reading, expressed dissatisfaction with assigned reading and writing that did not match their interests or purposes ( Ivey, 1999), and in fact stated that they were being ‘turned off ‘reading. If many students are getting turned off reading because they dislike their set texts, what are the future implications?

Pertinent to middle schooling is a study by Beane (1990), which found that there is often a mismatch between what students want to read and what they are presented with in the classroom. Further research by George, Stevenson, Thomason & Beane (1992) found that subject-area loyalties and content-driven teaching persisted in middle school classrooms. Thus, the challenge for students to become more proficient and engaged readers was further complicated by subject matter that was uninteresting and the content requirements of schools, particularly schools that are governed by district or state-mandated standards. Thus these students progressed through post-primary school with the gap between what they choose to read and what they have to read widening significantly. These findings were collaborated by other studies (Corcoran and Evans, 1987; Applebee, 1994; Krashen, 1993; Purves, 1999) that showed much of the literature promoted in schools as set texts did not attempt to consider the mainstream lives of these students. Nodelman (1996), and Purves (1999) further contended that texts were selected for perceived qualities of narrative style and content in an attempt to maintain a high standard in the literature promoted in class.

In summary, it would appear that the concern to establish national standardisation and state-wide curriculum frameworks is frequently at variance with the ideology of individualism that underpins good middle-school pedagogy. Maybe, as Beavis (2000, p.56) pointed out in her article ‘What I really like now...’: Renewal and curriculum change in literature teaching it is time to ask ‘what about the purpose of teaching literature?’. I would extend this question by posing another. ‘What about the purpose of teaching literature and its effect on adolescent students?’
2.5 THE SELECTION AND TEACHING OF TEXTS IN THE CLASSROOM

2.5.1 INTRODUCTION

It is necessary, I believe, to firstly determine what is a text. Texts can be spoken, written or digital. When the term ‘text’ is used, written text probably comes to mind, but a text is any communication that involves language. When the word ‘text’ is encountered in English curriculum it is within the context of a broad range of meaning that relates to conversations, speeches, letters, novels, plays, feature films and multi-media texts.

For the purpose of my study, ‘text’ refers to written fictional literature in book/novel format. I understand that classic literature texts are used in classrooms as part of a literary heritage, but I strongly contend that contemporary texts are of particular significance because I believe that they allow students to explore complex ideas in complex ways that are relevant to them. In addition, I also believe that popular literature texts which include series books can also provide a critical understanding, but I contend that it is often the purpose of these texts to entertain. Furthermore, I maintain that these three categories (classic, contemporary and popular) overlap, because a contemporary or popular text may become a classic over time. Conversely a classic such as ‘Romeo and Juliet’ may re-emerge as a popular text through film.

2.5.2 SCHOOLS AND TEXTS

2.5.2.1 Introduction

All learning areas in the school curriculum use texts. What makes English an unique learning area is what students do with three particular types of texts, these being literature, mass media and everyday texts (CSF, 2000).

There are many competing activities that can distract students away from reading when they leave the classroom - television, videos, computers, electronic games - unless, of course, the student enjoys reading and ensuring there is time to do so.

Many adults who read and talk about books, buy books for themselves and their children, borrow books from each other, visit libraries and whose homes contain lots of books, assume that this is normal behaviour. Seldom would they ever conceive that there are adolescents who come from homes where books are not valued or promoted (Bintz, 1993; Worthy, 1998; Bean, Bean & Bean, 1999). Likewise, the students Finders (1997) studied, played out a range of social roles in what Finders called a ‘literate underlife’ (Finders, 1997, p.1), outside of the school curriculum. Their school reading
was based on traditional texts: the students read, wrote and discussed issues that were not sanctioned for them in typical classrooms. Relatedly, the young adolescents who participated in the after-school book discussion groups facilitated by Alvermann, Young, Green & Wisenbaker (1999) developed social relationships and explored social positions as they discussed freely what they had read.

2.5.2.2 The diversity of adolescent literature

Of particular interest to me is the difference between the reading habits of primary and secondary school students as discussed in studies by Cairney, Lowe and Sproats (1994), Hargreaves (1994), Stewart-Dore (1996), Green, Hodgens and Luke (1997) and Elkins and Luke (1999). For example, in their paper entitled ‘Redefining Adolescent Literacies’ (1999), Elkins and Luke discussed the diversity of adolescent literacy. They suggested that, just as the single word literacy disguises the complexity and subtlety of adolescent reading and writing, it also makes it difficult to recognize that these activities change as children develop into adolescents. Therefore, reading (and writing) activities are more complex and differentiated as the adolescent’s school curriculum and out-of-school life expand. There are new skills to be learned, and new applications for these skills. Secondly, Elkins and Luke (1999, p.4) maintain that, once learned, literacy skills need to be constantly used and refined. Unfortunately this comes at a time when adolescents have many other restrictions and demands on their time - homework, social interactions, self identity concerns, to name a few. Thirdly, Elkins and Luke have contended that literacy’s development through adolescence is vitally dependent on being embedded in language and thought, far more than was a requirement in primary school literacy. In their opinion, reading specialists must strive to help their colleagues to infuse their teaching with literate activities’ and ‘they need to abandon the view that students in middle and high schools should come from elementary (primary) schools able to read and write’.

Although my study is concerned with adolescents within a middle school cohort (13-15 years), there are other studies which I believe have relevance to my work. For example, in a study of Year 12 Literature teachers, Beavis (2000) investigated ‘their inherited understandings and assumptions about what Literature the subject should be … and other issues such as pedagogical and classroom factors including what students would like and find accessible, what would work, and what would bring good examination results’ (Beavis, 2000, p.57). Although Beavis’s study focused on Year 12 Victorian Literature teachers, the findings are applicable to the changes occurring in the middle school English curriculum (and in the subjects in my study), because, with the
introduction of STELLA and national middle schooling standards, all teachers involved with the teaching of English are being urged to examine their own beliefs, ideologies, pedagogies and principles concerning the teaching of English language and literature (Moni, van Kraayensoord and Baker, 1999; Beavis, 2000; Doecke and Gill, 2001).

2.5.3 **CRITERIA FOR SELECTING SET TEXTS**

2.5.3.1 Introduction

Cognisant that English teachers use set texts to teach aspects of literature to their students using the Victorian English Curriculum and Standards Framework (2000) as a guide, what criteria, if any, do English teachers use to select certain novels as set texts?

2.5.3.2 Curriculum and texts

According to Green & Beavis (1996), when planning curriculum, teachers are not only required to consider all elements of the English curriculum (content, pedagogy and assessment) but also select texts that meet curriculum requirements and perceived needs of their students. Sarland (1991, p.132) argued that ‘English teachers simply reproduce society’s unequal social relationships in the way they select and teach texts’.

However, Ball (1995) argued that the teachers’ selection of texts is strongly influenced by paradigms which are produced through a process of ‘communication, (discussions about teaching), apprenticeship (at school or in university teacher-training) and colleagueship’ (Ball, 1995, p.12).

Following on from this premise, Reynolds (1996) postulated that there are basically three curriculum paradigms that are influential in the selection and teaching of literature - the Cultural Heritage paradigm, the Personal Growth paradigm and the Meritocratic paradigm.

In Reynold’s view, the Cultural Heritage paradigm espouses ‘close study of the text customarily taken from the classic canon. Pedagogy is emphatically didactic and transmissive’ (Reynolds, 1996, p.79). F.R. Leavis’ literary criticism, which emphasised the moral value of great literature, embodies the Cultural Heritage paradigm. Thus the teachers who espouse this paradigm would be more inclined to select texts of a classical nature, or texts that would be taught to rather than explored by the students.

The Personal Growth paradigm places the ‘growth of the learner at centre stage’
(Reynolds, 1996, p.79). The choice of texts to be read emphasises the extent to which the text content interests and engages students: the themes of the texts are relevant to the issues it is assumed that adolescents would choose.

The Meritocratic paradigm ‘borrows heavily from the Cultural Heritage paradigm for much of its content but in overall approach is much more concerned with the social utility of what is being learned’ (Reynolds, 1996, p.80). The emphasis is on individual achievement and the attainment of high grades. As Blackmore (1991) has argued, assessment systems based on notions of merit have created ‘the systematic exclusion or alienation of the majority of working class children from secondary education … rationalised on the basis of merit and the “natural” statistical distribution of intelligence, not on class’ (Blackmore, 1991, p.13).

Thus I understand that there are many ways of selecting and teaching texts. From my reading and observations, set text selection would appear to be determined by a number of factors, these being: the ideology and pedagogical practices that inform each individual or group of English teachers; the purpose for teaching the text; the predilection of the English teachers for a particular style and/or genre; variations of texts (classic, contemporary, popular); inter-curriculum themes and units into which a text might ‘fit’; perceived reading ability of the students; word of mouth from other English teachers or school librarians; texts recommended in professional journals; the ‘tried-and-true- set text that has been used for years.

Firstly, I will examine the English teachers selection of texts that would adapt into a cultural heritage model, in most instances, the classics.

2.5.3.4 Teaching Shakespeare as a set text

There have been numerous recent debates about the teaching of Shakespeare and its place in a twenty-first century literature program. For example, Elsden (1999) points out that, for many teachers, Shakespeare is foremost in the canon of truly great writers and his writing is studied for our edification.

Others see the teaching of Shakespeare as linking past worlds with the present. Ryan (2000) in her article entitled ‘Doing Shakespeare’, discussed the selection and teaching of texts in classrooms, and examined the ‘reader-response’ theory which encouraged teachers to develop a range of pedagogical strategies that encouraged students to see the connections between Shakespeare and their contemporary concerns. Ryan (2000)
further contended that teachers felt that ‘doing’ Shakespeare was important, ‘not so much because of its intrinsic qualities, but because familiarity with Shakespeare is essential if one is to succeed in the education system’ (Ryan, 2000, p. 9).

However, does Shakespeare appeal to the majority of the students and is its reading assisting students to obtain a positive reading identity? If not, is this a concern for the English teachers? Do the traditional English classics connect at all with Australian adolescents? In an article entitled ‘We are teaching kids, not subjects’, Pidduck (2001) commenced his argument against the unsuitability of ‘classics’ for many adolescents with these insightful few lines.

Hamlet: Do you see nothing there?
The Queen: Nothing at all; yet that is all I see
Year 8: Special English class: See what, where? This is shit
(Pidduck, 2001, p.95).

Peim (1993, p.183) has taken a sceptical stance, asking why English teachers ‘have thought about why Shakespeare has such an exalted place in literature teaching’ and ‘without critical reflection, much of our teaching is simply reinforcing a literary hierarchy which excludes the cultural preferences of the majority of the population’. Peim also suggested that ‘the insistence that Shakespeare is central to the teaching of English could be seen as the desire to sustain an ethnocentric national identity against incursions of an alien other … in the form of an inferior mass culture, or … in the forms of texts or cultural forms that express ethnic difference.

In her study of the Australian university setting, Dale (1997) suggested that by putting Shakespeare at the centre of literature studies, Australians have followed the elitist pattern of English scholarship. And in a survey of Australian secondary school English curriculum (as embodied in State documents as well as common practice), Elsden (1999, p.33) remarked that English teachers in Australia have been very prone to ‘unquestioning enthusiasm’ for “iconic Shakespeare”‘. Too often, Elsden claimed, there is a held assumption that only some students will be able to manage the challenges. Moreover, the teaching of Shakespeare’s texts in this tradition tends to be ahistorical, many teachers not seeing Shakespeare’s texts as emerging from a social context.

An example of this phenomenon is the Australian study by Ryan (2000), who interviewed teachers, and students in government and private schools who were
studying Shakespeare. Ryan (2000, p.9) stated that she found ‘it was not always easy to
discover what was really going on for teachers and students’, believing that her role as
an outsider from an elitist institution, namely a university, clearly affected responses
‘some wanting to align themselves with me, others to resist’. For example, one Year 10
boy at a government school (who wanted to be an actor) stated ‘Everyone [in my class]
really loves Romeo and Juliet. Ryan,(2000, p.8) believed that he was trying to impress
her ‘with his enthusiasm for prestige literature’. And in various ways, the teachers
appeared to think that Shakespeare would somehow ‘enlighten’ the students, seeing
Shakespeare as raising life’s big issues. However, Ryan reported that many of the
students ‘did not hold to the canonical view that they were likely to be edified by
studying Shakespeare’ (Ryan, 2000, p.9). But also of significance was that Ryan
contended that her data supported the work of Alloway and Gilbert (1997) in terms of
class as well as gender is important in defining which students are connecting to school
literacy practices. For example, boys in more affluent schools were more likely to
express enthusiasm for Shakespeare than those in less privileged schools. Ryan (2000,
p.10) concluded her paper by stating, ‘Do we do these students a favour by teaching
Shakespeare?’

2.5.4 SELECTING SET TEXTS
2.5.4.1 Introduction
In my exploration of the literature concerning set texts, British educator Sarland (1991)
argued that teachers of English simply reproduce society’s unequal social relationships
in the way that they select and teach texts, being pessimistic that this will change for the
better, and it would seem, within the context of teaching Shakespeare and other classics
in Australian secondary schools, that this could be so.

2.5.4.2 The Australian context
Within the context of Australian schools, Pidduck (2001) also raised concerns about
other set texts that are frequently chosen for students, such as Playing Beattie Bow (an
Australian ‘classic’) and pointed out that in his special English class, where the
Curriculum and Standard Frameworks level 5 had only (unofficially) been obtained by
three of the twenty-two students, some students were ‘phonetically pouring over every
single letter … never mind sentences and overall meanings. Never mind Beattie Bow
and “Ye ken verra weel I’m no use at all”.’ (Pidduck, 2001, p.95).

Pidduck continued to explain that, if he had
… turfed the book and found something else it would set a precedent, and there would be a raging subversive fire of (students) refusing to read set texts: or so I was told. Where would it all end? If we careful, we might be in a position where we were not able to teach Of Mice and Men to Year 10 (Pidduck, 2001, p.95).

However, Maher (2001), in answer to Pidduck’s paper as cited in the STELLA narratives, questioned whether other voices had been heard in this debate about appropriateness of certain set texts. Maher asked, ‘Is it possible, for instance, that the sequence of texts and their allocation to particular year levels, has been chosen, with good materials prepared, to reflect CSF outcomes, as mandated by the Department of Education and Employment Training (Maher, 2001, p.98).

Maher (2001, p.98) debated the issue further by arguing that the reality (largely financial) in secondary schools is such that ‘students are expected to purchase at least two set novels for class study, with class sets providing the basis for other text studies’. In my view, this is not a sufficient reason for retaining texts that are obviously out of touch with the life-worlds of today’s adolescents, because the students could just as easily purchase two contemporary or popular texts that have a proven track record with most students as being ‘an interesting read’, for example John Marsden’s novels. And eventually when the class sets become too worn-and-torn, these could be replaced with sets of more popular texts.

However, Maher (2001, p.98) also remarked that ‘in many respects, the choosing of set texts evokes the greatest conflict we have as teachers of secondary English or Literature because it touches on issues of values embedded in our lives ‘as human beings, as readers, as professionals’. When it comes to annual text selection, Maher (2001) stated that she and her colleagues have ‘inevitable discussion about those texts we are passionate about, engage with, feel comfortable with, balk at, can easily find a way into, can locate resources for, must change because of VCE lists or unavailability, and so on’ (Maher, 2001 p.98).

This may be so, but I would argue that there are other considerations in this debate. For example, Brennan (2001) as cited in the STELLA narratives, claimed that Pidduck’s paper raised the central dilemma of setting a common text for study in Junior and Middle Schools, which she saw as ‘a relatively recent historical phenomenon, perhaps
reflecting the conservative trends in education towards measurable outcomes’ (p.100).
In agreement with Pidduck, Brennan (2001, p.100) believed that ‘we would train them
[students] better if our first goals were their enjoyment of reading’ … and ‘the set text
can achieve the opposite when, as it does for many students, it becomes synonymous
with reading per se’. Furthermore, Brennan (2001) remarked that in the 1960s and
1970s there was often no set text in Junior and Middle School, and wide reading
programs were the norm. The challenge was to find material that would attract even the
most reluctant reader. However, in subsequent years ‘the challenge to find a text to suit
a whole class would prove far more daunting’ (Brennan, 2001, p. 100).

Novels written in earlier times can be effectively used if the issues are related to today’s
context. In my opinion, it would make more sense to select texts that are in a
contemporary or popular genre, because I contend that these texts connect far more with
students’ experiences of life (or how they would like their lives to be). However,
problematic for English teachers is that, if a popular set text is selected, such as Tim
Winton’s Lockie Leonard, Human Torpedo, there can be parental fallout. Brennan
(2001) cited that ‘the novel was about burgeoning adolescent sexuality (that should be
relevant at least), with a nice moral point about the virtues of delaying sexual activity.
But when we returned to school after the holidays, the Principal - rattled by a letter from
a “concerned” parent - ordered all copies to be bought back from the students. Piles of
them languished in a dusty storeroom before assuming new life as a class set’ (Brennan,
2001, p.100). So the dilemma is also that while the teachers select a text that they think
the majority of their students might like, the set text can receive parental condemnation,
resulting in its removal from the curriculum.

Back to the debate. If the English teachers select texts that meet with parental approval,
but these texts are disliked in classrooms by the students, what does this do to enhance
adolescent reader identity?

2.5.5 CRITICAL LITERACY AND TEACHING LITERATURE TO MIDDLE SCHOOL
STUDENTS

2.5.5.1 Introduction

Fundamental to the act of reading is the reader being able to draw on background
experiences to compose a text and engage in ongoing negotiation to arrive at meaning
(Tierney & Pearson, 1983). In order to accomplish this, one important underlying
principle in the instruction of higher order thinking skills in reading is the acceptance of
the theme of active learning, that is, the students taking responsibility for engaging in
and understanding the text. However, students need to be taught these active learning skills to enable them to take a critical stance. In the following discussion, the need for the teaching of critical literacy skills is examined.

2.5.5.2 Adolescents and the acquisition of critical literacy skills

Literacy scholar Paulo Freire contended that those who share in the learning process are empowered by a critical consciousness of themselves as meaning makers. Freire (1970) supported the position which suggested that language is the tool for meaningful construction, the thinking process which allows students to learn and grow. Freire (1970) contrasted this with ‘banking’ education (teachers ‘deposit’ knowledge into students’ heads) which he described as the antithesis to teacher-student dialogue.

According to Kordalewski (1999), great importance is currently attached to standards set for schools and statewide testing to measure how those standards are being met. In this context, ideas about classroom activity are often centred around prescribed student performance objectives that are to be achieved (Payzant, 1999). Furthermore, Kordalewski (1999) suggested that in some classrooms, students’ voices are barely heard: the teacher monopolises the classroom talk.

Paradoxically, Collins (1993) pointed out that educators have had this tool for teaching critical thinking, but many have not employed it.

Giving students a voice entails more than asking for periodic comments or feedback (Onmore, 1992). ‘Negotiating curriculum’ is a means through which students share authority in the classroom (Boomer, 1992). Curriculum can be negotiated when students select their own topic, sources and media for individual or group projects (Walsh, 1991; Mercado, 1993; Davenport, 1995). Taking this notion further, Shor (1996) devised a literature syllabus in collaboration with students, inviting student critique of the course as the semester proceeded. Of importance was the work of Levin (1998) and Dilg (1999), who believed that critical reading entailed teachers allowing class discussions to follow students’ emergent questions and/or planned further reading/activities that addressed those questions.

Flynn (1989) described an instructional model for problem solving which promoted analysis, synthesis and evaluation of ideas. It was also found in another study by Neilsen (1989), that when literature is approached from a problem-solving perspective, students are asked to evaluate evidence, draw conclusions, make inferences and develop
a line of thinking.

Building on this, Wilson (1998) suggested that teachers cautioned against skills lessons that were repackaged in the name of critical thinking but were only renamed worksheets. According to Wilson (1998), critical literacy advocates the use of strategies and techniques that formulate questions prior to, during and after reading; responding to the text in terms of the students’ own values; anticipating texts, and acknowledging when and how reader expectations are aroused and fulfilled; and responding to texts through a series of writing activities which ask the reader to go beyond what they have experienced in the text in personal ways.

In a middle school classroom study by Collins (1993), the atmosphere in which teachers could create active, critical readers was examined. It was found that students must be encouraged to question what they were reading, to make predictions and to organise ideas which supported value judgements. However, although critical literacy has attracted much interest from affiliates, there are those who are not so pleased with its pedagogical parameters.

Corson (1999) argued, in a review of Muspratt, Luke and Freebody (1997), that critical literacy has become a mainstream in Australia, ‘with its multifaceted nature and its insertion into very different curriculum discourses leaving little room for uniformity of concept. much less uniformity of argument’ (Corson, 1999, p.111). However, while Corson (1999) pointed out that Australian critical literacy has taken up a multifaceted approach, it can be argued that critical literacy features broadly in cultural studies and therefore maintains a social justice perspective. As Luke and Elkins (2000, p.449) argued, ‘it is not about just enhancing individual growth, personal voice or skill development’, but has the potential to confront the social, political and ideological contexts of literacy/teaching, rather than ignoring them. In an attempt to further clarify the issue, Johnson (2002) posited that some of the negative debate has emanated from its unsuitability to support the teaching of English as literature.

The issue of critical literacy becoming ‘mainstream’ was further investigated in a study of Queensland teachers’ discursive practices by Johnson (1996). At the time, it was found that critical literacy was indeed not mainstream in the participating teachers’ classrooms. However, in a subsequent study by Baker and Johnson (1998), it was found that teachers were adopting the vocabularies and practices associated with critical literacy in their reflective talk. In her recent study, Johnson (2002) contended that ‘the
movement from traditional to more contemporary pedagogies in the teaching of English is slow and possibilities for detours are numerous’ (Johnson, 2002, p.50).

The reluctance to accept critical literacy as a dominant in Australia, particularly Queensland, has been demonstrated at policy level. Wyatt-Smith (2000) described ‘a protracted struggle in Queensland about how to configure the relationship between language, literacy and textual studies in the senior syllabus for English’ (Wyatt-Smith, 2000, p.71). The demise of a version of the senior syllabus was deemed by opponents to grant too much of a stronghold on critical literacy with ‘insufficient emphasis given to literature’ (Wyatt Smith, 2000, p.72). Additionally, Luke and Luke (2001) offered a more direct pedagogical reason for its demise, contending that ‘a major critique came from those who argued that many teachers were not ready for the transition from cultural heritage and personal growth models’ (Luke and Luke, 2001, p.458).

Reid (1982) contended that crisis is no stranger to English teaching. Many teachers prefer a traditional approach with the aesthetic attributes offered by a cultural heritage model. A single, invited reading of a text is produced by a trained reader wherein ‘he/she focuses on the author’s mind’ (Eagleton, 1996, p.2), and superior language skills. Traditional teaching, as explained by Patterson (1997) ‘has little or no regard for the sociohistorical and ideological locations of texts, and readers’ (Patterson, 1997, p.339). However, according to Threadgold (1997), critical literacy involves the concept that texts position readers to take up reading positions. She argued further that ‘it involves understanding of how readings are constrained and produced in the complex networks of the social, cultural and gendered realities that we live and embody’ (Threadgold, 1997, p.375).

In summary, Johnson (2002) contended that teachers should not turn full circle and use critical literacy with community text exclusively. ‘There is room for a critical literacy approach to all kind of traditional and contemporary texts’ (Johnson, 2002, p.55). The opinion of Johnson (2002) is that traditional and contemporary ways of teaching literature have always co-existed, but her concern is that teachers and students might call old language and literacy practices by new names, which will have implications for what is (not) offered in literacy classes. Traditional ‘words on the page’ teaching does not ‘mutate to critical literacy merely by attaching the cultural context’ (Johnson, 2002, p.55).

In fact, Johnson (2002) believed that teachers should ask the familiar critical literacy question, ‘Whose interests are served by particular literacy teaching practices?’ According to Johnson (2002), understanding the conflicts that exist between and within particular teachers’ discourses of literacy allows schools to address their changing notions of literacy change that will often involve stepping outside of, or resisting, parts of familiar discourses.

2.5.6 THE IMPACT OF CRITICAL LITERACY ON PEDAGOGY

2.5.6.1 Introduction

According to Elkins and Luke (1999), Schoenbach (1999), Burke (2000), Robb (2000) and Alvermann (2002), the reading of various forms of literature in many middle schools is still taught through teacher rather than through students’ active learning and questioning in a critical way. Is this a positive or a negative factor in enhancing a reading identity for adolescents? More importantly, can English teachers change their style of teaching to incorporate less teacher instruction and more student active learning?

2.5.6.2 Viewpoints on teaching critical literacy

Within an Australian secondary school education context, Luke and Elkins (2001) argued the need to step back from the widespread assumption that policy and practice in literacy education should focus on intervention, on skills acquisition, and on immediately testable behaviour and assessable outcomes. However, what do English teachers who work in actual classrooms think?

From an American study on the teaching of reading by Foertsch (1998), middle-school
teachers in the qualitative study reported that:

- Good readers have many different strategies and are able to monitor their own comprehension.
- No one approach works for everyone.
- Students should be able to respond personally and critically and make connections with a variety of texts.
- Reading should be done within a content area.
- It’s important to have a variety of opportunities to interact with text.
- Reading and writing are vehicles for thinking.

In a related interview question, the middle-school English teachers also were asked to explain what they think middle school students need to learn in order to be good readers.

- Students should have a repertoire of strategies in order to make meaning.
- [Teachers] must give students opportunities to read a variety of different types of books.
- Students must be able to see that what they are learning is interesting and relevant to their lives.
- Scaffolding and modelling are important aspects of strategy instruction.

Similarly, the middle school teachers emphasised several positive key points, such as the freedom they enjoy in terms of instructional decision making. Other positive comments included the following:

- Students should be given lots of opportunities to read a variety of texts.
- There should be good collaboration among staff in planning for instruction.
- There should be a rich variety of materials from which to choose.
- Students should be really challenged.

However, middle school teachers also voiced concerns:

- Too many students are reading texts at their frustration level rather than at their instructional level.
• An influx of bilingual and ESL students will necessitate changes in a reading program.
• The English curriculum often does not provide teachers with strategies for addressing reading problems.
• Often a program is reading-based, but it is not really a reading program.
• Not enough time is actually spent on the teaching of reading.
• Many students seem to lack the necessary strategies for dealing with text.


2.5.6.3 Critical literacy and adolescent’ interests

In 1999, the International Reading Association published a position statement citing a neglect of adolescent literacy by schools, policy makers and the public and calling for widespread efforts to support continued development of adolescent readers. This, along with other nationally focused activities, brought long overdue attention to the plight of adolescent readers and their teachers.

Alvermann (2002) is a strong advocate of keeping adolescent interests and needs foremost in mind when designing literacy instruction at the middle and high school levels. In a position paper commissioned by the Board of Directors of the National Reading Conference (USA) in 2001, Alvermann argued that adolescent literacy instruction, if it is to be effective, must address issues of self-efficacy and student engagement with a variety of texts (e.g. textbooks, hypermedia texts, digital texts) in diverse settings. Furthermore, attention must be given to the literary demands of the subject area classes, to struggling readers, to issues of critical literacy, and to participatory instructional approaches that actively engage adolescents in their own learning.

But is this goal achievable? In yet another American study Schoenbach (1999) argued that many middle school English teachers saw their primary responsibility in helping their students grow into effective and efficient readers, but were getting little support in the form of suitable materials and resources. Following on this notion, Ivey (2002) cited three important steps which she believed would help adolescent readers to develop and thrive. The first of these steps proposed that schools and English teachers should invest in varied and interesting reading materials related to curriculum topics which should span difficulty levels and formats to meet both students’ comfort levels in reading and their personal preferences, including genres of texts that they might ordinarily read only
outside of school. The second step suggested is that reading time should be prioritised across the curriculum, one option being how teachers might use class time across an entire school week. The third step involved personal and pedagogical development for teachers - teachers need help in learning how to support students as readers and creating a motivational and enabling context for reading.

Also problematic, according to another American study by Robb (2000), at one end of the spectrum, English teachers saw struggling middle-school readers who knew the words but didn’t really know how to read, in the truest sense of the word. As Robb (2000) remarked, these students might really strive to understand and read the assignments given to them, but all too often they say ‘I read it, but I don’t get it’.

At the opposite end of the spectrum English teachers saw the students who were skilful readers. They interact with the text, often without realising it. They ask themselves questions as they read, monitor their comprehension, anticipate what might happen next, understand the author’s intent or purpose, have strategies for integrating new knowledge into what they already understand, and when that does not happen, they know what questions to ask (Robb, 2000).

In another American study, Burke (2000) postulated that most middle school students fall in between the two extremes. They read some texts more successfully than others, often because they have limited strategies and techniques, and they tend to read all texts in the same way. They do not monitor their own comprehension during the actual act of reading, and decide after they have finished, that they did not understand important elements of the text.

2.6 MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS AND SET TEXTS

2.6.1 INTRODUCTION

There are studies by Corcoran and Evans (1987), Applebee (1990), Sarland (1991), Krashen (1993), Wray and Lewis (1993), Nodelman (1996), Purves (1999) and an article by Pidduck (2001) indicating that there is a discrepancy between the set texts selected by English teachers for classroom study and what the students prefer to read. This issue will be raised throughout my research projects, especially in my project concerning boys and books, and also author visits to schools. I would argue that it is of extreme importance in the my overall study because it reflects what I believe is a dichotomy between what middle school students are given to read in classrooms and what they would actually prefer to read in classrooms.
2.6.1.2 Adolescents’ reading preferences

Do adolescent readers like reading their classroom set texts? In an American study with over 1000 14-15 year old students, Crowe (1998) found that one of the most common student responses to the reading of tried-and-true great literature was ‘it sucks’. However the opinions of the English teachers do not reflect the opinions of the students. For example Crowe (1998) found that the teachers appreciated ambiguity, which they felt believed made the set text more challenging, whereas whereas the students preferred things to be ‘back’ or ‘white’, and the text to be easily absorbed.

Indeed, Crowe(1998) found that the students held an egocentric view of the world, preferring texts that related to their own experiences within their framework of reference, whereas the teachers held a much broader world view.

The opinions of teachers and students in regard to set texts is explained in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2: Opinions of teachers and students on set texts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>English Teachers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appreciate ambiguity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enjoy challenging reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like to discuss abstractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have a broad world view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are lifelong readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have good reading skills/experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have quiet time to read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reinforce one another’s reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>believe that reading is pleasurable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exercise authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have adult freedoms and experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Crowe, 1998, p.121)

From this table, it can be seen that there were variances between the opinions and expectations of the English teachers and the students.

Given that these expectations are different, and given that the selection of set texts is problematic because of the many issues involved, what do middle-school students say about their set texts?
In a paper titled *Meeting, Not Ignoring Teen Literacy Needs*, Ivey (2002) reported that middle school readers were required to read complex materials without instruction on strategic reading, and that struggling readers felt that they would never improve in middle-school classrooms. ‘Standardised curricula and curriculum materials are partly to blame for this mismatch’ (Ivey, 2002, p.1). For example, students in her survey reported an interest in reading a wide range of texts including series books and magazines, but in school their reading was limited to text books and fictional novels assigned to the whole class. As a result, Ivey argued that a struggling reader rarely, if ever, got opportunities to read in a format they preferred.

Ivey (2002) also argued that adolescents found it difficult to reconcile school literacy with the reading and writing they engaged in, outside of school. In fact, her study indicated that many students failed the standardised literacy curriculum, yet demonstrated proficiency outside the classroom environment. Even successful readers perceived different reasons for reading inside and outside school. For instance, her research showed that ‘they read and write simply to complete school assignments, whereas outside school they read and write to communicate, create and participate’ (Ivey, 2002, p.1).

On the basis of the literature reviewed, I further contend that there is a discrepancy in what many adolescents like to read, in both the classroom and outside the classroom, and the set texts selected for them.

2.6.1.3 What texts do adolescents want to read in classrooms?

To answer this question, I turned to the research of Ivey and Broaddus (2001) for enlightenment. Their large study of 1,765 middle school students in mid Atlantic and north-eastern United States reflected American middle school adolescents’ opinions. Ivey and Broaddus (2001, p.350) found that middle school reading instruction ‘is full of mixed messages and inconsistency’. Ivey and Broaddus identified two particular characteristics that distinguished their study from other research in middle school reading. The first characteristic of other research examined students’ experiences and motivation in a specific curriculum established by the teachers or a researcher. Building on the work of Oldfather (1993) who looked at whole language classrooms, and Dillon, O’Brien, Wellinski, Springs and Stihl (1996) who examined inquiry-based projects related to students’ life experiences and personal interests, Ivey and Broaddus decided to investigate a larger, broader sample for students across many
different classrooms regardless of the curriculum in place.

The second characteristic that Ivey and Broaddus (2001) wanted to highlight was the students’ voices. What differentiated their study from the work of McKenna, *et. al.* (1995) Moje (1996) and Alvermann (1998) was that Ivey and Broaddus foregrounded the students’ voices, and by seeking the opinion of a large sample, hoped to detect not only commonalities in their perspectives, but issues concerning motivation for reading. 49% of the students were male, 51% female. Basically what the students valued most in their reading or language arts classes was free or silent reading time, (63%) and the teacher reading out loud (62%).

Overall, whole class reading materials were mentioned as either the students’ best or worst reading experiences. Personal choice for reading texts was closely aligned with positive reading experiences. When the students reported an experience in which they were motivated to read, they usually discussed the content of the text and described features that they found interesting. In contrast, the students’ worst reading experiences were directly related to assigned reading. When asked about the types of books they liked to read, the top three choices were magazines, adventure books and mysteries, followed by series books. A quarter to a third of the students enjoyed reading across genres in texts about people their own age, fantasy and science fiction.

There has been debate about the concept of motivation and adolescents’ reading. For example, Baker and Wigfield (1999) argued that motivation is multidimensional and that students fluctuate in their motivational profiles. Ivey (1999) reported similar complexities. However, like the middle school students in other studies by Stewart, Paradis, Ross and Lewis (1996), Dillon, *et. al.* (1996) and Worthy and McKool (1996), the students in the Ivey and Broaddus study were clear about the importance of time to read in school. Furthermore they sent a strong message about the need to read as individuals, personally interesting materials, as was also found in the study by Atwell (1998).

2.6.1.4 Students as individual readers

One hallmark of middle school is the emphasis on students as individuals, yet Tomlinson, Moon and Callahan (1998) found that teachers rarely differentiate instruction to meet student needs. I agree that much teacher-talk is centred around teaching students as individuals, but the reality is that class sizes are usually too large and assignment work and standardised testing ensure that most instruction is to the
group and not to the individual. My assumption is validated by the work of Finders (1998/1999), who pointed out the tendency of preservice middle school teachers to characterise adolescents as a group, ignoring any diversity among individuals. Perhaps this changes when they become full-time teachers.

In a conceptual framework for their study, Ivey and Broaddus found that many middle school students had been described as apathetic, reluctant readers, a finding also substantiated by the earlier work of Anderson, Tollefson and Gilbert (1985), Ley, Schaar and Dismukes (1994) and McKenna et. al. (1995). Possibly this is because the school curriculum dictates that adolescents are expected to read a wide range of texts, yet, according to Worthy, Moorman and Turner (1999), in school they are usually limited to teacher-selected class novels (usually award-winning fiction) and textbooks.

Researchers and educators such as Lewis (1998), Nixon (1999), Alvermann and Hagood (2000) and Ivey and Broaddus (2001) have recently begun to respond to the need to infuse students’ out-of-school interests and activities into the school curriculum by urging teachers to consider the role of popular culture in adolescent reading. Although the evidence is mounting in favour of certain printed reading materials (magazines, comics), genres (mystery, relationships, fantasy, series texts) and issues (popular culture, social concerns), a broader notion needs to be developed in terms of what adolescents prefer to read.

This notion of what adolescents prefer to read begs the question, do adolescents like reading? I would like to discuss three American surveys. The first survey is the Mellon poll (1987) which concerned 362 ninth graders in two rural high schools in North Carolina. Mellon reported that in these schools, one third to half the families were below the poverty line, yet 82% of the respondents stated that they read in their spare time. Interestingly, Mellon found that her respondents “didn’t trust” that the questionnaire was really dealing with self-selected pleasure reading, and considered the reading they liked as “not quite legitimate.

“I don’t like reading except for comic books or magazines”
“I don’t like to read much except for romance, mystery, and scary books”.

Of the 66 respondents in Mellon’s study who claimed that they never read in their spare time, 49 ticked several categories of leisure reading when asked what they liked to read.
I would argue that these adolescents have a poor reading self-identity because they have rated themselves on their failure to succeed in the classroom, yet their responses showed that they are in fact, enjoying reading, even though they think their reading is somehow not “real” reading.

The SmartGirl poll was administered in October 1999 in co-operation with the Young Adult Library Services Association’s Teen Read Week campaign in the United States. More than 3,000 adolescents took part aged 11-18 years (1,826 girls and 1,246 boys). According to the survey, 72% said they enjoyed reading. They either “read constantly for my own personal satisfaction” (26%) or “I don’t have much time to read for pleasure but I like to when I get the chance” (46%). When asked how often they read, about two thirds of the SmartGirl respondents said they read a book a month or more, and 30% said they read a book a week or more.

The third survey is the READ California poll, September 1999, which 201 surveyed subjects aged between 10-17 (48% male, 52% female) in the Southern California area. READ is sponsored by the Education Department of California to encourage reading. 85% of the READ respondents said they liked to read out of school. 58% said that they read four days a week or more, and 67% said they read 26 minutes a day or more. Furthermore, READ’s California results confirmed that reading skill was really important (81%).

How does this compare to studies on adolescents and reading conducted in Australia? A study was conducted nationally in 2000 by the Sydney-based Woolcott Research Pty Ltd. on behalf of the Australian Centre for Youth Literature and the Australia Council’s Audience and Market Development Division, and four other partner groups. 800 young people between ages 10-18 and 600 adults were involved in this quantitative study which was of importance because it provided indicators as to the numbers of students who were reading for pleasure and how often and sources of obtaining books and sources of advice on good books to read, in addition to other pertinent statistics. For example, 74% of students aged between 10 and 18 claimed to like reading to some extent with girls overall reading more frequently than boys. The Woolcott study also found that there is an 80% correlation between the number of books in the home and the frequency of reading. This was congruent with findings in the USA studies.

However, one concern to educators in Australia is the apparent demise in reading fictional literature by years eight and nine students, that is, adolescents between 14-15
years. Evidence of this phenomenon was constantly noted in the Australian Woolcott (2001) research. There was a considerable drop between the reading patterns of primary school students (with 76% reading every day), to 45% of post-primary students reading every few days, and an even greater demise between years seven and years eights’ leisure reading. Additionally, 68% of the post-primary students interviewed in the Woolcott study stated that they did not have enough time to read, and 76% of post-primary students considered reading as ‘boring’.

I believe that the Woolcott (2001) quantitative study was of importance because it provided indicators as to the numbers of students who were reading for pleasure and how often, sources of obtaining books and sources of advice on good books to read, in addition to other pertinent statistics. For example, 74% of students aged between 10 and 18 claimed to like reading to some extent with girls overall reading more frequently than boys.

Results from the Australian National Literacy test for Year 9 students (ACER, 1995) revealed that 34% of boys did not meet the desired literacy skills level (ACER 1997) with the 23% of the Year 9 girls falling below the stated standard for reading.

Other recent Australian studies in the field by Power (2001), Love and Hamston (2002) and Hamston (2002) have concentrated on specific cohorts of adolescent readers such as boys and reading. As an English educator, Power (2001) noted the dilemma of increasing boys’ participation in the English classroom through interesting text selection that did not disenfranchise the girls.

Having perused the relevant literature as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, I would argue that lack of interest in school literary texts is a major reason for many individual middle school student’s negative attitudes and school failure, a view shared by Dillon, O’Brien, Wellinski, Springs and Stihl (1996), O’Brien (1998) and Ivey and Broaddus (2000).

Krashen (2001, p.2) stated that’ if adolescents and teenagers are provided with interesting reading materials and have a time and a place to read them, they will read’. How this access to interesting reading material which not only an individual’s reading identity but also an individual’s adolescent identity is studied further in my three subsequent research projects concerning promotion of literature by schools, boys and reading, and author visits.
2.7 THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY IN THE PROMOTION OF LITERATURE IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

2.7.1 INTRODUCTION

My research projects indicated that adolescent reading identities are often established within classroom literacy lessons, and, as discussed in the literature review, can be positive or negative, depending on these experiences. However, other avenues of reading are available in schools, and I contend that in particular, these occur in the school library with the teacher librarians and the library staff.

2.7.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY IN THE PROMOTION OF ADOLESCENT READING IDENTITIES

2.7.2.1 The role of the teacher librarian

School libraries and library staff, especially teacher-librarians, play a vital role in the promotion of literature (Chambers, 1991; Altmann, 1994; Hale, 1994; De Groff, 1997; La Marca, 1999). In Australia, statements from professional associations for teacher-librarians also mention the role to be played in the promotion of literature. For example, in the Australian Library and Information Association handbook (1995), it states that ‘the teacher-librarian collaboratively devises and implements programs to encourage reading’ (ALIA, 1995, p.5).

In a nation-wide survey conducted in the United States by the National Reading Research Centre, De Groff (1997) reported on the staff and student’s perceptions concerning the role of the teacher-librarian. The findings indicated that there were three facets of the role of teacher-librarian - that of information specialist, the teaching role, and the role of instructional consultant. The promotion of ‘lifelong learning and an appreciation for reading and learning’ (De Groff, 1997, p.10) was seen as part of the teaching role of the teacher-librarian.

However, a study by Waddle (1987) postulated that somehow school libraries, like corporations, had diversified, and ‘lost in the shuffle during this diversification process has been the book, a forgotten medium. Isn’t it time to get back to books, and help sharpen the skills needed to create a more literate society?’ (Waddle, 1987, p.44).

However, Hamilton (1992), claimed that ‘the school library, like the school, will draw its energy and direction from the individuals who direct and nurture it’ (Hamilton, 1992,
Nimon (1992) agreed, arguing strongly for a role for the teacher-librarian in the promotion of reading, fiction in particular, despite the ever-increasing demands upon many libraries and staff to be the centre of technological advancements for their schools. Nimon (1992) highlighted the difficulty of the teacher-librarian’s role in a post-primary school library, due to limited time and funds, and contended that often reading does not get a high priority. Furthermore, Nimon (1992) contended that the demise of the teacher-librarian who is being replaced in many cases by technicians and computer experts, or experiencing rapidly changing roles, needed further investigation.


2.7.3 CREATING A READING ENVIRONMENT

The promotion of literature in secondary school libraries by the teacher-librarian, is essentially achieved by the creation of a positive reading environment that is conducive to students wanting to read (La Marca, 1999). However, this is an elusive concept, because the term reading environment does not necessarily refer to a clearly designated physical space, but rather it is an atmosphere which encourages students to read.

All reading has to happen somewhere … but it isn’t only a matter of place-setting. It is also a matter of having books we want, and what mood we’re in, and what time we’ve got, and whether we’re interrupted. Not to mention our general attitude to reading (whether or not it is something we enjoy for its own sake) and why, particularly, we are reading at the moment (as a work duty, or for private [pleasure). These are some of the things that influence us. They make up the social context of reading


As discussed further in the Australian publication of ‘Back to Books’ by La Marca (1999), the attitude of the teacher-librarian is a crucial factor in understanding the connections and interplay at work between the many influences of any reading environment. Essentially, ‘the views of the teacher-librarian greatly influence what they ultimately create’ (La Marca, 1999, p.16).
In a USA study, Carlsen (1980) believed that other factors are considered to be strongly influential in creating a positive reading environment. Are the books displayed so that the students know they exist? Are they stored where the students can get easy access to them? Can the students browse through the collection out of class time? Can they borrow when and where they choose?

Decisions made by the teacher-librarian directly affect the size, scope and type of books to be found in any library’s fiction collection. Carter (1987) argued that ‘adolescents, like the rest of us, read what is available’ (Carter, 1987, p.187). This raises the question of the teacher-librarian’s selection procedures - what books do they buy, and why?

In another USA study conducted by Doll (1992) the students were asked about improving the reading environment of their school library. The students suggested buying more popular fiction, displaying the books on low shelves or heaped on low tables, bright posters on the walls, and comfortable seating, private space. ‘The environment should be attractive and comfortable’ (Doll, 1992, p.226).

Educators such as Chambers (1991), Altmann (1994), Hale (1994) and La Marca (1999), emphasised the importance of accessibility and availability and also other factors such as the views of the school on censorship and the provision of funds to maintain and replenish the books. Also, it is very important for teacher-librarians to recognise the types of books that adolescents want to read, and stock the shelves accordingly if they want to promote literature to their students.

Stover and Tway (1992) contended that

Good literature written for and about adolescents is an especially valuable tool to use when seeking to help adolescents connect with the larger world of human experience because characters are immediately accessible to readers due to the similarities of age and concerns between the reader and those who populate young adult books, and young adult literature provides validation of their own experience.

(Stover and Tway, in Salvner and Monseau, 1992, p.133).

The key aspects to the teacher-librarian’s role of creating a positive reading environment can best be summed up by Boyd (1995), a teacher-librarian, who stated that ‘enthusiasm and commitment to literature are the essential tools needed to
successfully promote our product and ensuring that the school library has a warm, attractive and enthusiastic reading environment’ (Boyd, 1995, p.52).

2.7.4 TEACHER-LIBRARIANS AND SCHOOL PERSONNEL

2.7.4.1 Communicating with the staff

Of paramount importance are the interconnecting professional relationships formed by teacher-librarians with teaching staff, library staff, administration and students. Worthy (1996) contended that libraries are essentially a place where people come to get information, and to get books, either to read there, or to borrow. In order to remove the barriers to voluntary reading, it is vital that librarians and teachers pool their resources and expertise, ‘the librarians sharing their knowledge about student interests and popular materials, teachers providing opportunities for students to follow their interests, and both groups working together to provide access’ (Worthy, 1996, p.49).

Teacher-librarians cannot promote books within a vacuum. Studies by Henri and Hay (1996), Oberg (1996) and Hartzell (1997) analysed the relationship between administration, in particular, teacher-librarians and the principal. Henri and Hay (1996) stated that ‘there is a unanimous agreement that teacher-librarians and their programs thrive upon the leadership of energetic, supportive, visionary administrators’ (Henri and Hay, 1996, p.9). This stance is supported by Hartzell (1997), who contended that ‘unless the library is forcibly brought to the attention of teachers and administrators, it is likely to be unnoticed and undervalued’ (Hartzell, 1997, p.2).

2.7.4.2 Communicating with the students

‘Any school library reading environment can only be successful if it brings students and books together’ (La Marca, 1999, p.1). Furthermore, La Marca (1999) contended that the ambience of the school library was of great importance in order to influence students to enjoy being there.

The development of a relationship between the teacher-librarian and the students is considered to be crucial. Atkinson (1997) interviewed Pat Scales in the American School Journal because she had won the prestigious Grolier award for librarians. Her idea for the promotion of reading was that building a relationship was of prime importance, thus ‘turning reading into an experience’ (Atkinson, 1997, p.114). During the interview, Atkinson asked how these relationships should be formed. Scales answered that trust is paramount: ‘How do we gain that trust? Number one is listening
to them, to their opinions, and really wanting to know them, engaging them in a conversation’ (Scales, 1997 cited in Atkinson, 1997, p.110).

Young, cited in Corcoran and Evans (1987) agreed that building relationships with the students is critical, and that from the very beginning, the reader has encounters which are supported and shaped by others who share this with them. ‘Our first reading experiences are made possible by competent readers - parents, older siblings, relatives and friends - who aid us in the realisation of the literary experience’ (Young, 1987, as cited in Corcoran and Evans 1987, p.7). Furthermore, Meek (1988) believed that readers gave themselves ‘private lessons’ by reading large quantities of books that they enjoy. Krashen (1993) contended that students became fluent readers through reading in a low-anxiety, non-threatening situation. If, in fact, readers give themselves lessons and enjoy reading in non-threatening situations by reading quantities of texts, Ross (1997) argued that teachers should be willing to trust the readers’ choices. Often the teacher-librarian is the person who fulfils this role of promoting a wide range of fictional texts in a comfortable, non-threatening environment. La Marca (1999) believed that it can be to a teacher-librarian’s advantage not to be a classroom teacher hindered by curriculum requirements and assessment criteria.

Some strategies for building good relationships with the students included the formation of book clubs by the teacher-librarians. These book clubs are conducted by the teacher-librarian in the school library, usually at lunch time, or after school, and usually attended by enthusiastic and above-average readers. The relevance of book clubs, in particular for girls’ self esteem, was investigated by Gilligan, Lyons and Hammer (1990) who indicated that girls could ‘lose voice’ and ‘go underground’. A further study by Fine (1995), found that girls could disconnect from reading as they began to understand the implications of culture and gender for their lives during the crucial period of early adolescence.

In an article entitled, ‘Book Club is da bomb: early adolescent girls engage with texts, translations and talk,’ (Smith, 1997), the notion of shared reading was explored. In this USA study, Smith (1997) was interested in extending the school focus from individual and autonomous aspects of reading to reading as a shared social experience, influenced by and influencing cultural norms. ‘An After School Book Club was a forum where former non-reading girls could connect in ‘safe spaces’. The Book Club was ‘a site where adolescent girls were able to raise their own agendas, negotiate their issues and identities and learn to like the reading of fictional books’ (Smith, 1997, p 10).
2.7.4.3 Connecting with teachers, students and parents

A different approach was used in an Australian school in a Victorian rural district to promote fiction in the school library. The teacher-librarian, Josie Fleming, had observed that during school time, students could be seen aimlessly cruising the library’s fiction shelves, sent on a mission to ‘get something to read for English’ (Fleming, 1999). When surveyed, the consistent comment from the students was ‘that the novels are too long and too boring’, so she established two Teenage Fiction Club groups. One group consisted of ten to fifteen students who were deemed good readers, and the other was a group of ten to fifteen teachers and parents. Members of the groups chose a latest-release novel then wrote a book review and discussed whether that book should receive a gold star (which indicates a good choice for browsers) or a recommended subject heading, ‘Recommendations - Teenagers’ which then made it easier for the general students to find the book on the shelves. The duty of the teacher-librarian was to ‘customise the collections to ensure a balance of genres, reading levels and student interests’ (Fleming, 1999, as cited in La Marca, p.55).

Following the selections, there was a launch for example, years tens reading out their choices to year sevens, so that the year tens acted as positive role models for the younger students. Also ‘buddy’ systems were introduced between older and younger students, and teacher-librarian and students, to enrich the reading relationships. Fleming (1999) also stated that the book club members received certain privileges. In addition to being involved in book selection and promotion of these to the other students, ‘they received chocolate mud cakes, a trip to the Melbourne Writers’ Festival, empowerment (‘you get to read all the new books first’), and the forum of discussing novels, skills to improve confidence when reviewing or presenting ideas to other students and teachers. The parent members felt that it ‘kept them in touch with what their own kids are reading’ and the classroom teachers appreciate ‘being introduced to “kid-friendly fiction” ‘ (Fleming, 1999, cited in La Marca, 1999, p.56).

Other promotional ideas which teacher-librarians employ are excursions during which groups of students visit a bookstore and purchase books of their choice for the school library, with each book then having a plaque stating the name of the student who chose the book, writing camps, excursions to festivals and literary places of significance (for example, Dromkeen in Victoria, Nutcote in NSW), inviting authors to speak to the Book Club or selected groups, poster competitions, book review competitions, murals and Book Week dinners (La Marca, 1999).
COLLABORATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES

2.7.5.1 Introduction

With the aim of promoting fictional literature to adolescents, the notion of collaboration between school libraries and public libraries is a viable concept. In Australia, schools are often invited to send classes to the public libraries to hear an author speak. As an author speaking to a class of adolescent students in a public library, I have observed that, for some students, this is the first encounter with their local library.

2.7.5.2 Why should public and school libraries collaborate?

In a USA study, Callison (1997) highlighted the importance of collaboration between school and public libraries to promote literacy and the reading of books. Callison argued that ‘adolescent reading continues to decline. Co-operation amongst teachers, parents, school librarians and public librarians, may help to reverse the trend’ (Callison, 1997, p. 38). He believed that in communities where school and public libraries existed, co-operation was needed to create new and necessary services to address the needs of the adolescent reader.

However, Callison noted that there were some major differences between school and public libraries. He felt that the teacher-librarian functioned as ‘a facilitator who acts to assure that students and teachers are effective users of information’ (Callison, 1997, p.38), and that materials and services are designed to support specific learning activities. Reading for the purpose of seeking meaning through literature is one of the major learning activities to support, whereas public libraries have a broader set of responsibilities. Callison contended that public libraries are much more sensitive to the individual interests of their patrons and that reading promotion is often combined with cultural and recreational requests as well as informational and educational needs. He defined the primary role of the school librarian as ‘teaching the process of information retrieval and use; providing resources’ supporting educational programs, and the role of the public librarian as providing access to books, information and community programming’ (Callison, 1997, p. 39).

In 1993, the American Library Association’s Presidential Committee for Customer Service honoured fifty exemplary programs that demonstrated creative ways to cooperatively promote reading to children and young adults. In a 1994 survey concerning the possibility of a joint collection development policy at locations of exemplary service
to children and young adults, sixty-six per cent of school librarians described a joint policy as ‘possible,’ ‘a good idea,’ ‘on the way,’ whereas sixty-three percent of public librarians disagreed, describing a joint policy as ‘unlikely and undesirable,’ and ‘not possible’ (Callison, 1994, pp.17-21).

Other research in 1989 found that the general lack of communication and planning was nation-wide (Fitzgibbins and Pungitore, 1989, pp.3-56). For example, in another survey, forty-seven medium-sized public libraries in Indiana with a service base of ten thousand to thirty-five thousand patrons indicated a major lack of contact with secondary schools. Fifty-seven per cent could not name a local junior high or middle school librarian (Callison, 1997, p.41). Contact with school libraries gave a similar result. Forty-six per cent of the junior high/middle school librarians could not name a professional librarian at the local public library.

As previously stated, in my own experience as an author speaking to groups of students, many Australian public libraries invite school classes to visit the library. This is congruent with the findings in an American report by Heaviside et al. (1995) for the National Centre for Education Statistics (1995), which stated that:

> Several ways in which public libraries and schools work together were reported. Sixty percent of public libraries host class visits from schools to the library. Forty percent of schools indicate that the public librarian visited the schools for book talks or to discuss and promote library use. Fifty-eight percent reported sharing activities such as interlibrary loans for school on an occasional basis’

(Heaviside et. al. 1995, pp.51-52).

Problematic for the schools in my study was the availability of certain texts for students to borrow. A school may purchase ten copies of a popular text, with a waiting list of one hundred students, which was the case in the private all-girl school in regard to my novel, *Back on Track - Diary of a Street Kid*. If public libraries had copies, this would reduce the wait time and frustration levels of the students who want to read but have to wait to get access to the text.

Many public libraries conduct reading clubs or summer reading programs to promote reading to children and adolescent readers. Walter and Markey (1997) put forward three typical elements to a public library book club or reading program, these being: theme, reading incentives; and programming. The theme was considered to be an essentially
public relations hook, enabling the library to establish a unifying thread that tied various parts of the program together conceptually and visually. Reading incentives were given to readers who achieved reading goals, such as award certificates, photographs of them displayed on the library notice board, book prizes donated by the library or local book stores. Programming was often organised to coincide with a local festival or event.

2.7.6 ON-LINE PROMOTION OF LITERATURE IN LIBRARIES

2.7.6.1 Introduction

One emerging promotional tool is the use of electronic mediums and computer technologies. With competing demands on adolescents’ time, teacher-librarians may find it more difficult to rouse reluctant readers than ever before. However, many students are eager to use computers, and this can be a means of promoting computer-mediated reading. Programs such as DEC talk (Lock and Leong, 1989, Mackay and Leong, 1992; Boyd, 1999, cited in La Marca, 1999) mean that the student can take a more active role in processing text.

The rapid advance of email as a communication tool has had a massive impact on the concept of time and place, creating ‘a sense of shared place with the potential for different forms of social exchanges’ (Riel, 1997, p.1). and the use of email for promoting the reading of fiction can promote students to read so that they can contribute to the email.

Book raps are best described as on-line discussions about a particular book, conducted by email. The major ingredients to success are knowledge of the book under discussion, and ‘a willingness to share thoughts and feelings with other students throughout Australia and overseas’ (Carr, 1998, p.9). It is suggested by Kinch (1999, cited in La Marca, 1999), that teacher-librarians work closely with English teachers so that a book rap can be integrated into something that may be happening within the curriculum.

Also, the world wide web can be accessed so that students can gain information about books and authors on web sites. The OzKids Literature web page has hotlinks that provide information about overseas authors for adolescents such as Judy Blume, Roald Dahl, J.R.R. Tolkien, Cynthia Voigt, Lewis Carroll (to name just a few) and Krista Bell, Margaret Clark, Hazel Edwards, Jackie French, Libby Hathorn, Christine Harris, John Marsden and James Moloney, to name a few of the Australian authors. Many also have their own web sites, for example, www.margaretclark.com and christineharris.com.
In a paper entitled *Wired-Up Boys Read Better*, two teacher-librarians, Judy James and Jill Johnson (1999) described a project they conducted with year 9 boys, who studied *Bridge to Wiseman’s Cove* by James Moloney, and then book rapped with him. ‘As the book rap progressed, the boys also read other titles by James Moloney … (James and Johnson, 1999, p.175). The boys were enthused by the response and the Australia wide contact that this provided, not only with the author, but with other students and teachers. This ‘engendered some enthusiastic debates about the book with the author, as the students collaborated in their responses’ (James and Johnson, 1999, p.175).

As Robin Slavin, a teacher-librarian at a coeducational high school stated, ‘electronic promotion of fiction does lead to more work on my part. I need to liaise with English teachers in order to select the students to participate … I register with the chosen Book Rap … I discuss the rap points with the students … I have to ensure that books are available and the students know how to email and that they have given some thought to their responses … ‘ (Slavin, 1999, as cited in La Marca, 1999, p.29).

In summary, the key points indicate that the school library can promote the reading of fiction and create a reading environment conducive to this. The teacher-librarians collaborate with the library staff and general staff by communicating about the acquisition of new titles; they can offered suggestions concerning the selection of set texts for the English teachers; can they provide information for students’ projects; they display fictional novels and tried to promote reading as a fun activity for the students; they can conduct book clubs; they can provide on-line services and collaborate with other school libraries on line.

3. THE RESEARCH DESIGN: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

3.1 SELECTING THE METHODOLOGIES

3.1.1 INTRODUCTION

In relation to theory-building, Miles and Huberman (1994) proposed that there were three research strategy identifications, those being the research problem, the research purpose, and the research questions. Having established these, the researcher needs to utilise the most appropriate methodology.

The purpose of this section on methodology is twofold. Firstly, it provides a description of the particulars and procedures pertaining to the reasons for my methodology choices,
and then discusses the methodological basis for reporting, analysing and interpreting the
data in my three research projects. Central to the choice of the research methods were
the methodological issues associated with each particular project. The three research
projects which made up my folio pieces were:

**RESEARCH PROJECT 1: ADOLESCENT BOYS AND THEIR READING OF FICTIONAL TEXTS**

This research project concerned adolescent boys and their reading of novels.

For this project, I wanted to collect data from English teachers, teacher-librarians and
cohorts of middle-school students, in years seven, eight and nine, from a private all-boy
Catholic college, a private co-educational college, a government rural secondary school
and a government lower socio-economic co-educational secondary school.

My reason for selecting these schools was to examine boys and their reading within a
wider context of my research on adolescents and reading. Additionally, as a comparison
to the data from the private all-boy Catholic school, I wanted to collect data from a
cohort of middle school adolescent girls from an all-girl private Catholic college to
compare whether there were differences between adolescents reading of novels in the
two all-boy and all-girl schools.

**RESEARCH PROJECT 2: AUTHOR VISIT TO SCHOOLS**

This research project concerned author visits to schools. For this research, I wanted to
collect data from English teachers and teacher librarians, and cohorts of middle-school
students from a private all-boy Catholic college, a private all-girl Catholic college, a
private co-educational private college, a government rural secondary school and a
government lower socio-economic co-educational secondary school.

My reason for selecting these same schools as for project one was to find out if there
were differences in the purpose for and organisation of author visits between the
schools.

**RESEARCH PROJECT 3: THE NARRATIVES OF AUTHORS**

This research project focused on the stories of authors’ experiences concerning school
visits. Their responses were limited to middle-school in both the private and
government sectors. Additionally, excerpts from my personal professional journal
concerning my own school visits as an author were used as data for this research project
3.1.2 THE SEARCH FOR A METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the three research projects being undertaken was critical for determining how the study should be conducted. It was apparent that a qualitative research design would best suit my purpose, but qualitative research, according to Merriam (1998), is an umbrella term that has many variations. Depending on the writer, such variations can be called orientations (Tesch, 1990), theoretical traditions (Patton, 1990), major traditions (Lancy, 1993), strategies of inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), or genres (Wolcott, 2001).

A short review of these typologies shows the large variety of qualitative research. To illustrate my point, Tesch’s (1990, p.58) list of forty-five approaches to qualitative research is a mixture of designs (action research, case studies), data analysis techniques (content analysis, discourse analysis) and disciplinary orientations (ethnography, oral history). Tesch later collapses these into three basic orientations- language-oriented, descriptive-interpretative, and theory-building, acknowledges that these distinctions are not rigid and frequently overlap.

Taking a different approach, Patton (1990) anchors different types of research in the kinds of questions a particular researcher will ask (Patton, 1990, p.66). Different disciplines or scholarly traditions lead to different questions. In their ‘strategies of inquiry’, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) include case studies, phenomenology, ethnomethodology and interpretive practice, grounded theory, biographical method, historical social science, clinical research, and ethnography and participant observation.

According to Merriam (1998), the types of qualitative research commonly found in education are the basic or generic qualitative study, phenomenology, grounded theory, case study and ethnography. Initially, I was drawn to the qualitative ethnographic approach, which would have involved following the teachers in their classrooms and taking the role of a participant observer. For example, I was interested in the notion of student resistance to the teaching of set texts, and I felt that my observations in the classrooms could contribute some valuable data.

However, I also felt that ethnography possessed the potential for problems with the knower/known relationship, given my teaching and author background and my predilection for popular fiction as set texts. Additionally, would an ethnographic study clarify the problem or cause more confusion? I turned to the literature to assist me in
making the most suitable choice.

For example, the most basic aspect of ethnography is that it is a contextual account of a particular social milieu and is created out of a social environment (Erikson, 1986; Lee, 1991; Atkinson, 1992). If I had undertaken a cultural description of English literature classrooms and middle-school students via participant-observation, this could presuppose my position of being outside the sphere of what was being objectified (Erikson, 1986).

Extracts from my personal professional diary are quoted in italics throughout my study. In the extract cited below, I was grappling with ethnography as a viable choice of methodology.

*Personal professional journal extract: May 15th 1998.*

Still undecided, I’ve looked at Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), who divided ethnographies into disparate positions, these being:
- the elicitation of cultural knowledge
- the detailed investigations of patterns of social interaction
- holistic nature of societies
- the development and testing of theory

None of these categories suit my needs.

Also, the ideal qualities of an ethnographer are those of empathy and understanding - the compassionate observer is supposed to become the trusted confidants and to play out the role of total ignorance (Erikson, 1986).

*I honestly doubt that I can step away from my personal subjectivity. Although ethnography appeals to me as a research methodology, I have to ask myself will I achieve what I really want to find out? The answer is no.*

Problems of my personal biases, although being acknowledged, would probably influence my data interpretation. Indeed, all researchers have a personal or professional bias and it is acknowledged in research fields that this can be an inherent problem.
Awareness of this potential problem can assist the researcher to avoid certain pitfalls.

My own concern was that I would start adopting the role of educator and get sidetracked by teaching methods, theories and theorists’ influences, students’ resistance and all the other facets that could surface to bedazzle me. In my role as an author, I believed that assumptions about the selection of set texts and the promotion of literature by teachers to students would colour my judgement. I needed to visit schools in the role of interviewer, remain ‘distanced’ and ask structured questions. I also realised that it would be extremely difficult for me to become ‘an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer, standing outside, and above the text’ (Brunner, 1993, p.1). Thus I was aware of many of my biases and knew that I had to formulate my interview questions so that I appeared to be impartial.

My research was intended to concentrate on adolescent reading identities in classroom [and beyond], but, because I had decided against ethnography as a methodology, I was reliant on interviews with the English teachers, teacher-librarians and a cohort of middle school students in years seven, eight and nine for this information, which, in the telling, was subject to distortion and individual perceptions. This, in itself, raised ‘issues of truth’.

3.1.2.1 The problem of truth

Having studied teachers in the classroom, Wolf (1994), had this to say:

> Without information about the teacher’s instructional goals and teaching context, it is difficult to examine the soundness of the teachers’ planning. Without evidence of the teaching that took place, it is difficult to examine the adequacy of the teacher’s instruction. And without reflections by the teacher on the problems and successes, it is difficult to determine the depth of the teachers’ understanding of the teaching and learning process

(Wolf, 1994, p.115)

However, for this study. I have to assume that the teachers and students who participate in the interviews are telling ‘the truth’ as they perceive it. More importantly, would my own account be truthful? According to Stake (1995) each human being has his or her own version of the world and these are ever-changing. ‘The aim of research is not to discover, for that is impossible, but to construct a clearer reality’ (Stake, 1995, p.101). Furthermore, the researcher adopts different roles - interviewer, reader, storyteller, advocate, evaluator and others. Stake (1995) contends that each researcher consciously
or unconsciously makes continuous decisions about how much emphasis to give each role. Through awareness of my researcher roles, I hope to represent the participants’ responses fairly and honestly.

### 3.1.3 WHAT IS METHODOLOGY?

Initially it was difficult for me to separate the techniques for data gathering and the mechanisms from exactly how the research should proceed. Harding (1987) argued that discussions of method (techniques for gathering data) and methodology (a theory and analysis of how the research should proceed) have been intertwined with each other and with epistemological issues (issues about an adequate theory of knowledge or justification strategy. Furthermore, Harding stated that ‘method is often used to refer to all three aspects of research, that is, method, methodology and epistemology’ (Harding, 1987, p.2). Harding perceived methodology as being related with methods (on the practical side of doing research) and with epistemology (on the theoretical or thinking side of doing research). Harding’s definitions assisted me to think about how I wished to proceed with my research design. However, there was a multitude of other considerations.

For example, what types of research questions should I be considering? Guba (1990) identified three types of questions that may be used for generating inquiry paradigms:

- **ontological**: what is the nature of the knowable (or reality)?
- **epistemological**: what is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?
- **methodological**: how should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?

For my research projects, I wanted to find out the opinions of students, teachers and teacher-librarians, and also other authors. On the surface, a simple task, but more complex because there were so many choices in regard to my methodological approach. How I made these choices would impact significantly on my research. Van Maanen (1995) attempted to simplify the issue by suggesting that doing research involves ‘fieldwork, headwork, and textwork’ (Van Maanen, 1995, p.4). Fieldwork meant ‘enacting methods and methodically producing data: headwork is thinking about producing texts, stories and narratives including listening to informants, observing behaviours, examining historical records, methodological issue-theories, analyses and criticisms of how research should proceed: textwork consists of recording testimonies to
field and head work, critiques and analysing other texts’ (Van Maanen, 1995, p.4).

According to Griffiths (1998), my own reasoning and explanations are bound to be partial, with the exact meaning of terms like ‘methodology’, ‘method’ and ‘technique’ being inherently unstable, precisely because of the depth of argument about them. In fact, Gough (2000) believed that ‘there is no universal agreement as to what researchers mean by methodology’ (Gough, 2000, p.1). The word methodology is based on the Greek word met (with, after), hodos (the way) - sometimes combined as methodos (a following after) and logos (reason, account, reckoning). Thus, Gough (2000) believes that research methodology can be understood as the reasoning that informs particular ways of doing research. However, while this was illuminating for me, I had not made my decision on what methodology to use for my research projects.

3.1.4 BACKGROUND TO MY CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY

Before I made my firm decisions about my method of data collection, I continued to read a plethora of literature about methodology, again turning to the work of Gough (2000). He stated that ‘methodology refers to more than particular techniques, such as “doing a survey” or ‘interviewing students”. Rather, it provides reasons for using such techniques in relation to the kind of knowledge or understanding that the researcher is seeking’ (Gough, 2000, p.4). In fact, Gough (2000) took the position that reality is unknowable except through its relationship with us, and the distinction between epistemological and ontological questions is not strategically useful for organising approaches to inquiry.

Gough (2000) contended that conventional approaches to research training often over-emphasise fieldwork-methods and techniques for producing and analysing data, and pay less attention to headwork and textwork. Gough refers to ‘producing’ data rather than ‘collecting’ data because he believes that data are ‘not out there waiting to be discovered, but are actively produced or constructed by the researchers’ (Gough, 2000, p.7). Thus, the researcher’s methodology is based on his/her understanding of the world, including its social and physical attributes. Our views of the world are not static and are always under review. This personalisation of methodology is seen by Gough as very important. It alerts the researcher to the possibility that there is not one “best” methodology. Through the reflection on what guides the actions of the researcher, Gough believes that it is possible to determine what methodology will most likely guide the researcher’s research activity (Gough, 2000, p.6). For myself as the researcher, the methodology had to compliment the nature of my research and the
nature of my data.

3.1.5 MY ROLE AS A RESEARCHER

I reflected deeply about the nature of my research using Gough’s suggested methodological questions, those being:

- what theories, understandings, conceptualisations and representations of inquiry (or question-asking as such) determine how my research should proceed?
- how adequate are these theories, understandings, conceptualisations and representations?
- whose are they?
- why are they privileged?
- why should I privilege them?

The personalisation of a methodology as suggested by Gough (2000) allowed me to reflect upon my stance as a former educator and now an author of children’s and adolescent fiction. This, in turn, led me to select a qualitative methodology using five schools as research sites. For the first two research projects, I would conduct face-to-face interviews with English teachers, teacher-librarians and students in the selected schools. For the third research project, I would use my personal professional journal writings and the narratives of four authors.

I selected a qualitative research method which would allow me to explore a context-specific activity, that of adolescents’ reading in five secondary schools. One strength of qualitative research is that personal reflection can be stimulated. The emphasis is on introspection and the development of personal professional knowledge and personal experiences (Richert, 1991; Kleinfeld, 1992), as well as a stimulus to analytical thinking. Spindler and Spindler (1992, p.66) contended that ‘there is no … substitute for the alert individual observer, with all senses working at top efficiency’. With due regard to the pertinence of my work as an author, I concluded that qualitative research would benefit me not only as a researcher but within my field of work as an author.

More importantly, as discussed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), Stoecker (1991) and Yin (1991), the rich contextual data collected from the schools could contribute to the building of theory, qualitative research being primarily concerned with theory-building as opposed to hypothesis-testing.
Having perused much literature on qualitative research and reflected upon its appropriateness for my research projects, I concluded that this method would be the most appropriate to use for my research projects concerning English teachers, teacher librarians and year seven eight and nine students, with the emphasis on conducting face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the respondents.

For the obtaining of responses from the four authors, I would employ a qualitative research which examines the written narratives of these respondents.

A detailed explanation of the collecting and analysis of data is discussed in the next section.

3.2 THE COLLECTING AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

3.2.1 INTRODUCTION

As stated in the previous section, I decided to collect the school data through face-to-face individual or group interviews with the English teachers, teacher librarians and cohorts of middle school students. According to Oakley (1981), the interview is an information-gathering tool, and the interview is designed to minimise the local, concrete immediate circumstances of the particular encounter - including the respective personalities of the participants - and to emphasise only those aspects that can be kept general enough and demonstrable enough to be counted.

3.2.2 MYSELF AS BOTH AN INTERVIEWER AND AN AUTHOR

One problem is that, in the role of interviewer in schools, I needed to establish a rapport without overstepping the boundary between interviewer and well-known author. The role of author-in-schools is in total variance with that of an interviewer, with an emphasis on being open, warm and friendly to the teachers and students because the author is, in essence, ‘selling’ himself/herself, promoting books and importantly, promoting reading. The following extract from my personal, professional journal reveals how I was grappling with my role as an interviewer.

May, 1999

Problematic is the fact that I personally know many of the authors whose texts are being studied in classrooms. It is imperative that I don’t show any bias towards a particular author, or get side-tracked into talking about authors. Some schools will be studying the texts that I have written, too. I need to establish my role of interviewer clearly to the respondents. I am not there as an author, yet they will
still see me as an author. Maybe I could wear a scarf through the interviews and remove it at the end, indicating that the interview has concluded and I am now an author who can sign autographs and answer questions about authorship that pertains to myself.

(extract from my personal professional journal).

Anticipating that the students (and possibly the teachers) would ask me a great many questions, means that prior to the actual interview, I would need to establish ground rules. But there also needs to be a delicate balance between appearing as an autocratic dictator and rule-setter, and a as friendly interviewer. The interviews also needed to reflect the ‘voice’ of the respondents when they are transcribed.

5th June, 1999

I am conscious that, in the transcription and analysis of these interviews, I’ll have to counterbalance these ‘voices’ other than my own, and that the final draft will hopefully emerge from a process of negotiation and discussion. I have just read an article by Stronach and Maclure (1998), and they refer to ‘dialogue’ and ‘induction’. As Stronach and Maclure state: “the writer is never more present in the text that when she seems to be absent, and the subject less audible than when he seems to be speaking for himself” (Stronach and Maclure, 1998, p.35). I have to allow the teachers to tell their stories, whilst my role remains that of ‘unobtrusive’ interviewer.

(extract from my personal professional journal).

3.2.3 THE INTERVIEWS

As stated, the semi-structured interviews with the English teachers and teacher-librarians would be conducted individually or in groups. The students’ interviews would be conducted in groups of four to six students, with the interviews taking place over a fortnight at each school. Participants would be encouraged to speak freely, although interviews would be timed to last no more than two hours. The English teachers and librarians would be invited to send follow-up comments if they so wished. (Only one did this, the others preferring to wait until they were sent draft copies of the interviews for comment, changes or additions).

In order to get a coherent record of the interviews, I decided to use a tape recorder. Whilst this method allowed me to retain on tape the audible tones, pauses, inflections of each speaker, visual gestures and expressions would not be retained, except in my memory. However, I felt that the tape recorder was less intrusive than a video camera.
Basically, my discussions with the English teachers would concern years seven, eight and nine students as readers; the criteria for selection of set texts for these age groups; whether they thought their students enjoyed these or not; how they maintained and promoted the students’ interest in literature, beyond class set texts and any other pertinent issues. The interviews with the teacher-librarians would focus on the promotion of fictional literature and the strategies they employed to optimise this.

I was concerned with obtaining the opinions of the students. However, I was aware that students who are in the school setting could be influenced in their responses just by being in school, or with the covert peer influences of the response group, so these factors had to be taken into account.

12th June, 1999

I see my initial task as ‘setting the scene’, explaining what I am trying to achieve, that is, to find out what the students think about their school set texts and other reading matters. I’ll have to explain the purpose for this research. I remember when I was a student, thinking that there was always a hidden agenda to any questionnaires. I’ll have to ensure that the students are comfortable about these interviews.

(extract from my personal professional journal).

For the purposes of this study, I wanted to determine if there were any differences between the types of schools and their approaches to the teaching of literature within these schools, given that the culture and demographics were so disparate. Would the choice of set texts be the same in each school, and if not, what was the rationale behind the text selection? Would the private co-educational teachers have the same expectations of their students as those of the rural government high school or the socio-economically disadvantaged high school? Would the all-boy school teachers and librarians promote the same types of literature as the all-girl school? And would the teachers and students believe that I had represented their views correctly when I finished collecting the data?

3.2.4 TRANSCRIBING THE INTERVIEWS

Lather (1992) discussed issues of ‘face validity’, which entailed recycling tentative data back through the subgroup (or in my case, the English teachers, teacher librarians and students). I intended to ensure that the teachers received a draft copy of my written transcript of the interviews, so that they could alter or add to any of the data. In order to
transcribe the raw data, I played each tape many times so that I could type the exact words used by the respondents into my computer. (Examples of this raw data can be seen in the Appendix). This process, though time consuming, allowed me to reflect on the words of the respondents in more depth.

I then went through the transcripts, looking for sentences and phrases that answered my questions. Obviously the answers varied according to individuals. I also included what I thought were interesting opinions in order to attempt to represent the respondents as fairly as possible. This final component of reflection of the data is what Lather (1992) referred to as ‘catalytic validity’. This indicates the manner in which the research enables the subjects of the study to understand their ‘world’ and how this ‘world’ impacts upon their lived experiences and what they need to do to ultimately transform this ‘world’. I believed that it was important for the English teachers and teacher librarians to receive feedback from my study in relation to what their students thought of their set texts and other relevant information. I therefore planned to have follow-up discussions with the teachers after I had interviewed the students.

3.2.5 DECIDING ON AN ANALYTICAL TOOL

Tesch (1990) argued that data analysis is an eclectic process, with the choice of the analytical tool dependent upon the method of data collection.

In order to gain a greater understanding of the most useful analytical tools for my study, I studied the literature that pertained to qualitative research. Huberman and Miles (1994) and Cresswell (1998) contended that content analysis is a useful tool when conducting qualitative research, because the researcher uses research questions to guide the analysis rather than to restrict the findings. In this instance, the data collected was analysed for patterns or categories of information on fictional texts and author visits. These patterns ‘form the basis for the emerging story to be told by the qualitative researcher’ (Cresswell, 1998, p. 154). In addition, data collected can be searched for ‘unusual or useful quotes that can be incorporated into the qualitative story’ (Cresswell, 1998, p. 155).

However, Doan (1997) reminds the researcher to consider:

- Who has the power?
- Is there room for optional responses and information, or were these subjugated?
• Who authored this data collection and analysis?
• What sort of power practices does it employ?

(Doan, 1997, p.130).

When analysing the data, I referred to these points in an attempt to report the findings in a fair and honest manner.

3.2.6 THE CASE FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS

3.2.6.1 Introduction

In my school-based research projects, the opinions of English teachers, teacher-librarians and students were paramount, so I needed a content analysis of their interviews in order to interpret this data.

3.2.6.2 Content analysis

Content analysis is a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Krippendorff 1980; Weber, 1990). It allows inferences to be made which then can be corroborated using other methods of data collection (Krippendorff, 1980). Furthermore, it is a useful technique for allowing the discovery and description of individual, group, institutional or social attention (Weber, 1990). While technically, content analysis is not restricted to the domain of text, in order to allow for replication, the technique can only be applied to data that are durable in nature (Weber, 1990). Content analysis is also useful for examining trends and patterns in documents. For example, Stemler and Bebell (1998) conducted a content analysis of school mission statements and looked at whether the criteria being used to measure program effectiveness were aligned with the overall program objectives.

According to Krippendorff (1980), six questions must be addressed in every content analysis:

1. Which data are analysed?
2. How are they defined?
3. What is the population from which they are drawn?
4. What is the context relative to which the data are analysed?
5. What are the boundaries of the analysis?
6. What is the target of the inferences?
When analysing the findings, I referred to Krippendorf’s work. However, content analysis extends beyond these six points. Tesch (1990), Maykut and Morehouse (1994), Miles and Huberman (1994), Coffey and Atkinson (1996), and Creswell (1994, 1998) argued that content analysis can take many varied forms. For example, Miles and Huberman (1994) believed that the data collection could be analysed in the form of matrixes, with comparison tables according to themes (categories), participants or sites.

Indeed, Tesch (1990) contended that information could be reduced to themes or categories. Expanding upon this notion, Creswell (1998) postulated that categories could be generated from two sources - from the literature review and from the research questions. Because of the nature of my research, I decided that a categorical approach utilising the literature review and the information obtained from interview questions would be used to analyse my data collection.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) discussed issues concerning epistemological, political and moral dimensions. Whose story is it? What is the relationship of the researcher’s story to the story told in the final text? Indeed, as Clandinin and Connelly explained, ‘Researcher relationships to ongoing participants’ stories shape the nature of field texts and establish the epistemological status of them’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, p.422). The researcher’s position in relation to the stories of participants ought to be acknowledged, examined and expiated because ‘when we become characters in their stories, we change their stories’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, p.422).

For the school-based research projects, I selected Cresswell’s (1998) model of analysing content through the creating of categories from the relevant literature and collected data, because I believed that it best fitted my purpose. Together with my research questions, the following categories were formulated in order to analyse the data in my research projects one and two.

The categories for research project one were:

1. The differences in adolescent boys’ reading practices and preferences in the selected schools.
2. The opinions of English teachers concerning boys and reading.
3. The opinions of teacher-librarians’ concerning boys and reading.
4. The opinions of middle-school boys concerning reading.
The categories for Research Project Two were:

1. The differences in organisation and criteria for author visits in the selected schools.
2. The opinions of English teachers concerning author visits.
3. The opinions of teacher-librarians concerning author visits.
4. The opinions of middle-school students concerning author visits.

I planned to transcribe the data from the interviews then deliver the draft copies of these transcriptions to the schools that had been involved in the research. I then contacted them after a week to make an appointment to collect their written comments and tape any verbal comments.

During my reflections, I wondered if I should get a second opinion, or someone to re-interview the teachers, in case the information had changed, or because myself as an author had influenced the research in any way.

17th August, 1999

What can I achieve from a third party interviewing the teachers? Will this be yet another imposition on their busy time? And what will the third party discover that I already haven’t? And who should the third party be? Duane, my colleague, ex education faculty lecturer? Another author? Or someone totally removed from the field? But what about issues of validity? My latest reading of a study by Kincheloe and McLaren (1994), suggests that, rather than validity, trustworthiness is a more significant term, particularly when analysing interviews and narratives. They stated that critical researchers award credibility only when the constructions are plausible enough to construct them, and even then the researchers might disagree about validity, whereas trustworthiness evoked the notion of an implied validity. I know I will go to these interviews with some preconceived ideas, and these will probably be turned topsy-turvy in many instances, which I’ll explore more when I write up the summary. I really think my approach will be trustworthy.

(extract from personal, professional journal, 1999).

Furthermore, through the referencing of key and subsidiary questions in relation to my categories, and through reference to the relevant literature in my literature review, as proposed by Cresswell (1998), a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the data indicated some interesting findings for my school-based research.
However, my third research project, the narratives of authors, required a different method of analysis.

### 3.2.7 THE CASE FOR NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

#### 3.2.7.1 Introduction

I discovered from the related literature, that the study of narrative does not fit neatly within the boundaries of any single scholarly field. As realist assumptions from natural science methods prove limiting for understanding social life, theorists such as Barthes (1977) and Bakhtin (1981), set the stage for this “narrative turn”. Todorov coined the term narratology in 1969 in an effort to elevate the form to ‘the status of an object of knowledge for a new science” (quoted in Godzich, 1989, p.ix). In fact, Bakhtin (1981) argued that in a dialogic work of literature there is a polyphonic interplay of various characters’ voices … where no world view is given superiority over others; neither is that voice which may be identified with the author’s necessarily the most engaging or persuasive.

Inherently interdisciplinary, it extends the “interpretative turn” in the social sciences (Reissman, 1993 p.1). Reissman continued to explain, stating that ‘story telling, to put it simply, is what we do with our research materials and what informants do with us’ (Reissman, 1993, p.1). Order is created, texts are constructed within particular contexts.

#### 3.2.7.2 Issues of quality in narrative

Issues of quality arise in narrative. Barthes (1966) believed that good narrative has:

… authors and the narrative emanates from them. The author is omniscient, apparently impersonal and conscious and seems to tell a story from a superior point of view. The narrative must limit itself to what the characters can observe and know, narrator and characters must seem real living people, they are paper and the narrator of the narrative is in no way to be confused with the author

(Barthes, 1966, p.282).

Barthes (1966) also argued that a poor narrative is one that has no ‘logical time, which has very little connection with real time’ Barthes (1966, pp.290-1), preventing suspense and does not lend lends itself to summary.

However, a good narrative need not be ‘representative’. It constitutes
a spectacle … the ‘reality’ of a sequence lies not in the ‘natural’
succession of composing it but in the logic there exposed, risked and … logic has an emancipatory value - and with it the entire narrative … the passion that us a novel is not a ‘vision’ … we do not see anything

(Barthes, 1966, p.5).

According to Kress (1997), a good narrative is one where the ‘representations exist within culturally and historically formed systems of representations, which, like that of language are available for the socially motivated use by individuals with their specific interests’ (Kress 1997, in van Dijk, 1997; p.264). Indeed, ‘the task of narrators and scholars is to pursue the generic threads that run through a text and fathom their interconnections’ (Ocsh, 1997, p.192), but this can be problematic, particularly as ‘stories are not so much depictions of facts as they are construals of happenings ‘ (Ocsh, 1997, p. 192).

A recent study by Hester and Francis (1997) on reality analysis of storytelling in classrooms highlights how stories are seen as real, with a tenuous association with social reality that can be reliably and validly reproduced by social scientists. The contextual elements in which the narrative is formulated are essential to elucidate the particular aim, overall purpose and meaning of the narrative.

Camic and Gross (1998) argued that there is not an appropriate way of distinguishing good or poor narrative. It is a connoisseur-like approach, no book being available on the methodology of rhetoric. Good or poor is treated as an aesthetic judgement - each person has their own interpretation of inherently good or poor narrative.

To sum up, ‘Words are the currency of serious discourse’ (Beloff, 1994, p.495). Narrative tells a story; it is up to the researcher to analyse the story in a way that portrays authenticity without jeopardising the narrator’s intent.

3.2.8 NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Qualitative methodologists agree that the ethical issue is not simply attaining the respondent’s consent to have his or her story recorded and analysed. There has been less discussion about what constitutes respect for stories in narrative analysis. According to Frank (2002), narrative analysis entails extensive ethical obligations. The researcher who solicits people’s stories does not simply collect data but assents to enter into a relationship with the respondent and become part of that person’s on-going struggle.
toward a moral life.

In his article *Why study people’s stories? The dialogical ethics of narrative analysis*, Frank (2002) posed the following questions. How are dialogical relationships both the topic of the story, its content, and also the goal of telling the story, its process? Again, authenticity is interpersonal. Before Taylor’s (1991) emphasis on dialogue comes the classic statement of Mikhail Bakhtin (1929-1984), writing on Dostoevsky:

> To portray the inner man … was possible only by portraying his communion with another. Only in communion, in the interaction of one person with another, can the ‘man in man’ be revealed, for others as well as for oneself

(Bakhtin, 1984, p.252).

Stories, as dialogue, do not present a self formed picture before the story is told. Rather in stories the person becomes for the first time that which [she or] he is and we repeat, not only for others but for himself [or herself] as well (Bakhtin, 1984, p.252). Narrative analysis can show how that process of becoming ‘for the first time’ works, even as the analysis itself is another stage in this on-going process.

Indeed, the narrative process ‘seeks to collect data to describe …..lives’ (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.86), and narrative analysis ‘can be applied to….an in-depth interview’. Indeed, in the analysing of narratives, the researcher works to actively find the voice of the participant in a particular time, place or setting (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000).

Reissman (1993) argued that narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself. In qualitative interviews, typically most of the talk is not narratative, but question-and answer exchanges, arguments and other forms of discourse. Precisely because they are essential meaning-making structures, narratives must be preserved, not fractured, by investigators, who must ‘respect respondents’ ways of constructing meaning and analyse how it is accomplished’ (Reissman, 1993, p 4).

Kamler (2001) contended that what we call a personal experience is a narrative production, and a cultural analysis alerts the narrators to the narrative possibilities of their experience. What results is an understanding of text as processual which is profoundly embodied and disciplined, subject to all kinds of policy, institutional, private and power relationships. Indeed, Threadgold described this type of discourse as ‘always
narrative, dialogic and rhetorical’ (Threadgold, 1997, p.22).

3.2.9 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), critical discourse analysis is very much about making connections between social and cultural structures and processes on the one hand, and properties of text on the other. Gee (1999) contends that any discourse analysis involves asking questions about how language is situated at any given time and place and how the aspects of the situation network simultaneously give meaning to that language. In essence, what are the situated meanings of some of the words and phrases that seem important in the situation?

Researchers do not have direct access to another’s experience. Ambiguous representation is compiled through talk, interaction and interpretation. It is not possible to be completely neutral and objective, merely to represent (as opposed to interpret) the world (Peller, 1987). There is no one, true representation of spoken language. Meaning is constituted in very different ways with alternative transcripts of the same stretch of talk (Mishler, 1991).

My discussion and interpretation of the authors’ narratives used a narrative analysis framework based on the work of Reissman (1993), Mike and Huberman (1994), and Cresswell (1998). I attempt to provide a description of the authors’ stories and experiences based upon their recollections and statements about their own feelings, and perspectives. Using a type of discourse analysis adapted from the work of Kamler (1994, 2001) which involves lexical networks, I analysed commonalities within these narratives.

3.2.10 PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL

Another source of data was my personal, professional journal. In the context of the study, my personal journal represented a written account of my observations and experiences from the perspective of a professional author within the field of adolescent literature; about writing novels for the age group in this study (thirteen to fifteen years): visiting schools; demands from publishers and the market place versus what I wanted to write as a professional author; letters and emails from readers of my novels wanting to know how I developed particular characters, if there will be sequels, wanting information for school projects and other relevant issues. Then there were my observations, experiences, insights, reflections and hunches as a researcher concerning
this study: the protocols and administrative tasks prior to visits; the school milieu; and, most importantly, the participant interactions and interpretations as they relate to this study.

The latter became akin to a set of field notes during which I was able to record the inflections, moods, impressions and observation that taped transcriptions cannot capture so aptly. As a course of routine, these personal reflections and observations were noted in my journal following each set of interviews in a school. Although I sometimes felt that it was tedious, it proved to be extremely useful for tracking the overall development of the research project. Thus, the compilation of the field notes provided me with a way of maintaining a self-conscious awareness of the influences, and my personal biases, that were impinging on the study while it was in progress.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992), postulate that the researcher can never eliminate bias, but, through awareness, can strive to keep an open mind. In my role of researcher, I strived to compile this part of my journal as closely as possible to its lived phenomena in order to enhance accuracy and avoid misinterpretation, but I was aware that these notes were from my own personal perspective and therefore are approximations of my recollections of events. My journals formed a self-narrative of events, thoughts, feelings and beliefs.

My rendering of experiences as a professional author and a researcher means that the context is viewed from my ideological, social, emotional and intellectual framework. Narrative is inevitably a self-representation (Reissman, 1993). Self-narrative is employed in relation to my personal professional journal entries briefly throughout my third research project on author narratives.

3.3 MY RESEARCH PROJECTS - METHOD AND PROCEDURES

33.1 INTRODUCTION

This section concerns how I made decisions about collecting data from the schools, my criteria for selecting the schools, and my sample interview questions that were sent to the schools at the time of contact, in order that the principal and teachers would be aware of the nature of my research before committing to becoming involved.

Following a critical appraisal of the literature and having made the decision to employ content analysis for research projects one and two, and narrative analysis using a type of linguistic lexical analysis for research project three, I then organised my procedural method of collecting the school data.
3.3.2 DATA GATHERING TOOLS AND RESEARCH ARTEFACTS

The data gathering tools I used were:

- my personal, professional journal.
- interviews with English teachers, teacher-librarians and students.
- narratives from professional authors.

In order to accomplish the interviews with the school participants, I had to:

1. Select the schools
2. Obtain permission from the Department of Education and Training (Victoria) to enter schools in order to interview teachers and students.
3. Discuss the research with the salient people at the school
4. Deliver sample interview questions and permission forms
5. Interview the participants (three visits)
6. Transcribe the interviews
7. Send transcripts to the schools for approval/amendments
8. Analyse the data
9. Discuss the findings
10. Send draft copies to the schools

3.3.3 SELECTION OF THE SCHOOLS

I decided to interview English teachers, teacher-librarians and students in schools. But how many? What kind of schools? Where should they be located? Would I have visited these in my capacity as an author before or should I select schools that I had not visited before? These questions could be answered by decisions about what data I wanted to collect and why. Would there be any discernible differences between different types of secondary schools, such as government or private? Metropolitan or rural? Boarding schools and schools in lower socio-economic areas? And, having selected the schools, would I be able to gain entry as a researcher to conduct my interviews?

I recognised that I was unable to interview every teacher and school librarian in post-primary schools in Victoria. I decided to select a range of schools from various demographic sectors - a government co-educational school, all-girl and all-boy private schools, a co-educational private school, and a large rural secondary school. The
schools also were within one hour of my home base, due to expediency of travel time and the necessity to make several visits. However, to protect their anonymity, I did not select the schools in my immediate locale. I also selected schools that I had either not attended in an author capacity, or had not attended within two years as a visiting author.

For purposes of anonymity, the names of the schools, the exact location of each, any other information which would enable the schools to be identified, and the participants’ names have been changed. However, the details concerning demographics, size, locale (for example, lower socio economic or rural) and other data are a true representation of the schools selected for my research projects. The research focused on secondary schools in Victoria, both government and private., and I contend that the selection is representative of schools nationwide.

In order to clarify the actual schools used in my research, and the teacher-student interviewees, the following table demonstrates the schools and the interviewees that I used in my research.

**TABLE 3: Schools and interviewees in my research projects**

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<th>School</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St John’s Boys’ Catholic College</td>
<td>Pam, Head of English&lt;br&gt;Kirstin, teacher librarian&lt;br&gt;Two English teachers&lt;br&gt;One group of six year seven boys&lt;br&gt;One group of six year nine boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Ann’s Girls’ Catholic College</td>
<td>Faye, Head of English&lt;br&gt;Mary, teacher librarian&lt;br&gt;Three English teachers&lt;br&gt;One group of four year seven girls&lt;br&gt;One group of four year eight girls&lt;br&gt;One group of four year nine girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchton College</td>
<td>Ewan, Head of English&lt;br&gt;Kate, teacher-librarian&lt;br&gt;Two English teachers&lt;br&gt;One group of year seven, two males, two females&lt;br&gt;One group of year eight, two males, two females&lt;br&gt;One group of year nine, two males, two females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northdown High</td>
<td>Laura, teacher librarian&lt;br&gt;Two English teachers&lt;br&gt;One group of year seven, two males, two females&lt;br&gt;One group of year eight, two males, two females&lt;br&gt;One group of year nine, two males, two females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countryside High</td>
<td>Meg, Head of English&lt;br&gt;Melanie, teacher librarian&lt;br&gt;Two English teachers&lt;br&gt;One group of year seven, two males, two females&lt;br&gt;One group of year eight, two males, two females</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3.4 THE SCHOOLS

According to Martin (1994), O’Loughlin (1995) and Richardson (1997), schools are sociocultural settings where teaching and learning take place and where the culture of schools emphasises the reproduction of the surrounding culture of its ‘clientele’. The teaching of literature does not occur in a vacuum (Gilbert and Taylor, 1991; Martin, 1994, O’Loughlin, 1995).

All schools contain their own ‘culture,’ according to Bates (1995) which can affect the content and manner of what is taught and how it is taught. In the matter of literature, however, there are curriculum guidelines. All of the schools in my study were cognisant of the requirements for the Victorian English Curriculum and Standards Framework (2000), as demonstrated by references to the CSF. However, due to the different demographics, school ethos, and cultural differences between all-boy/all girl/private and co-educational government schools, there were some noticeable differences in rationales for certain set text selection.

In total there were fifteen teachers, five librarians and sixty students

**St John’s Boys’ Catholic College**

This is a large college that has two campuses - junior to middle school at one campus, and senior school at another campus, with 1,400 students in total. The school is old, established, traditional and parents pay fees to send their sons to this respected college. There is a predominance of male teachers, but of interest is the fact that most of the female staff there teach English. The school is located on the outskirts of a city. Although several teachers still reside there, there are no boarders although it used to be a boarding school of repute. Christian teachings and positive role models for males are predominant ideologies, and ‘the school prides itself on the educating of young men who will take prominent leadership roles in society’ (School prospectus, 1999).

The interviews were to be conducted with the teacher-librarian, Kirstin, and Pam the Head of English, and a group of four year seven boys, a group of four year eight boys and another group of four year nine boys. Of particular interest was that vertical streaming had been introduced for years eight, nine and ten, so, although for example, the boys might be in a year eight grouping for reading, they were different ages.
**St Ann’s Girls’ Catholic College**

St Ann’s was selected because it’s the ‘sister school’ of St John’s. It has approximately the same number of students (except it is located in one large campus). It was established approximately at the same time as St John’s, the same Christian values are espoused, and traditions of excellence are purported to be upheld. Again, while several teachers live on the premises, there are no boarders at the school. Many of the girls have brothers at St John’s school. There is no vertical streaming at St Anne’s. The grounds are old and gracious, with shady trees, smooth lawns and conducive to girls sitting in small groups enjoying the peacefulness at lunch or recess times.

**Churchton College**

Churchton College was originally an all-boy school, but became coeducational ten years ago. There are still more male students than females, but the gap is decreasing each year. There is a junior school, middle school and senior school on the one campus. There are approximately 2300 students at the school and over 100 staff members. It is busy, both academically and athletically, with high emphasis being placed on scholastic achievements and sporting prowess. The school is still very traditional, though one of the teachers said that this has broken down somewhat due to the influx of students from other cultures, female teachers in what was always a male-predominant domain, and the broadening of the curriculum from traditionally academic school-based subjects to encompass the changing needs of the students. Surrounded by large grounds, the school is in a tranquil setting.

**Northdown High**

Northdown High gained a reputation as a rough, tough school that serviced a sprawling housing commission area, where there are a number of single-parent homes and low income families. The percentage of people out of work in this area is the second highest in Victoria. However, some homes are now privately owned by a now older population through a government home buying scheme, so the school numbers have declined to below 600. This has enabled class sizes to be reduced, and some of the portable classrooms can be used for extra curricular activities. The school consists of two long corridors, one going north-south and one east-west, with portables branching off from either side. Unlike St John’s, St Ann’s and Churchton Grammar, there are no peaceful gardens graced by old, gnarled elm and oaks, and quiet nooks. There is wall-to-wall asphalt, tan bark borders and a few scraggly melalukas beside broken seats, with faded graffiti on the side fence, and the constant roar of heavy traffic going past.
Countryside High
This is a government rural school approximately seventy kilometers from the nearest large city. There is an abattoir, and brick-making factory on the outskirts of this busy town that is the hub of this region. It is predominantly a dairy-farming area in addition to mixed farming. The school consists of a number of portables springing from a central corridor rather in the manner of octopus tentacles. There are 520 students at this school, but this population can swell to 800 when seasonal work is available. As one of the teachers said during my initial contact, ‘Most of the business and professional families in the district send their sons and daughters to be educated at boarding schools in the city, or to Trinity College. This is the old ‘tech’, and reputations die hard in this town. The average or below income parents send their bright kids to the high school, and the rest come here.’

Thus, the five schools were
- a girls’ Catholic college
- a boys’ Catholic college
- a private co-educational college
- a government rural co-educational secondary school
- a government lower socio-economic co-educational secondary school

3.3.5 INITIAL PROCEDURES
Permission was sought from the Victorian Department of Education and Training to conduct research in selected government secondary schools. The participating schools were recruited into the study through an approach by letter to the principal. The English teachers and librarians were then approached by letter, informing them of the nature of the research and recommendations for teacher selection of students for the study. (see Appendix 2). Consent forms were sent to all participating teachers. (see Appendix 2 ). The student consent forms were given to the selected students by the teachers for approval and signing by the parents of the students (see Appendix 2). A cohort of middle school students at year levels seven, eight and nine were selected because this group do not have mandatory set texts for examination purposes as do years eleven and twelve.

Students were to be interviewed in groups of four because I had reasoned that the students would feel more comfortable in a small group and that one’s response to a question would generate responses from the others, rather than a one-on-one interview technique, during which the student might take cues for response from the tone of the
interview, or be unduly influenced to respond in a way that he/she might think would please the interviewer. However, I was also cognisant that an individual’s response could be influenced by other opinions in the group.

Having selected the potential schools, I gained permission from the Department of Education and Training (Victoria) and the Catholic Education Office to approach the principals of the schools. This was done in the form of a letter outlining my research, and sample interview questions, permission forms and other relevant data. (see Appendix 2).

I then made appointments to discuss the research with the person nominated by the principal. A preliminary visit was conducted, and telephone conversations were also conducted with the salient person who was overseeing the project from the school’s point of view. In three schools this person was the Head of English, and the other two, the teacher-librarian. I explained that I would prefer to use a structured interview technique and gave them a list of my suggested questions (see Appendix 2).

The teachers were asked to add or delete any questions that they did not think were relevant or did not wish to discuss during the interview. No one changed the questions.

I also requested that the teachers select students for the interviews, the criteria being that the students be ‘average’ readers who were articulate and would be able to speak confidently and give their opinions. I did not want above average readers or low-level readers because I wanted to obtain a perspective of the ‘average’ reader’s opinions as much as possible. I also requested that there be an equal number of males and females represented in each group where possible.

3.3.6 NARRATIVES FROM PROFESSIONAL AUTHORS

As I was gathering data from schools concerning author visits, I decided it was important to obtain the views of authors who visited schools. As they are professional writers, I thought that, rather than interview them or send them a questionnaire, they should to tell their own stories about school visits. As a guideline I suggested that they write no more than a thousand words on their ‘Dream’ schools and their ‘Nightmare’ schools. I selected four authors (two male, two female) whom I knew had done countless school visits and were very experienced in this area. I contacted them by email and they responded via email. I thought that the opinions of professional authors would have different perspective on the data collected from the schools, and add to my
findings on adolescent reading identities, particularly in regard to author visits.

4. CONCLUSION

A number of factors that influence the teaching of English literature have been examined in the dissertation. The background of cultural heritage, that is, why English literature is taught in schools, and in particular the influence that critical literary theorists have had on subject English, have shaped the way that English literature is presented to students today.

However, issues such as gender roles and literacy, critical literacy, culture, specific reader identities, the redefining of adolescent literacy and the potential for introduction of national standards for subject English can influence adolescents and their reading of fictional texts. The literature has indicated that middle-school students are at risk if they are turned off reading in secondary school. This can be due to many factors, from self-labelling as a slow reader to dislike of the texts and the way these are presented and assessed.

The impact of critical literacy in classrooms was shown to be of importance, particularly when linked to the middle-school students’ interests and reading preferences. Research by Alvermann (2001), and Moje, Readence, Young and Moore (2001) found that when students have ‘a voice’, can select their texts and are encouraged to give their own opinions, the level of reading interest has been shown to increase.

The issue of what middle-school students want to read in class was examined. Of importance is that the students should be able to choose their preferred texts. Personal choice for texts was found to be closely aligned with positive reading experiences (Moje, 1996; Atwell, 1998; Baker and Wigfield, 1999; Ivey, 1999; Ivey and Broaddus, 2001). Indeed, when students are encouraged to question and to voice their opinions, the reading experience was further enhanced. Alvermann (1998) and Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found that the students’ negative experiences were related to assigned reading and assessment of assigned reading.

Issues concerning the appropriate methodology for my research projects were discussed. For the two school-based research projects about boys and reading and author visits to schools, I decided that qualitative research using content analysis was
preferable. For the research project on author narratives, my narrative analysis employs discourse analysis that is concerned with linguistics in terms of lexical networks.

An outline of the key questions for my interviews in schools and the method of collecting and analysing the data was outlined. The authors were asked to write freely about their experiences in ‘Dream’ or ‘Nightmare’ schools.

From these three research projects, I hope to draw further conclusions and postulate recommendations that will be useful in the field of secondary school English and the teaching and promotion of fictional texts to adolescents.
CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH PROJECT 1: ADOLESCENT BOYS AND THEIR READING OF FICTIONAL TEXTS

PART 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 AN OVERVIEW

This project investigates adolescent boys' reading - beliefs, values, practices- in a middle-school cohort. I wanted to investigate whether there are differences in adolescent boys' reading identities in comparison to adolescent girls' reading identities. Furthermore, I wanted to examine whether there are differences between the reading preferences and reading habits of adolescent boys in an all-boy school and adolescent boys in co-educational schools. Taking this even further, I wanted to explore whether there are differences between adolescent boys reading preferences and reading habits in a private co-educational school, a government suburban socio-economic high school and a government rural high school.

In order to understand reading in regard to adolescent boys, it is useful to examine issues that can lead to an understanding of the world of adolescent boys, what it is to be an adolescent boy in the twenty-first century and whether this has any impact on reading performance.


From these readings, and from my own curiosity about boys and books, I shaped the following key research question to examine cohorts of adolescent boys and their reading identities.

1.2 KEY RESEARCH QUESTION

How does the issue of defining oneself as ‘masculine’ relate to adolescent boys’ reading of fictional texts, and issues of identity?
The view of masculinity adopted in this research is that cultural and social practices present and reinforce certain understandings of masculinity, which most boys seek to aspire to or master. There are a number of perspectives on masculinity. According to Mailer (1990) ‘Man is forever at war because he can never assume he has become a man’ (Mailer, 1990, cited in Segal, 1990, p.104). In other words, masculinity is in a state of uncertainty; it continually has to be proved. This begs the question: proved to whom? The answer seems to be: to other men, to partners, particularly women; and to oneself. Traditional masculinity is ‘based on three ‘dicta’ or musts: perform, protect, provide’ (West, 1996, p.45). All of these incorporate the idea of proving or testing. The male must prove that he is not female, and not homosexual. The idea of proving occurs in most of the western literature on masculinity (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Alloway & Gilbert, 2002). Boys appear to listen avidly for the signs of what society expects of them as they grow towards manhood. ‘And the leitmotif is testing’ (West 1996, p.5), in areas of physical strength and ‘toughness’. In terms of reading identity and reading of set texts in school, many boys find a dichotomy between the two. In their mindsets, concepts of masculinity and reading of set texts (and indeed, fictional texts) are not compatible.

1.3 SUBSIDIARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1. Within the English curriculum, what criteria do English teachers use for selection of set texts and are there differences in criteria in all-boy/all girl and co-educational schools?
2. How do adolescent boys perceive themselves as readers?
3. What is their opinion of their set texts?
4. What types of texts do adolescent boys enjoy reading?
5. How often do adolescent boys read?
6. How is literature promoted to adolescent boys in schools?

1.4 THEMES WHICH UNDERPIN MY RESEARCH PROJECT
My research data are categorised into the following themes: reading and masculinity, reading within the curriculum from teachers’ viewpoints, reading within the school curriculum from boys’ viewpoints, the reading preferences and reading habits of adolescent boys. My data were analysed within these themes, identified by my literature review, using content analysis.

1.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH
One major limitation was that I only used one example of a single-sex boys’ school.
Therefore the sample was not large. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the respondents, which I felt provided richer data for qualitative research than with questionnaires. Fifteen English teachers, five teacher-librarians and sixty students took part in this research project. The students were selected by their English teachers or teacher-librarians within a cohort of middle-school, that is, years 7, 8 and 9. The main requirement was that they were average readers and were articulate. The sample was restricted to five Victorian secondary schools, these being three private and two government schools.

On reflection, I could have conducted research in several all-boy schools and not just the one, in addition to the co-educational schools. There is potential for future studies to be conducted nationally using a number of all-boy schools.

PART 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review extends the literature review in the dissertation, both seeking to gain an understanding of adolescent boy’s academic performance, particularly in the subject English with relation to fictional texts.

2.1 THE BIG PICTURE

In Australia, Rowe (2000) in his analysis of the problem of boys and schooling in Australia, reported to the Australian Council of Education that:

- Boys are significantly more disengaged with schooling and more likely to be at risk of under-achievement - especially in literacy.
- Boys exhibit significantly greater behaviour problems in the classroom and at home (that is, anti-social behaviour, inattention, restlessness - particularly inattention).
- Fifty percent of consultations to paediatricians at tertiary referred hospitals relate to behavioural preliminaries. These include ADD and AD/HD, with a ratio of boys to girls of 9:1
- Twenty per cent of referrals relate to learning difficulties - predominantly consisting of boys’; poor achievement in literacy.
- Boys have a higher percentage of hearing problems which can impact negatively on early literacy learning and subsequent progress as well as on their behaviours.
- Boys report significantly less positive experiences of schooling in terms of enjoyment of school, perceived curriculum usefulness and teacher responsiveness.
• Boys are more likely to drop out of school prematurely. Recent Australian national estimates indicate that between 1994 and 1998, 30 per cent of boys failed to complete their secondary schooling as compared to 20 per cent of girls.
• Boys are subject to more bullying behaviours, expulsions; are more likely to participate in subsequent delinquent behaviours and alcohol and drug abuse during adolescence and are also five times more likely to commit suicide than girls (Rowe, 2003, p.3).

In Australia, lists of high achievers in high schools across all subjects show girls to be in the majority (NSW, 1999, 58 per cent girls, 42 per cent boys) Queensland’s girls ‘exelled boys in the top performance bands in 36 out of 45 subjects in 1998’ (Buckingham, 2000, p.30). South Australian girls excelled boys in the top bands in 27 out of 34 subjects in 1998.

In New Zealand, a study of gender differences in high schools with 1000 participants found ‘that the traditional disadvantage shown by females had largely disappeared and replaced by an emerging male disadvantage’ (Aitken, 1999, pp.6-7) West (2002) stated that ‘boys were falling behind girls in every country in the developed world except Japan’ (West, 2002, p.5).

The reality is that, for many boys, school is not a positive experience. Rowe (2000) quotes the following response from an articulate thirteen year old boy:

My English teacher wants me to write about my feelings, my History teacher wants me to give my opinions, and my Science teacher wants me to write my views about the environment. I don’t know what my feelings, opinions and views are and I can’t write about them’ (Rowe, 2000, p.3).

This is collaborated by the findings of Aitken (1999) in New Zealand who studied the problem of boys under-achievement in school, particularly in literacy. She said that:

Most teachers are women. It is argued that some schools place a greater emphasis on feminine values and that teachers adopt teaching styles and assessment practices that favour girls over boys. This may lead to differences in the performances of boys and girls at school that are unrelated to their ability. Changes in teaching practice may be needed to counter boys’ perception of literacy as a feminised subject’ (Aitken, 1999, p.9).
In research conducted in South Australia with 600 adolescent boys in 20 schools, Slade and Trent (2000) found that there was surprising uniformity in schools, whether co-educational, single-sex or demographically different. In summary they found that:

- Boys felt that school had little value for them, because the aims could seldom be achieved.
- Girls got a better deal from school than boys; so did boys who conformed and were quiet
- Teachers felt pessimistic about boys.
- Boys said that teachers didn’t ask, didn’t listen and didn’t care.
- Teachers were too old, too out of date in their ideas.
- Boys admitted that they were sometimes lazy and disorganized the workload at school interfered with things seen as important to boys, such as learning to drive, part-time employment, sport and social life.
- Boys found schoolwork repetitive, boring and not related to any reality. For boys, time at school meant copying notes, reviewing novels or doing maths that seemed unlikely to help them in any future activity

(Slade and Trent, 2000, p.11).

In the UK, a study by Bray, Gardner, Parsons, Downes and Hannan (1997) found that literacy curriculum changes have advantaged girls (who are traditionally more proficient at language and literacy skills) because:

- students have to read more carefully
- students have to provide a written-answer portfolio
- there are fewer short-answer tests
- there is much more emphasis on verbal reasoning
- even maths and science are more verbally demanding
- students need more subtlety in their answers to do well

Buckingham (2000) in her Australian study, agreed, finding that curriculum changes affect adolescent boys more than girls because:

- Boys mature later than girls
- On average, boys do not read as well as girls
- Boys’ concentration on verbal work is weaker than girls
- Boys feel that ‘we’re not good at this stuff’
- Boys get lost in as sea of words
- Boys get bored and misbehave
- Boys suffer from poor teaching skills more than girls do
- Boys get more negative attention when they are in co-education classrooms

(Buckingham, 2000, p.38).

2.2 ENGLISH AND ADOLESCENT BOYS

From examples cited in the bigger picture (2.1) it would seem that boys are disadvantaged in school due to a number of factors, one being their concepts concerning the subject English. In a UK study in Shropshire, that investigated adolescent boys’ views of the subject English, Steward (1999) found that boys see English as a female subject because:

- English is about ‘Who am I?’
- English explores feelings.
- English demands personal reflection.
- Most secondary English teachers are female.
- Reading and writing need a lot of time at the desk.
- Pretty presentations of written work get higher marks.
- Attention to character and empathy are not male interests.
- The requirements of English assignments can be ‘fuzzy’ and hard to interpret.
- Teachers expect boys to be worse at English.

(Steward, 1999).

However, the UK report on Boys and English looked at changing teachers’ attitudes and behaviours, arguing that if there was more focus on pupils needs and interests, and if teachers worked harder to broaden boys’ interests in reading, boys read almost as well as girls (Department for Education, 1993).

However, Martino’s (1995) interviews with secondary school boys in Western Australia demonstrated that the problem is more complex. Indeed, Martino (1995) suggested that homophobia and a general feeling of being described as non-masculine, may feature in regulating boys’ engagement with English.

Of consideration is the fact that adolescent boys did not suddenly metamorphose
overnight into this framework of thinking. For example Orlandi (1996) found that primary aged boys in grade 2 considered reading was for girls and that writing stories was ‘dumb’. This is at odds with school practices that have come to be associated with literature and responses to literature. For example, many familiar school literacy practices require that students accomplish the process of self-disclosure, introspection, empathic response, and personalised and creative expression, as postulated by Hunter (1988), Gilbert (1989), Patterson (1997), Alloway and Gilbert (1998) and Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert and Muspratt (2002). Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity, according to Gilbert and Gilbert (2001), ultimately refuses to be regulated or controlled.

However, according to Alloway and Gilbert (1998), the complex relationship between class, ethnicity and masculinity may mean that privileged groups of boys are more likely to be encouraged to accept forms of school regulation in anticipation of career and professional rewards in the post-schooling period. The aspect of private schooling in both all-boy and a co-educational secondary school in regard to masculinity and class, the subject English, and in particular, reading, were investigated in my research project.

### 2.3 ADOLESCENT BOYS AND LITERACY

As Alloway and Gilbert (1998) argue, demographic trends in literacy tests have raised questions about the way literacy is viewed in competitive, individualistic terms, as well as in its role in stereotyping of groups. In fact, Alloway and Gilbert (1998, and Alloway et al, 2002) believe that test results are misleadingly taken as indicative of a ‘crisis’ in literacy and contend that questions should be asked about consistent performance differences between particular groups, such as those between boys and girls, and different socio-economic areas. Their concern is that poor literacy test results are equated with national economic and social decline and the breakdown of what Alloway and Gilbert (1998) identify as ‘an historic [Anglo-Saxon] cultural hegemony, rather than with any valuable measure of young people’s competence with the literacies of their homes and communities’ (Alloway and Gilbert, 1998, p.249).

Four Australian state education departments (NSW, Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia) have released gender-based analyses of senior secondary results for subject English, which showed that girls significantly outperformed boys in terms of school-based literacy. The NSW data tracked the interplay between gender and socio-economic ranking.
I agree with the arguments put forward by Alloway and Gilbert (1998; Alloway, et al, 2002) because their research underpins many of my own research questions. Alloway and Gilbert (1998) examined why particular groups performed at consistently lower levels than others, these being boys in comparison to girls in literacy-related tasks. Furthermore, Alloway and Gilbert (1998) posed the following questions which are pertinent to for my research project.

Why do boys with the lowest socio-economic rankings perform least well of any group? How is it that boys with the highest socio-economic ranking perform at lower levels than girls from the same group, but at higher levels than girls who live in families where fewer social and economic resources are available to them? (Alloway and Gilbert, 1998, p.253).

2.4 ADOLESCENT BOYS AND READING

2.4.1 ATTITUDES TO READING

There have been many studies on boys’ attitudes to reading. If reading attitudes are developed at an early age as suggested by Gilbert and Gilbert (1998), Love and Hamston (2001), and Power (2001), it is important to examine some of the findings.

McKenna, Kear and Ellsworth (1995) reported on a US national survey of reading attitudes. In this study, 18,185 children from 38 USA states were surveyed from years 1-6, with 50% boys and 50% girls in the cohort. They found that attitudes to reading declined gradually through primary school years, that a negative reading attitude to recreational reading correlated with lack of reading ability, and that boys possessed a less favourable attitude to reading than girls.

A UK survey by Millard (1997) found that there were gender differences in reading in the home, and these influenced attitudes towards reading at school. Furthermore, Millard (1997) argued that there were three major areas of influence in reading attitude: the peer group in school, the friendship group and the family.

Nichol’s (1994) Australian study offered insights as to why adolescent boys were disenchanted with reading. The report suggested that boys were specific about texts they preferred most, citing that they did not like fictional texts, reading and physical activity were mutually exclusive, reading was associated with conforming to authority, and an interest in mathematics and reading were seen as mutually exclusive (Nichols, 1994).
Not all adolescent boys have a negative attitude to reading. A study by Love and Hamston (2001) investigated the reading behaviour of one group of Australian adolescent boys who identified themselves as committed readers. Predominantly, their research focused on a cohort of boys in a private Catholic secondary college catering for boys from year 5-12. The aim of this research, according to Love and Hamston (2001) was twofold. Firstly, to offer a detailed description of the reading behaviour of boys who self-identified as committed readers. Secondly, to provide parents and educators with this data so they could design reading programs to meet the needs of a range of boys. All of the 91 respondents indicated that their families, teachers and key people in their communities played a significant role in their development as readers.

This is congruent with the framework proposed by Luke (1995) in which reading is viewed as social practice. In this view, students bring to and take from their literacy experiences the resources and practices that they have appropriated in their homes and communities as well as their schools. Indeed, by shifting the focus from psychological to sociological models of reading, Luke (1995) identified reading as a set of social practices deeply embedded in particular cultures where ‘one learns to do with reading what one is taught to do and what is valued and encouraged and useful in cultural interpretative communities and cites’ (Luke, 1995, p.175).

2.4.2 CHANGING PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN THE TEACHING OF READING

The trend towards dissatisfaction with reading as adolescents move into middle school and beyond has been documented (Kos, 1991; George, Stevenson, Thomason and Beane, 1992; Morris, Ervin and Conrad, 1996; Worthy and McKool, 1996; Beane, 1999, Bean, Bean and Bean, 1999; Ivey, 1999).

However, there is a growing body of research on middle school instructional contexts that suggest differences can be made by curriculum changes and responsive teachers who can engage their students, particularly boys. Through a formative experience, Reinking and Watkins (2000) were able to document how teachers modified a whole-class book review project to increase struggling readers’ participation. These teachers made a wide range of books available of varying levels and interests, acceptable for review. Furthermore, these teachers effectiveness was linked to creating culturally responsive instruction that not only reflected the students’ cultural backgrounds, but also the social and political forces that shaped their literacy development.
The theme of student ownership has also been promoted as a defining feature of successful reading. Atwell (1998) suggested that student motivation was linked to two main features, a meaning-centred English curriculum which was negotiated by the students and a student-responsive culture that honoured students’ voices and their need for self-expression. Alvermann (2002) also focused on the importance of keeping adolescents’ interests and needs foremost when designing literacy instruction and middle school and higher school levels. She argued that:

Teachers must address issues of self-efficacy and student engagement with a variety of texts (textbooks, hypermedia and digital texts) in diverse settings, while also attending to the literacy demands of subject area classes, to struggling readers, to issues of critical literacy, and to participatory instructional processes that engage students in their learning.


However, West (2002) argued that the problem is more complex. He contended that in particular, Australian adolescent boys do not respond to teaching methods that demand they express their feelings and thoughts about the texts they have read. Inserted, he suggested that English teachers change their questioning strategies when directing instruction at boys. For instance, ‘Give me seven single-word descriptions of this character.’ West (2002) reasoned that adolescent boys think more logically and in a directly focused way and respond to this style of questioning rather than the traditional ‘write a brief portrait of the main character in this text’ approach.

In a USA survey by Finders (1997), it was found that the students played out what Finders termed ‘a literate underlife’ outside the school curriculum. Students, particularly boys, read, wrote and discussed issues that were not sanctioned in the school classroom. Relatedly, in another study by Alvermann, Young, Green and Wisenbaker (1999), students who participated in after-school book discussion clubs used these opportunities to develop social relationships and explore social positions to explore what they had read.

2.4.3 THE STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES

Ivey and Broaddus (2001), found that students in their Virginia, USA study could and wanted to participate in literate activities, but were without appropriate support or motivation to do so in schools. Furthermore, Ivey and Broaddus argued that while adolescents’ perspectives are valued in literary research, their voices are not included in
most studies.

This is congruent with the opinion of Alvermann in her 1998 study. She elaborated on the positioning of students’ perspectives in research with this commentary from Erikson and Schultz (1992, pp.467-468) by stating:

If the student is visible at all in a research study, he is usually viewed from the perspective of …the educators’ interests and way of seeing … Rarely is the perspective of the student explored. Classroom research does not ask what the student is up to, nor does it … question whether ‘failing’ or ‘mastering’ or being ‘unmotivated’ … adequately captures what the student might be about in daily classroom encounters with curriculum

(Alvermann, 1998, p.360)

When students’ voices are included in research reports, Hinchman (1998) argues that their opinions take a back seat to teachers’ voices and researchers’ opinions about what they said and did, and selected comments from a few students are used to supposedly reflect the opinions of their larger body of peers in most of the research on students in the classroom.

While I agree with Hinchman’s view, and I wanted to foreground the adolescent boys’ opinions on their reading preferences and habits in my own research, I was unable to include the opinions of a large number due to the scope of my work, time limits and other restraints. It was important to detect if there were any strong commonalities in their perspectives, but also I wanted to identify issues on which the boys differed from one another in respect to motivating contexts for reading. In order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the situation, I believed that I also needed the opinions of the English teachers and teacher-librarians.

2.4.4 THE READING PREFERENCES OF BOYS


Because adolescent boys tend to read for more pragmatic reasons (Bunbury, 1995), it
sometimes assumed that all boys enjoy non fiction, comics and sporting magazines more than fiction. This is dependent on whether the boy is a ‘committed reader’. Millard (1997) defined committed readers as those ‘who seek to read whenever they get an opportunity at any time in the day’ (Millard, 1997, p.40). For committed readers, popular leisure activities, according to Love and Hamston (2001), were the reading of fictional texts (92%) followed by watching television (91%). Furthermore, Love and Hamston (2001) found that the reading of fiction books for leisure was complemented by the sustained reading of a wide range of other types of materials which included newspapers, magazines, the Internet and CD-ROMs. However, fiction was overwhelmingly indicated to be the favourite type of material for leisure. Of interest in this study was that the boys could identify elements of their reading as a social practice that had been scaffolded (Mercer, 1994) through various social interactions such as school, parents, and other community influences.

Wilhelm and Smith’s (2002) USA, year-long study supported by the Spencer Foundation, involved forty-nine 12th grade boys of different ethnicity, social class and school success at four diverse sites in three states: an urban high school; a comprehensive suburban high school; a rural school; and a private all-boys school. Wilhelm and Smith (2002) claimed that the private all-boy students appeared to read more fictional texts than boys in co-educational schools, particularly the boys from the suburban and rural high schools.

Overall, Wilhelm and Smith’s (2002) study found that many of the boys from all of the schools in their study valued the information they took from their reading, but not necessarily the experience of reading. Most of the boys expressed a dramatic contrast between school reading and life reading. For instance, school reading was assigned, unconnected to their interests, too long and hard, and involved mostly literature; life reading was freely chosen, built on their interests, and was usually shorter texts that they felt competent to read (Wilhelm and Smith, 2002).

However, studies by Sarland (1991), Purves (1991), McKenna et al. (1995), Lewis (1998), Nixon (1999), Worthy et al. (1999), Alvermann and Hagood (2000), and Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found the subject matter in fictional texts varied considerably to that which is enjoyed by girls. Boys are reported to enjoy mystery and adventure (Sarland 1991). Furthermore, according to Sarland (1991), boys read and identify themselves as the hero in the fictional text, whereas girls identify with the heroine in a fictional text. In other words, boys put themselves into the story as they read in an
active way, whereas girls identify with the story from the sidelines as a passive observer. Other studies found that boys like to read scary stories, magazines and comic books (Worthy, et. al, 1999).

In co-educational schools, according to Sarland (1991), English teachers often select texts that will appeal to boys more than girls, the premise being that girls will comply and read these texts whereas boys will not comply if they are not interested.

Furthermore, Reed and Gerlach (1993) postulated that there is a discrepancy between teachers and students, particularly boys, in their selection of texts. They conclude:

> We realise that teachers’ perceptions of what literary works are appropriate for in-class study and formal out-of-class assignments offer differ significantly from the choices adolescents will make, when they have the opportunity for self-selection. However, as teachers, we realise that what we do in the classroom will influence what students do on their own. Further research might look at the discrepancy in the decisions that teachers and students make in order to shed more light on how student reading can be aligned with the kids of books promoted by teachers who insist on including for school reading only works that have literary merit.

(Reed and Gerlach, 1993, p.55).

### 2.5 SUMMARY

The prevalent literature indicates that there are notions of masculinity that affect boys’ attitudes to school and learning. Subject English is often regarded as ‘a girls’ subject’ because feelings and self-disclosures need to be expressed about the texts vocally in class discussions and when undertaking written assignment work; many boys do not like expressing their feelings.

The findings from the literature review suggest that there are variances in boys’ reading patterns depending on their schooling and family attitude to reading. Furthermore, it is argued that boys’ attitudes to reading is different from that of girls, and that set texts are often selected by English teachers which appeal to boys rather than to girls.

### PART 3: THE RESEARCH PROJECT

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

My purpose in choosing to investigate adolescent boys and their reading of fictional texts, their attitudes to reading and their reading preferences and habits, arose from my
curiosity about boys and reading from my perspective as an author of adolescent fiction. Publishers had approached me with requests to write fiction for primarily for boys. This led me to ponder what exactly boys needed in their fiction. Because there were many discrepancies and unanswered questions, I then decided to explore the issue for myself as a research project for my doctorate.

3.1.1 MY KEY RESEARCH QUESTION

How does the issue of defining oneself as ‘masculine’ relate to adolescent boys’ reading of fictional texts, and issues of identity?

3.1.2 QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. How is reading organised within the school curriculum?
2. What criteria do you use for selection of set texts?
3. How do you promote fictional texts to the middle-school boys?
4. How do you think boys identify themselves as readers?

3.1.3 QUESTIONS FOR BOYS

1. What is your opinion of reading novels?
2. What types of novels do you enjoy reading?
3. How often do you read novels?
4. What other things do you like to read?

3.2 METHODOLOGY

Prior to this research project, I had visited numerous secondary schools in Australia as an author and held numerous discussions with teachers about adolescent boys and reading. Because I found schools to be the best places for my data collection, I decided to use five Victorian secondary schools as my research sites, as discussed in the dissertation. To reiterate, the five selected schools were:

- St John’s independent all-boy Catholic college
- St Ann’s independent all-girl Catholic college
- Churchton independent co-educational college
- Countryside government rural high school
- Northdown government suburban high school
3.2.1 Method of Obtaining Data

As outlined in the dissertation, each school principal was approached, permission was obtained, and I visited each school again to discuss the project with the English teachers and teacher librarians who would be involved. The teachers selected the participants, a cohort of middle-school average readers who were articulate at expressing their attitudes, values and beliefs concerning the reading of fiction. I used the same schools, teachers and librarians for research project two, author visits. I also used the same cohorts of students, but for this research project I read the transcripts from the same interviews for different information that pertained particularly to boys and reading.

The interviews were conducted in each school over a period of eight weeks, either in the staff room, the Head of English’s office or the library. The interviews with the teachers and librarians were held individually or in small groups. The student interviews were conducted in groups of four in each group, and in their year levels. I realised that allowing a group situation could affect their responses, but I anticipated that a relaxed atmosphere with a small group would generate rich discussion, rather than an intense one-to-one situation.

The participants were selected by the teachers, the criteria being that they be average readers who were articulate. In the all-boy school the librarian sat in an adjacent room with a glass partition, but in the other interviews the students were with me in the staff room or library without a teacher in the group, although present in a corner of the room doing other work. The students were seated around a table. I sketched their seating positions and names, and when I asked questions it was in a clockwise order. I always named the person to whom I was initially directing a question so that when I later listened to the tapes, I could usually identify who was speaking.

The students knew I was an author, but I had a strategy for dealing with this factor (see section, Methodology in the dissertation). Interviews were taped during each session and lasted no more than two hours, although the teachers and librarians were invited to send follow-up comments if they so wished. Only one did this, the others preferring to wait until they were sent written transcripts of the interviews for comment, changes or additions.

3.2.2 Method of Data Analysis

In order to analyse my data, I have returned to the two principles as cited by Alvermann, Hinchman Moore, Phelps and Waff (1998). The first principle is that
adolescents want to be viewed as already possessing knowledge and skills and plans for the future. The second principle is that they want to participate in literacy practices suited to the way they live their daily lives. Building on this premise, Moje Young, Readence and Moore (2000) have established that literacy plays a vital part in the development of adolescents’ individual and social identities.

Adolescent boys’ and negative reading identities that are coupled with notions of masculinity have been well documented in world-wide studies (Rotundo, 1993; McKenna, Kear and Ellsworth, 1995; Worthy and McKool, 1996; Dutton, 1996; Millard, 1997; Steward, 1999; Buckingham, 2000; Wilhelm and Smith, 2002; McQueen and Henwood, 2002), and Australian studies (Nichols, 1994; Browne and Fletcher, 1995; Martino, 1995; Teese, 1995; Hearne, 1996; Ujiie and Krashen, 1996; Alloway and Gilbert, 1998; Barry, 1999; West, 1999; Power, 2001; Love and Hamston 2001; Rowan, Knobel, Bigum and Lankshear, 2002).

Gender and traditional masculinities can constrain and influence everyday life, particularly in school, in subject English and in reading (McQueen and Henwood, 2002; Rowan, Knobel, Bigum and Lankshear, 2002). However, research by Barry (1999), James and Johnson (1999), Love and Hamston (2001) and Wilhelm and Smith (2002) discovered that certain cohorts of boys, particularly in all-boy schools, had extremely positive identities that pertained to masculinity and reading.

In order to examine the data, I listened to the interview tapes, then transcribed these word for word onto my computer. The transcripts were replicated exactly from the interview tapes (see appendix 3 for an example of interviews with a cohort of adolescent boys).

As my key research question was concerned with adolescent boys’ reading of fictional texts and issues of identity, I examined the issues concerning adolescent boys’ reading preferences, set texts in classrooms, and the reading habits of adolescent boys.

In order to establish some findings that would best answer my research questions, I coded the responses from the teachers and students. A sample of the coding that was generated from my research question in regard to the responses of a cohort of the boys is included as Appendix 3. I wanted to discover whether the teachers, school librarians students had different opinions about the reading of fictional texts and issues of identity.
3.3 FINDINGS: ENGLISH TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

3.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Fifteen English teachers and five teacher-librarians were interviewed.

The responses have been divided into two sections, these being issues concerning school organisation and the English curriculum, and the selection of set texts. In order to find out the answers to these issues, I interviewed the Head of English, teacher-librarians and cohorts of English teachers as outlined in the following table.

TABLE 4: English teachers and teacher-librarians in this research project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St John’s Boys’ Catholic College</td>
<td>Pam, Head of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kirstin, teacher librarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two English teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Ann’s Girls’ Catholic College</td>
<td>Faye, Head of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mary, teacher librarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three English teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchton College</td>
<td>Ewan, Head of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kate, teacher-librarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two English teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northdown High</td>
<td>Laura, teacher librarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two English teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countryside High</td>
<td>Meg, Head of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melanie, teacher librarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two English teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.2 HOW IS READING ORGANIZED IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM?

Of particular interest in St John’s, the all-boy Catholic college, was the introduction of middle school vertical streaming for Years 8, 9 and 10. It was considered a radical step for the school to take, with annual surveys of parental opinions, student opinions, and staff opinions. Year 7 are not included in the vertical streaming, as it was felt that they were settling into their new school and needed to remain as Year 7 for their classes. Faye, the Head of English, explained:

*In a Level 5 class you’d mostly have year 8 students and in a level 6, because we work from the Curriculum Standard Frameworks, you’d probably get 9s and 10s in that class. Oh, and there are some Level 6 units that operate with a couple of year 8s and 9s and 10s obviously, and some clever year 8 boys. Sometimes it becomes an organisational problem and a staffing*
problem, but overall it’s working well.

In order to discover if there were any major differences between St John’s curriculum organisation and philosophy, and St Ann’s all-girl Catholic school, the English teachers and librarian from St Ann’s were asked to give an overview of their English curriculum. Pam (Head of English) explained that:

There is no vertical streaming, but we offer a wide choice of set texts. Year 7 has a list of about six or seven texts, but which ones each individual teacher chooses to run with is their own business. Years 8, 9 and 10 do a series of electives. Each semester there’s a core term where there is a set text and then the electives ... we focus on integrated themes, like Families and Relationships because that’s what seems to interest most of these girls.

All schools have to adhere to the Victorian Curriculum and Standards Framework for English, but the flexibility is within the approaches that each school can utilise for what it perceives as the optimum organisation for achieving the outcomes as prescribed in the CSF. Ewan, Head of English, spoke briefly about the teaching of literature in the English curriculum at Churchton College, a private co-educational boarding school. There is no vertical streaming.

Instead of a class set we’re going to do clusters, we’ll choose three books and we’ve got five classes with twenty two kids in each class, so we’ll maybe cover six titles Reasonably contemporary. We’ve had to change. We don’t want the tyranny of the class novel, but we’re a private school, so what should we do for our clientele? We want our students to have rigour in their reading, and so do their parents.

The accountability of the independent schools to ‘teach’ literature, as demonstrated by the above excerpts, is understandable in that parents are paying fees so that their children will receive a ‘good’ education. Indeed, it can be assumed that government schools want rigour from their students too, and that the parents justifiably will want their children to experience the optimum in educational opportunities. This is an excerpt from an interview with Laura, the school librarian at Northdown High School which is classified as a disadvantaged school due to its locale being in the centre of a lower
socio-economic area surrounded by public housing. In order to meet the needs of the students, the curriculum is flexible.

Basically, our curriculum is concerned with literature enrichment. I work closely with the English co-ordinator, and our big aim is to get the students to enjoy reading and to borrow books. We have some exceptional students, don’t get me wrong, but the reading level of most of our students is very low, particularly the boys. They don’t read much. So it’s really hard to pick a novel as a text. We can’t afford to make a mistake because we have to keep the set texts for a few years. We have the Book Hire because some of the parents can’t afford to buy books.

The expectations from Northdown High teachers appeared realistic as did the expectations of teachers at Countryside High. This is a sprawling high school set in a farming environment, so there are itinerant workers who arrive for seasonal work, at some local small industries, in addition to students whose families have been in the area on dairy farms for generations. Melanie the teacher-librarian said:

Well, in regard to the curriculum, we are aware that we have this wide range of student capabilities, and that goes across all subjects. We are in the process of introducing vertical streaming next year because we think it will work much better for the fluctuating student population. Reading mightn’t fit into some of these boys’ extra curricular activities, but somehow we have to make it fit into their lifestyle. We have to actually teach some of them to read, and we have to make it enjoyable, and we have to make it be seen as the cool thing to do.

The structure of the English curriculum within schools in terms of vertical streaming for ability or mixed ability classes and how this could impact on the students’ reading habits and appreciation of literature is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is interesting to note the rationale behind each school’s choice of the way English classes are organised.

3.3.3 WHAT CRITERIA DO YOU USE FOR SELECTION OF SET TEXTS?

Of significance for this research project are the criteria that English teachers use to
select the set texts for years 7, 8 and 9. As explained in the literature review, Sarland (1991) suggested that five elements came under consideration, these being the institution (school), the teachers, the students, the subject (English), and the book. These elements are often in conflict. For example, as demonstrated by the above discussion, it is apparent that even within the five schools selected in this thesis, the school demographics, culture, organisation and emphasis on variant components of the curriculum could conflict with how each teacher views the teaching of literature and what set texts should be taught, particularly in regard to boys.

The dilemma of choosing the set texts was emphasised by Kirstin, the school librarian at St John’s, the all-boy Catholic college.

Behind the scenes, we’ve had a lot of discussion about making the effort to try and find books that are suitable for our units, and also that have a readability level that cover all spectrums. Also they have to be books that the teachers want to teach and we think the boys are going to want to read. Again, we like to look at male protagonists and male authors where possible. We have a bias for that because of the role modelling. Also, when we select set texts, we’re mindful that boys like a good action story with plenty of dramas. For year 8 we’ve got Cage of Butterflies, that’s Brian Caswell, Year 9 is Archie Fuscillo’s book Sparring with Shadows, John Marsden’s Tomorrow When the War Began.

Mary, the librarian at St Ann’s all-girl Catholic college, and Fran, the Head of English, also identified significant dilemmas relating to text choice:

Mary: I give the English staff a range of books, the teachers read them, then they can make a decision and get in new class sets. We have set texts with high interest and low reading levels so the teacher can steer the girls who are weaker to those texts. Examples, Diary of Anne Frank for year 7, Bridge to Wiseman’s Cove for year 8. Year 9, Queen Cat, Carmel and St Jude Get a Life.

Fran: It’s hard to get texts that hold their interest. Like, in year 9 they talk and recommend books to each other. At the moment
they are fascinated by a book called The Day After Forever. But it’s not good literature and we wouldn’t have it for a set text because we have to set a text that’s a good female role model for them. And, of course, it has to satisfy the parents and have a certain literary rigour.

The flexibility for teachers to select and teach the texts is an important factor that emerged from the St Ann’s narratives. Would the set texts and methods of teaching these be as flexible in Churchton college? And due to the co-educational nature of the school, is it possible to promote both male and female protagonist and heroines when the set texts are selected? Ewan, Head of English, had this to say:

_We’re moving into something new, clusters instead of class lots. We’ll take three novels per class and the students will get a choice rather than doing the one class set. More contemporary novels, but I’m arguing to retain a classic or two. Shakespeare. Concerning the boys, I would argue that our boys’ reading stamina is down more than it was ten years ago. And we know that many boys don’t particularly want to read a particular novel. Certain boys will tell me the challenging books crap. And if I give trash books as set texts, I get boys saying ‘This is rubbish. Give me something with substance’._

Churchton College is a private co-educational school, and Ewan’s preference for set texts that are ‘classics’ is based on his notions of how literature should be taught. Are the perceived needs the same as for a government rural high school in relation to boys and set texts? Meg, the Head of English teacher from Countryside High, described the situation in her school:

_Meg: As an English staff, we do the reading and make the list, and then at the departmental meeting, we choose the books. We actually do slant them towards the boys. There’s a culture here of ‘only wimps read’. We have a lot of kids from families where reading isn’t a priority, and the kids who are only here for a few months then move on. We try not to make it boring. We select short books with a lot of action for years 7 and 8, like Mike and Gaz and for year 9, Deadly Unna._
Obviously under consideration are reading levels and abilities coupled with the knowledge that reading is not a high priority in most families. Reflecting back to the similarities concerning Countryside College’s reluctant readers and the Northdown High school librarian’s Laura’s perceptions of her students as reluctant readers, are there any comparisons in the selection of set texts?

For us, the problem is not knowing whether the kids actually read the whole book or just read the start, a bit of the middle and the end if left to their own devices. We try to choose books that the boys will enjoy. The teachers like to read a chapter to them, then work on it. The reading levels of a lot of these kids are very low, they don’t read much. Some of them have told me that they don’t really like the set books on the book lists. Personally I loved Lee Spain and Brocky’s Bananagram, and Two Weeks with the Queen, but they didn’t. It’s really hard to pick a novel as a set text. I’ve often wondered if maybe there shouldn’t be set texts, but how would we teach literature?

It is apparent that all of the English teachers and the librarians in the five schools spend a significant amount of time selecting a variety of texts that they believe will appeal to their students. Some had specific criteria, such as the male role modelling at St John’s, and easy-to read, interesting books for the boys at Countryside High. Churchton College had the dilemma of trying to please the weaker readers and yet challenge the stronger ones, at the same time striving not to let standards of teaching English become less rigorous. Northdown High had a problem with interest levels and set texts due to a prevailing attitude that reading isn’t cool with most of the boys and sub-groups of girls.

3.3.4 HOW DO YOU PROMOTE FICTIONAL TO MIDDLE-SCHOOL BOYS?

In the two government co-educational schools, the English teachers and teacher-librarians were aware that many of the boys did not like reading fiction. The staff had perceived that these boys viewed reading as a ‘girl thing’. If the boys were reading, they preferred non-fiction, sporting or car magazines or comics. The teacher-librarians from Countryside High and Northdown High were aware that certain book covers attracted boys to actually pick up a novel during class time in the library. Kaye, the teacher-librarian from Churchton, the private co-educational college, described measures at her school to establish a positive physical environment for reading:
Reading is a challenge in a boarding school context. We’ve got day school kids who read voluminously here and boarders who like to read but the lifestyle makes it hard to find a quiet place. There’s people round you all the time. So we try to do a variety of things. Displays in the library, nice armchairs, visiting authors.

St John’s, the all-boy school, promoted authors as male role models and featured science fiction and fantasy writers such as Robert Jordan and David Eddings. Kirstin, the teacher-librarian, encouraged the boys to compile their own fiction data bases of their favourite authors. Reading was promoted as a masculine pursuit, with fathers and male staff members encouraged to talk about their own personal reading of novels.

Laura from Northdown High gave mugs of hot chocolate to students who frequented the library, conducted book clubs where food was a feature, and tried to entice the boys to see the library as a user-friendly place to read or borrow, whereas Melanie for Countryside High found that most boys would not come to the library voluntarily because it was not ‘cool’ and threatening to the boys’ concepts of masculinity.

Meg, the teacher-librarian from St Ann’s, said that girls frequented the library but their choice of novels were usually not ‘the types of books read in class’. They preferred romantic, relationship-orientated books.

### 3.3.5 **HOW DO YOU THINK THE BOYS PERCEIVE THEMSELVES AS READERS?**

The responses from both Countryside High and Northdown High indicated that reading was not a cool activity for most of the boys. The teachers perceived that most of these boys had a ‘poor’ reading identity, although there were some very good readers in middle-school. It was difficult to entice boys into the school library because many boys did not want to be labelled as readers. Reading for most was a ‘gay’ or ‘girl’ thing, although Laura from Northdown High found that food broke the barrier. The boys insisted that they were just coming for the hot chocolate or the food, and then might borrow a novel or sit and read the newspapers. Laura also wanted to bring in ‘cool’ male authors as role models for the boys.

*I asked Robert Trickey. He used to be a teacher, and I’d heard through my teacher network that he’s great with the kids. He self-publishes his books and they’re a bit rude. The boys liked him*
and borrowed his books. Now I’m thinking of Andy Griffiths for years seven and eight and John Marsden for year nine and ten, if we can afford them. Basically our big aim is to get the boys in particular to enjoy reading and get interested in borrowing books. The author has to be able to switch them onto reading and be funny and entertaining.

The responses from Churchton College indicated that many boys did not prioritise reading novels highly, but family and school expectations influenced their reading attitudes and behaviours to a certain degree. However, they did not appear to regard the reading of novels as ‘gay’ or ‘a girl thing’. Rather it was something you did to improve your education and achieve better academic results. The teachers believed that the boys had a positive reading identity.

The all-boy school’s attitude to the reading of novels was, in the main, positive, according to Kirstin the teacher-librarian and Faye, the Head of English. Much work had been instigated throughout the school curriculum and school ethos that ‘real men read’. None of the teachers thought that the boys regarded reading as ‘uncool’ or ‘a girl thing’. The male role modelling of authors was also paramount. Kirstin stated:

*My focus of course is reading, but to have real, live male authors come to our school and tell them about how they got their ideas, like John did for Tomorrow When the War Began, it just blew them away. His books just walked off the shelves and still do.*

The teachers at St John’s all-boy school believed that the majority of their boys had a high reading identity, even if some were not classified as ‘good’ readers. Reading for them was a non-threatening and masculine activity.

### 3.4 FINDINGS: STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES.

#### 3.4.1 INTRODUCTION

Cohorts of middle school students at each school were interviewed in groups. The three co-educational school groups had three boys and three girls in each group. At St John’s all-boy school I interviewed three groups of middle school boys. As a comparison, I interviewed three groups of middle-school girls at St Ann’s, the all-girl school, to compare their responses with the all-boys’ school in a single-sex school setting. I interviewed a total of 30 middle-school boys and 30 middle-school girls.
The middle-school boys were interviewed in the library where the teacher-librarian was present in an adjoining room with a glass panel, whereas the groups of girls were interviewed in the staff room without a teacher present. As the teacher-librarian was unable to hear the boys’ responses, her presence nearby did not appear to influence the interviews in any way. While it would have been optimal for all interviews to be conducted in the same environments, this was not possible due to school organisation.

The following table shows the schools and the year levels of the boys interviewed.

**TABLE 5: Middle school boys in the study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Year 7</th>
<th>Year 8</th>
<th>Year 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St John’s all-boy school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchton College</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northdown High</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countryside College</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following table shows the schools and year levels of girls interviewed.

**TABLE 6: Middle school girls in the study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Year 7</th>
<th>Year 8</th>
<th>Year 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St Ann’s all-girl school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchton College</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northdown High</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countryside College</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**3.4.2 WHAT IS YOUR OPINION OF READING NOVELS?**

Findings here are based on the responses to interview questions including those conceived by me about types of novels read, frequency of reading and reading preferences, as well as questions explicitly conceived with the students’ attitudes to reading.

The boys from St Johns, the all-boy Catholic college, stated that ‘they did not
particularly enjoy reading their class novels because the characters didn’t relate to their own lives’ and ‘the books are boring’. Given a choice, the boys stated that they liked reading comics and magazines. If they chose a novel it was usually ‘science fiction/fantasy by Jordan or Eddings’, ‘adventure by Marsden/Paulsen’ or ‘horror by Pike’. The boys were cognisant that these would not be chosen as set texts because ‘they weren’t good enough’ and would not fit into the themes and units. According to Daniel, Year 8, there were’ books to read for fun and books that you had to read for school’.

Daniel: Well, we’ve done Strange Objects by Gary Crew. Every night I just went to bed and read it for half an hour because I had to. I would never choose to read that book. I think they chose it for us to do because we’re doing that subject, Science Fiction. I never have time to sit around and read books. Like, I go to bed about 10.30 and I just doze off before I read the pages, except I went a bit earlier when I had to read Strange Objects, like half an hour.

Mike, in Year 9 was in the higher vertical stream.

Mike: We’re doing To Kill a Mocking Bird because the theme for the semester is Gendered Fiction, like males and females and racism and stuff. It’s a pig of a story. Boring. I’m in the higher vertical group. I read it in the lounge so I could half-listen to what’s happening on TV and stuff. Like, when you get to high school, people sort of stop reading. I used to read a lot but now I don’t do it so much.

The boys from St John’s liked to read novels of their own choosing if and when there was time, the genres being science fiction, fantasy, adventure, crime and horror. All of the boys stated that they did not read as frequently as they had when at primary school, mainly due to pressures of homework, the reading of non-fiction for assignments, and other multimedia (computers, television, computer games) that were a distraction from reading. None of the boys said that they enjoyed their set texts. The boys were aware that the school promoted reading and they openly discussed the issue of role modelling - male authors invited to the school, male teachers with novels in class, parent newsletters and meetings that promoted reading as a masculine thing to do. None of the boys I interviewed said that they considered reading novels as an unmasculine activity.
These are the responses to the questions about set texts and leisure reading with a cohort of year eight boys from Churchton College, the private co-educational college that has both day students and boarders.

Greg: Well, last year we didn’t get regular ones {set texts}, We had Cage of Butterflies and I didn’t like it. And we read The Words of Stone and I don’t know who wrote it, and like when I read books I don’t actually look at the authors, I just read it. I don’t like reading a lot, but when I find a book and I like reading it, then I read the series.

Harry: I don’t like reading except the magazines, oh, and joke books, so Mum and Dad might get me one of those. And I’ve read a couple of pages of Foxspell because we have to. Last year I got through Cage of Butterflies, well I skipped bits but it was pretty okay, and Bridge to Wiseman’s Cove was a bit boring. They {the books} need more action or humour or be short or something. I don’t mind thinking about reading, I just don’t like doing it. Especially when I know there’s going to be some sort of test.

One major issue was the testing of set texts and the anxiety this seemed to be creating with these students. The testing of set texts seems immediately to create a barrier to enjoyment. (Applebee, 1990, Sarland, 1991; Purves, 1999).

The Churchton College boys were aware that studying a text in the classroom was different from reading a text under the circumstances of leisure consumption. This school had high expectations for student achievement and it was stated by the Ewan, Head of English that standards would not be lowered to accommodate whether students liked the texts or not. He also discussed assessment for set texts and obviously it was a priority within the English curriculum.

Conversely, the assessment of the students’ comprehension and understanding of set texts at Countryside High was underplayed. There was more emphasis on enticing the boys to read.

Andy: We’ve just finished Deadly Unna. Dunno who wrote it. I
didn’t really like it much because I’m not into football. And this book Gaz, it was painful, some guy on a motorbike. Back to year nine, we’ve got Piggy in the Middle next. Tara O’Dare said she’s read it and it’s crap. It’s supposed to be about these bush pig girls. Like, guys don’t read much round here, you’d be called a gay if you were seen sitting outside reading a book.

Andrew, I don’t know who the hell picks the books We had Topenders and Gaz and they were shockers. And Mike. It was this boy swimming and he dies. It was skinny and the teacher read it to us. Then we have to answer dumb questions, like ‘Do you think he’s a winner or a loser in the end?’ and always ‘What was the moral of the story?’ Who the hell cares?

Do the boys at Northdown High see the situation differently? There are good readers in the lower socio-economic schools, but there appeared to be a significantly greater number of students who were not seen as good readers by the English teachers and librarians, than in the private schools. The expectations of the teachers did not take into account boys like Mark when teaching reading.

Mark: I guess I like to read all sorts of different books. We have heaps at home. I reckon we’ve got enough books to fill five libraries. My dad doesn’t have much time to read but he’s a person who likes more informative type stuff, like the newspaper. I lay on my bed and read but I can only read when I’ve got a good book. I don’t like the school ones much.

In order to ascertain whether there were any differences between the reading preferences and habits of adolescent boys and girls, I interviewed a cohort of girls from St Ann’s, the Catholic all-girl school. Self-image and reading was not considered a problem. The girls cited lack of time to read for leisure. However, if other girls recommended a ‘good book’ they would find the time. Examples cited were In the Deep End, The Day After Forever and Fat Chance. If the set texts related to their lives in some way, the girls stated that they enjoyed reading them.

Rosie: I’ve just started reading Queen Cat, Carmel and St Jude Get a Life and so far it’s good. We have to do it next semester.
We did Bridge to Wiseman’s Cove. I read in a fairly analytical way. I’m talking about a set novel for school, you know, not like a fun reading book.

Emily: I don’t read books much now because once a teacher told me I was reading too slow. I read the set texts because I want to pass the tests, no other reason. In the library, I just go for a skinny book with a good cover. I reckon that’s how the teachers should choose our books, the ones we have to read. Skinny with good covers.

Although there was an emphasis on female protagonists in their set texts—Diary of Anne Frank, Queen Cat, Carmel and St Jude Get a Life—and on female authors—Isobelle Carmody and Maureen McCarthy—there was not the strong emphasis on positive female role modelling as was the case with the boys’ college for positive male role modelling.

3.5 DISCUSSION
3.5.1 INTRODUCTION

I did not set out intentionally to research the reading identities of adolescent boys, but my findings were congruent with the prevailing literature and studies on this subject. While I cannot make sweeping claims due to the small sample from each school, it was apparent that the boys whom I interviewed within the range of schools held different views on masculinity and the reading of fictional texts. Factors that influenced their views appeared to be connected to their socio-economic status and other pertinent issues which will now be discussed.

3.5.2 THE READING IDENTITIES OF ADOLESCENT BOYS

My research showed that the cohort of boys from St John’s, the Catholic all-boy school, had a positive attitude to reading, although not all of the respondents were considered ‘good’ readers by their teachers. In the main, this cohort viewed the reading of novels as an acceptable masculine activity, probably due to the strong emphasis on male role modelling which pervaded the school curriculum, and the school ethos of ‘Real Men Read’. Indeed, I would contend that this reflected the general attitude of the middle-school boys at St John’s college. This is not to say that all the boys at St John’s like reading novels, but they did not appear to be threatened by reading as a ‘masculine’
activity.

Australian research by Love and Hamston, 2001; Power, 2001; Rowan, Knobel, Bigum and Lankshear, 2002; and a USA study by Wilhelm and Smith (2002) has indicated that it is more likely for adolescent boys to develop positive reading identities in all-boy schools. I contend this is because there is no competition from girls who traditionally hold ‘the higher ground’ in literacy (Alloway and Gilbert, 1998; Moje, Young, Readence and Moore, 2000; Rowe, 2000; Gilbert and Gilbert, 2001; Alvermann, 2002). There are also issues of gender where boys may feel that they have to ‘prove their masculinity’ by deriding reading as an uncool activity. The ethos of the school can promote reading as a masculine activity, and can focus on boys and books throughout the curriculum.

Indeed, it is difficult to accomplish this in a co-educational school, even though my research revealed that text selection by English teachers appeared to favour the reading preferences of adolescent boys rather than girls, a finding congruent with UK research by Sarland (1991), Steward (1999) and McQueen and Henwood (2002), and Australian research by Power (2001). Despite this phenomena, the girls in my study who attended government co-educational schools appeared to maintain a positive reading identity, except for some non-reading sub-groups of girls whom the English teachers described as ‘wanting to maintain a tough image’ (Northdown High) or be seen as ‘cool’ (Countryside High).

In an independent co-educational school such as Churchton College, the emphasis for both sexes was on academic achievement, so that reading was viewed by the boys as another school-based activity in which one should attempt to excel. This was congruent with studies by Rotundo (1993), Dutton (1996) and Leal (1999) which found that girls from wealthier homes (and, for example, Churchton College, the private co-educational school in my research project) had more positive reading image than those girls in lower socio-economic government co-educational schools, indicating that gender, class and ethnicity have an impact on reading identities. Thus, boys from single-sex schools appeared to have very positive reading identities, more so than girls from lower socio-economic area schools, where class and ethnicity were seen by researchers such as Teese et. al. (1996), and West (1999) as contributing factors.

My research revealed that the cohort of adolescent boys in the two government co-educational schools (Northdown High and Countryside High) had less positive reading
identities than the boys from St John’s and Churchton. These reading identities appeared to be connected to their notions of masculinity. To cite one student, ‘if you’re seen reading a novel, people think you’re gay’. Australian studies by Browne and Fletcher (1995), Martino (1995, 1998), and West (2002) found that some boys believed the reading of fictional texts and enjoying these somehow threatened perceived traditions of masculinity.

While private all-boy schools can address this issue in more depth, it is possible for co-educational schools not only to change curriculum and teaching strategies in the classroom to incorporate different types of printed text to be studied, but to change assessment strategies to suit the needs of boys, as proposed by Dutton (1996) and West (2002). English teachers and teacher-librarians in co-educational schools can address issues of masculinity and reader identity of boys through changes in curriculum that maximise opportunities to allow boys to accept the reading of fictional texts as a ‘cool’ activity.

3.5.3 ADOLESCENT BOYS’ READING PREFERENCES

On examination, my data revealed that the thirty boys in my research did not prefer reading fictional novels. They would rather read non-fiction, autobiographical materials about sports heroes, sporting and car magazines and comics. A USA study by Wilhelm and Smith (2002) found that literature did have an important place in the lives of boys but that schools did not align the studying of literature with the way boys use it.

Unless boys have to read a set novel for school, they seldom select a fictional novel from the library shelves. Some boys in my research stated that it was difficult to find what they wanted to read in English classrooms, even if there was a selection of set texts from which to choose, as with the cluster system at Churchton College. This is congruent with the findings in a USA study by Worthy, Moorman and Turner (1999), who found that boys would read more if given more engaging materials. However, actually ‘starting a book’ was often difficult for many boys, which is congruent with findings in an Australian study by Barry (1999).

The exception was the boys from St John’s Catholic boys’ college, who stated that they enjoyed reading particular genres of fictional texts if they had the time. As a comparison with Martino’s (2001) study of 60 adolescent boys in a Perth Catholic co-educational high school, the St John’s boys had a more positive attitude to themselves as readers and to the reading of fictional texts. In Martino’s study, he postulated that
particular versions of masculinity informed the boys’ reading of fictional texts, and that many rejected reading because it was ‘uncool’. Whether it was ‘uncool’ to state that they liked reading was a factor that might have influenced their response.

However, my research data did substantiate that cohorts of boys in government co-educational schools did not read fictional texts because it was ‘uncool’. The teacher-librarian at Countryside High had difficulty enticing years 8, 9 and 10 boys into the library on a voluntary basis, because reading in the library of borrowing books was also seen by them as ‘uncool’. This is corroborated by Krashen (1993, 2001), Martino (1994, 1995, 2001), Teese et al. (1995), West (1996), Finders (1997) and Yates (1997). The problem of many adolescent boys seeing reading as ‘uncool’ needs to be resolved within school communities and beyond.

3.5.4 SET TEXTS IN CLASSROOMS

My data showed that English teachers and teacher-librarians selected set texts that did not appeal to the students. In co-educational schools, most texts were selected to appeal more to the boys. This is congruent with world-wide and Australian studies by Cocoran and Evans (1987), Applebee (1990), Sarland (1991) and Purves (1999) which indicated that most texts studied in classrooms do not relate to the students’ lives, particularly the boys, even though there is a concerted attempt to select text that do connect. Often the content (surfing, motorbikes, war) might appeal, but the style of writing does not. As Bintz (1993), Bearne and Watson (1996), Nodelman (1996), Purves (1990), Worthy et al. (1999) and Power (2001) have argued, texts appear to be selected for perceived qualities of narrative style and content in an attempt to maintain a high standard in the classroom.

The teachers at Churchton College, the private co-educational school, were aware that many boys disliked their texts, even though there had been a swing from the classics to more Australian contemporary novels such as Bridge to Wiseman’s Cove, Tomorrow When the War Began and Cage of Butterflies. As the boys stated that they did not enjoy these novels, Ewan, the Head of English, argued that they may as well be challenged with studying the ‘classics’ and particularly Shakespeare, which they would not like either, but they would be ‘learning about good literature’.

Pidduck (2001) postulated when teaching Hamlet to a cohort of Australian Year 8s, that the students could not relate to the style of language, the genre or the plot. Yet others (Maher, 2001; Brennan, 2001) have supported the teaching of the classics, arguing that
Romeo and Juliet is enjoyed by Year 9, particularly the girls. As Year 9 girls in my research enjoyed texts that explored ‘love, romance and relationships’, Romeo and Juliet could possibly appeal, but none of the schools in my research were studying Shakespeare at the time of interview.

If boys do not enjoy reading fictional texts about relationships in their set texts, what do they enjoy? Research by Sarland (1991), Finders (1997), Millard (1997) and Purves (1999) has revealed that the genres that boys tend to enjoy are adventure, crime, mystery science fiction and fantasy with plentiful action in the story. However, texts selected by the teachers did include these genres and elements. For example, Countryside High teachers selected short novels such as Mike, Gaz, and Topenders that would appeal, yet the boys stated that these books were boring. Northdown High teacher-librarian Laura was disappointed and puzzled because the boys did not enjoy Brocky’s Bananagram and Lee Spain. I would argue that not only the style that these aforementioned books are written in and the prevailing notion that reading is uncool, but the tyranny of assessments turns many boys away from fictional texts.

St John’s Catholic all-boy college and Churchton Grammar had assignment work on each of their novels. A cohort of St John’s boys were studying To Kill a Mocking Bird. The boys were aware that it related to their theme, Gendered Fiction, but they disliked it because ‘it was boring’, ‘does not relate in any way to my life’, ‘nothing happens for the first ten chapters’ and there were copious worksheets and assignments to accompany it. However, these boys seemed to distinguish between ‘school reading’ to pass tests and ‘fun reading’ and enjoyed fictional texts from the library in their preferred genres of science fiction, fantasy and mystery, as revealed by the work of Crowe (1998).

There is much research to suggest that teaching fictional literature in class then giving assessment work immediately creates a barrier between middle-school students and their perceptions of reading as an enjoyable past time, particularly in with adolescent boys. This was the exemplified with adolescent boys studied in Shropshire, UK by Steward (1999). In Australian research for the ACER, Rowe (2000) found that a significantly high number of boys are disengaged with school and more likely to underachieve, especially in literacy. As Rowe (2000) pointed out, boys believed that they ‘can’t write about feelings’ which disadvantaged them in classrooms where assignment work on set texts required them to write opinions, views and self-reflect. As Buckingham (2000) found in her Australian study, on average boys do not read as well as girls, ‘get lost in a sea of words’, get bored and do not perform well in written answer
portfolios.

Perceiving this as a pervasive problem, Countryside High teachers gave simple written assignments based on only two or three questions about the set texts, yet the boys disliked this assessment aspect. At Northdown High, the teachers tried to minimise the negative aspect of assignment work by reading a set text chapter by chapter, and doing assignment work after each chapter, often in the form of large class books or diaries. However, despite their efforts, the English teachers reported than many of the students still did not want to read fictional texts, particularly the boys.

3.5.5 THE READING HABITS OF ADOLESCENT BOYS

Most of the boys in my study said that they did enjoy reading magazines and comics of their own choice about subjects that interested them and related to their lives. The boys from Countryside High and Northdown High seldom read fictional novels apart from the boy whose family was, in his words, ‘book mad’. Findings by Atwell (1998), Moje, Willes, and Fassio (2001), Love and Hamston (2001), Power (2001), Alvermann (2002) and Wilhelm and Smith (2002), indicated that student ownership defines successful reading. Adolescent boys’ interests and needs must be kept foremost when designing literacy instruction and promoting fiction.

Boys will read if they are motivated. Atwell (1998) argued that student motivation is linked to two main features, a meaning-centred English curriculum which is negotiated by the students, and a student-responsive culture that honours students’ voices and needs for self-expression. However, beyond the classroom, what is happening with boys and reading?

The cohorts of adolescent boys in my study said that they read their set texts because they had to, usually in bed before going to sleep. The concern of Churchillton College’s Ewan, Head of English was that a boarding school life was not conducive to reading due to the difficulty of privacy, so the school had instigated an hour of silent reading after dinner. However, one of the boys in the cohort stated that ‘if someone’s actually reading, it must be a good book.’ The concern of Northdown High’s Laura, the teacher-librarian was that the boys, if left to their own devices, did not read their texts, ‘just maybe the beginning and the end’, which justified the teachers reading a chapter aloud in class then following with assignment work. This correlates with studies by Beane (1990) and George, Stevenson, Thomason and Beane (1992), Worthy and McKool (1996) and Ivey (1999), which showed that the challenge for boys in particular to
become more proficient and engaged readers was complicated by subject matter uninteresting to them, with the gap widening as they progress through school between what they want to read and what they have to read.

Most of the boys interviewed read magazines or comics or the newspapers at home often before bed, although one boy from St John’s said that he read his set text in the lounge room while watching TV. The work of Pollack (1998), Alvermann (2001), Ivey and Broaddus (2001), Gilbert and Gilbert (2001), Moje et al. (2001) and Wilhelm and Smith (2002), indicated that there is a dichotomy between boys’ literacy skills in the classroom and enjoyment of reading, and boys’ literacy skills, enjoyment of reading and reading habits outside of school.

3.6 IMPLICATIONS

A number of important findings emerge from my research project. Boys are reading, as they reported in my research. Studies by Wilson (1999) James & Johnson (1999) and Love and Hamston (2001) also indicated that boys are reading. They are often not as visible, and they often read non-fiction books, manuals, magazines and comics. In the Australian study (referred to earlier in the literature section), which was conducted at Scotch College, Melbourne (1997), cited in Barry, 1999, eighty per cent of the students stated that they enjoyed reading for pleasure. Of concern to the school was the twelve per cent who didn’t.

From my research, though, it was revealed that it is not the choice of adolescent boys to read fictional texts that are promoted in English classrooms unless it is a set text that has to be read in order to complete assignment work. The girls in my study from St Ann’s did not enjoy reading their set texts either and preferred novels of their own choice (relationships, family, romance, some fantasy). Given that world-wide studies show that girls read more than boys and are more successful in school assignments (Rotundo, 1993: Alloway and Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Pollack, 1998; Steward, 1999; Wilhelm and Smith, 2002), it would seem that curriculum that teaches literacy skills and promotes reading to boys, needs to change. Cognisant of the fact that boys, on the whole, do not like to self-disclose and give written opinions on their beliefs, values and beliefs, strategies in the classroom need to address this issue.

Importantly, particularly in Australia, notions of masculinity need to be challenged in classrooms, and adolescent boys need to believe that it is ‘cool’ to read fictional texts. The adolescent boys need to feel comfortable with reading novels and know that ‘real
men do read.’

3.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

From my research project, it is possible to make some useful recommendations.

1 In co-educational schools, the selection of texts should take into account the differing needs and predilections of males and females. Gender equity should be paramount so that girls do not have to read male-dominated books by male-dominated authors. Boys need short, action-packed novels that are written in their own language deal with their own issues, and relate to their own lives. This means different sets of texts for each class, and different expectations from English teachers concerning the way boys read and respond to questions about the texts.

2 Critical thinking or critical literacy skills should be taught in English classrooms, and the texts should relate in some way to the ‘cultural environment’ of the students. This appeared to be occurring to a certain degree at St John’s but not to the same degree at the other schools.

3 Students should be involved in the choice of set texts in the classroom. The girls at St Ann’s had a choice of texts but this choice was limited to one of six novels from the English teachers’ preferred texts.

4 Where possible, written tests and written assignments should be avoided in favour of class discussions. Boys should be given assignment work that focuses on logical, opinions rather than detailed essays that require the expression of feelings, values and beliefs.

5 Leisure reading should be promoted by English teachers and librarians after consultation with all the students, (not just cohorts of good female readers or above average boy readers who attend book club), and the students’ choices should be readily available if possible.

6 There should be a choice of reading material other than fiction, particularly for boys, given that boys overall in my research and other studies indicated that they preferred non-fiction such as biographies and autobiographies.
Above all, adolescent boys should be encouraged to develop a positive reading identity through male role modelling, promoting reading as a ‘boy thing’ to do at school and at home, and involving parents in this promotion of masculinity and fictional text reading.
CHAPTER 4 : RESEARCH PROJECT 2: AUTHORS VISITING SECONDARY SCHOOLS

PART 1: AN OVERVIEW

The literature review in the dissertation indicated how author visits can play a significant role in creating an environment which promotes a positive reading identity. In this research project, I wanted to investigate how different secondary schools utilised author visits and what they hoped to gain from these visits.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In my role as the author of books for children and adolescents, I visit schools throughout Australia and internationally, as do many other authors.

Over a number of years, I have developed a professional curiosity concerning the importance of authors’ visits to schools. What am I actually achieving when I visit schools, in terms of the students’ learning? What am I achieving for myself as a professional author?

In my role as a researcher, I am interested in investigating the reasons why English teachers and teacher-librarians invite an author to schools, what are the students’ perceptions of an author visit, and what impact (if any) such visits have on students’ reading. Also I was interested in considering whether more effective use could be made of author visits.

1.2 IMPORTANCE OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

Within the overall study which is concerned with adolescents as readers, this research project on adolescents’ reading, especially in terms of whether such a visit encourages the students to read more texts both in and outside school, and leads to the reading of further texts by other authors.

1.3 DEFINITION OF AN AUTHOR

The Australian Society of Authors defines a full author member as:

authors who have had one book published by an established publisher;
had one or two works of fiction or non-fiction published, including
short stories, articles and poetry in major magazines, newspapers, literary or electronic journals; had a play or other script produced publicly on stage, radio, TV or any other medium or had lyrics published with musical score; has signed a contract for a book with a major publisher; is in the opinion of the Committee of Management entitled to membership on the basis of professional standing. Affiliate membership is available to anyone interested in the craft of writing but who is yet unpublished.

(Australian Society of Authors charter, status: Office document, uploaded Fri August 17, 2001).

The definition of an author for the purposes of this study is ‘a writer who has had a significant number of children's and young adult fiction books published in Australia by a major publisher/s’ (Clark, 1999).

1.4 KEY RESEARCH QUESTION
What is the value of effective author visits in secondary schools?

1.5 SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS
1. How does the visit integrate with the curriculum?
   1.1 Is the visit part of a special literary occasion?
   1.2 Is the visit connected with students’ greater understanding of the set text?
   1.3 Does the school want to inspire the students to read more fictional novels?
   1.4 Does the school want to improve children's writing?
2. Who instigates the visit? (for example, the Head of English, the Teacher-librarian, a class teacher or a small committee?)
3. What are the schools’ guidelines for author visits?
4. How does the school evaluate the worth of the visit?
5. What are the students’ opinions concerning school visits?

1.6 ORGANISATION OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT
Section 1 is the overview

Section 2 is the literature review that pertains to author visits to schools.

Section 3 is the report of the data collection comprising of the responses of English teachers, teacher-librarians and students in five secondary schools concerning author
visits. These responses were collected in the form of interviews structured around questions which would form the categories for my analysis.

Section 4 is the data analysis. Content analysis was used to compare findings from my research data and from the literature as outlined in section two, and also from section two of my dissertation, *Reading the Reader*.

1.7 PURPOSE OF MY RESEARCH

Basically, I wanted to find out if there were differences and similarities in the ways in which author visits were conducted in different types of secondary schools, which is why I selected five disparate school situations, these being:

- St John’s Catholic boys’ secondary college
- St Ann’s Catholic girls’ secondary college
- Churchton private co-educational secondary college
- Northdown High, a government lower-socio-economic co-educational high school
- Countryside High, government rural government co-educational high school.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

Although I visit schools nation-wide and internationally, as do a significant number of the other authors involved in this study, my research was confined to responses from English teachers, teacher-librarians and students’ from five Victorian secondary schools. The sixty students selected by the English teachers or teacher-librarians were from years seven, eight and nine, that is, aged 13-15 years, so the study is limited to this cohort of middle school students in five schools. But it was envisaged that the findings would be relevant more broadly.

PART 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

While ‘author’ may seem a self-evident category, recent debates within literary theory have problematized the term. In an attempt to understand what an author is and does, in these terms, I have looked at two models, those being the humanist model and the poststructuralist model. The following discussion examines theoretical frameworks concerning definitions of authorship.
2.2 AUTHORSHIP WITHIN A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the humanist model, the categories of author, text and reader appear self-evident and separate: ‘the author produces a text, which is then read by a reader; the author was the source and origin of some creative power’ (Klages, 2001, p.5).

In a poststructuralist view, however, relations between author, text and reader are replaced by an understanding of the relations between language (as a structure) and subjects - positions we inhabit within the structure of language. Althusser (1971) contended that readers are interpellated as subjects into ideological structures, the readers becoming interpellated subjects within one or more textual ideologies.

Poststructuralist theorists such as Barthes (1977) and Derrida (1978) explored the notion that ‘the author is dead’. In this view, the author only existed as the product of a text. Foucault (1979) employed the same premise to conclude that ‘author’, like ‘reader’, is the name of a subject position within language, or, more specially, within a text. Furthermore, Foucault (1979) discussed at length the relationship between an author and a text, and the manner in which the text indicated the author as a figure outside the text, yet who preceded the text and created it (Foucault, 1979, p.139). The author is decentred, shown only to be a part of the structure, a subject position and not the centre. What an author produced is, according to Foucault, ‘a work’, but then he contended that there has to be a theoretical basis for determining what counts as an author’s ‘work’ (Foucault, 1979, p.140). Foucault then argued that the ‘author’ as product of ‘work’ also served a function within literary social relations - in other words, ‘the author is more than a name, being a mode of thinking, an object of contemplation and the methodology and forms associated with that name’ (Foucault 1979, p 141), and connects with the reader within these modes.

Author function, according to Foucault, was created through four features of texts, so that:

- texts are objects of appropriation, forms of property. Foucault’s example was that of heresy: when heresy was uttered, there had to be a heretic behind the utterances since words or ideas could not be punished, but only the ‘authors’. From this notion of locating authorship in someone held responsible for writing or speech came also the notion of ownership of works and the idea of copyright rules associated with ownership
- the ‘author function’ is not a universal or constant feature of
every text, Some texts do not require an ‘author’: myths, fairy tales, folk stories, fables, legends, jokes.

- the author function is not formed spontaneously, through some simple attribution of a discourse to an individual. Rather, it results from various cultural constructions, in which the audience selects particular attributes of an individual as ‘authorial attributes’, and dismisses others.
- the text always bears signs that refer to the author, or creates the ‘author function’. The most easily recognisable of these signs is a pronoun, “I”, though the audience has learned not to assume that the “I” of a narrator is identical to the “I” of the author

(Foucault, 1978, p.144).

Bakhtin (1981) discussed authorship as being self-referential. Indeed, according to Bakhtin (1981), the contemporary author is not ‘about the exalted emotions related to the act of composition’, and writing is not the vehicle for the author’s expression of his/her emotions or ideas, since writing is not meant to communicate from author to audience. If this is the case, what is the function of the audience?

Bakhtin’s and Foucault’s theoretical understanding to texts and reading is different in that author visits to schools are in the form of a physical presence. When visiting schools, authors are attempting to connect a real person (the author) to the reader.

2.3 THE FUNCTION OF AN AUDIENCE

Ong (1975, 1979), believed that the author’s audience was always a fiction. ‘For the speaker, the audience is in front of him. For the writer, the audience is simply further away, in time or space or both’ (Ong, 1975, p.10). Thus ‘the author addresses readers - only he doesn’t quite address them either: he writes to or for them’ (Ong, 1975, p.11), and ‘if the writer succeeds in writing, it is generally because he can fictionalise in his imagination an audience he has learned to know, not from daily life, but from earlier writers who were fictionalising in their imagination audiences they had learned to know in still earlier writers, and so back to the dawn of written narrative’ (Ong, 1975, p.12). Thus, the reader has to play the role in which the author has cast him/her, which seldom corresponds with his/her role in actual life (Ong, 1975).

2.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READER AND AUTHOR

Meek (1988) suggested that understanding authorship and audience are active ingredients in appreciating literature. Meek explained: ‘To learn to read a book . . . a
reader has to become both the teller (picking up the author’s view and voice) and the
told (the recipient of the story, the interpreter’ (Meek, 1988, p. 10).

Sarland (1991), believed that reader (audience) response was a critical factor which
should be recognised by authors and readers, especially through the study of cultural,
ideological and experiential factors in the interactions between audience and text. There
is a recognition that the reader’s response to a text will depend of the individual’s
cognitive framework, and the reader’s own ideology and culture. I have argued
elsewhere (Clark 1999) that the author does not create for the audience on a conscious
level, but ‘tells a story’, the interpretation of which is up to each individual audience
member.

Am I supposed to be creating a street culture by writing a novel such
as Back on Track - Diary of a Street Kid (1995) which could inspire
‘normal’ teenagers to suddenly up anchors and become homeless free
spirits living on the streets? Or am I allowing my audience to visit that
culture voyeuristically?


2.4.1 VISIBLE AUTHORS

Of importance to this discussion about authors and audiences is the phenomena of the
‘visible’ author. Shanahan (1992) believed that students formed mental images of the
author, whether they [the authors] made any attempt to reveal their presence in the texts
or not. These ‘implied’ authors often contributed to a reader’s understanding and beliefs
about the subject in the text. Nolen (1995) examined the impact that a ‘visible’ author
had on the reader (a visible author defined as one who writes in the first person),
intruding frequently into the text. Nolen argued that the presence of a ‘visible’ author
opened the door to a wider range of author-reader relationships, and these in turn
impacted readers’ comprehension and affective response to the text.

Research by Paxton (1997) examined how authorial presence influenced the manner in
which students read and understood texts. He believed that texts written by anonymous
authoritative authors by definition place a rhetorical distance between reader and author.
Author awareness played an important part in interpretation, analysis or simple
appreciation of the text (Shanahan, 1996; Paxton, 1997). According to Moffett (1983),
texts written in the first person seek to establish an I-you relationship between the
author and the reader. ‘A highly visible author established a close relationship with the
information in a text, thus conveying a sense of immediacy and vitality to the reader. At
the other extreme, an ‘implied’ author writing in third person, objective voice acts to widen the gaps …’ (Paxton, 1997, p.237).

2.5 AUTHOR VISITS IN SCHOOLS

2.5.1 INTRODUCTION

Teachers employ numerous strategies to assist students to improve their love of literature. They immerse their students in worthwhile activities, guide them to use effective strategies across the curriculum, and encourage them to develop independence with reading and writing (Carlsen, 1980; Carter, 1987; Corcoran and Evans, 1987; Chambers, 1991; Sarland, 1991; Bradford, 1997; Scutter, 1999). An often neglected, but important, part of this process is the direct role of authors. By meeting with authors and discovering what inspires them, the students can gain insights concerning the craft of writing, learn how ideas can germinate, and also come to realise that even professional writers experience frustrations when developing their craft (Soto, 1992; Sanacore, 1993; Carson-Shaw, 1994; Hirschi, 1994; Raum, 1994; Clark, 1999).

2.5.2 THE ROLE OF AUTHORS IN SCHOOLS

Research by Saunders (1978), Smith (1992), Maminski (1993), McElmeel (1994), Paxton (1997), La Marca (1999), and Clark (1999, 2001) has indicated that if the students identify with the author, they could be attracted to read more of the author’s novels and also other authors’ novels written in different styles and genres. Hence publishers have been interested in promoting author visits.

Sanacore (1993) postulates that there is a definite role for authors to play in the development of literature learning in schools. He states that ‘parents, teachers and school administrators become key players as they co-operatively work towards bringing students and authors together’ (Sanacore, 1993, p.1). Sanacore (1993) proffers some guidelines for an effective author visitation:

1. Form a committee of individuals who are committed to unite authors and readers.
2. Involve the faculty in developing an authors’ program rationale that is linked to the school’s mission.
3. Select books and authors based on thematic structure.
4. Have students read several of the authors’ books as preparation for the authors’ presentations.
5. Survey the teachers and parents to determine their preferences for scheduling the visits, and avoid times that conflict with important instructional and evaluative activities, holidays and authors’ busy periods.

6. Secure financial support for the authors’ program through available resources.

7. Assess the program’s outcome, and consider both quantitative and qualitative factors.

Extending on this concept, a major role of the author is to explain to the students why he/she wrote the book (Smith, 1992), the importance of the characters and juxtapositioning of these within the plots and settings (Soto, 1992), and the decisions that had to be made as to whether the novel should be written in first or third person narrative, present or past tense for maximum impact (Smith, 1992; Raum, 1994; Saxby, 1996).

A well-known US author, Peck (1992) devised a plan to eliminate unfounded invitations by requiring all students to write a paper for him to read before his arrival. The title, ‘Something that happened to me that would fit into a novel’, revealed to him their writers’ expectations for fiction. Most readers have not thought about why the author might use a certain way of writing, and the alternatives that could have been used (Scales, 1997 in Atkinson, 1997; Clark, 1999). This is of significance in relation to literary studies in schools, because during an author visit, the students can learn about the difficulties of writing, the different decisions that have to be considered by the author such as genre, tense, narration, settings, plot and characterisation.

It is discussed by Smith (1992) that the role of teachers is critical in engendering a love of literature for their students. Teachers must find material of interest to each individual in the classroom, ensuring that each student is both helped to read, and also protected from boredom, anxiety and failure. And ‘the culminating responsibility of teachers is to hand each students over to authors’ (Smith, 1992, p.435). By doing this, the teacher allows the author, with the students, to explore the underlying issues of the text and why the characters behave as they do.

In a Colorado, US study conducted by Kuta (1997), new standards for language arts (reading, writing, representing, viewing, speaking and listening) have been designed to create more opportunities for middle school students. Organised into three sections, the curriculum guidelines focus on three areas, those being reading and writing, visual displays, and speaking and listening. In the last section, panels, discussions, talks by
authors and interviews with authors were encouraged. This is congruent with guidelines in the Victorian English Curriculum and Standards Framework (2001), which recommends author visits as a way to encourage and enrich students’ reading.

2.6 AUTHORS AND STUDENTS CONNECTING IN MANY WAYS

Alternatives for authors who do not like to speak to students en masse are workshops with approximately twenty students, or small groups reluctant readers and writers, or gifted students who are then mentored by the author (Kinch, 1999; Paladino, 1999; Prawer, 1999, all cited in La Marca, 1999, pp.1-34).

Beyond this world of personalised, face-to-face communication, is the internet. Marianne Saccardi, an American middle-school librarian, organised this on-line ‘meet the author’ project. Saccardi (1991), stated that:

we wanted to know whether writing on the computer to their peers and an author would encourage students to read more books than they otherwise would, and if they would write about their reading to an author. … The teachers all agreed that their students did more reading during this period and they broadened their reading experiences by reading books they might not have chosen on their own. One student who said he did not read a book at all last year read five this year, due to the program.

(Saccardi, 1991, p.38).

However, even if authors do live in the same city or State, they are not always available to visit schools, so on-line interaction is a viable alternative. Also in Australian schools students are going on-line to chat to their favourite authors. For example, in a paper entitled Wired-up boys read better: report of an on-line reading and writing project, James and Johnson (1999) discussed the notion of a virtual writer-in-residence in a virtual writing workshop, which operated through email. They also participated in a book-rap with Australian author James Moloney, the emphasis being on collaborative learning, sharing the author’s thoughts and experiences, discussing his books and developing a web page.

Similarly, Boyd (1999) introduced the on-line concept at her all-girls school in Melbourne. In the area of fiction promotion, divided the web site into internet and internet services. The internet section links to many authors, booksellers and publishers. At the time of writing this study, Boyd (1999) had launched three Australian novels on her school internet - my novel Love on the Net, Mosh by Glyn Parry and Email Murder.
Also within the Australian context, teacher librarian Coomes (1999, cited in La Marca, 1999), established an on-line Book Club, and similarly Slavin (1997) set up a chat site on her school’s home page and initiated ‘conversations’ to launch two novels, *Messing Around* by Rachel Flynn (1997) and *Sparring with Shadows* by Archie Fuscillo (1997). Often Australian schools will collaborate with international schools, such as in Project Bookread in California in 1999.

In my opinion, connecting authors and students face-to-face for a longer period of time is a better option because a more educationally meaningful relationship can be established between the author and the students. One such ideal situation is getting an author-in-residence to work at the school for a week or more especially in rural areas.

In a study for the United States, Sanacore (1993) offered guidelines for bringing authors into rural areas. He suggested that schools pool their resources, citing ways to fund-raise. In a similar Australian arena, Raum (1994) suggested taking students to writers’ festivals and youth literature days; going to writer’s camps; writing letters to or emailing authors; and having a book gig conducted through the Australian Centre for Youth Literature (Prawer, 1999 as cited in La Marca, 1999).

Another alternative is the use of video tapes which are obtainable, particularly of Australian authors discussing the work of authoring. For example, Morris Gleitzman, John Marsden, Libby Hathorn, Glyn Parry, Brian Caswell, Gary Crew and several other authors have these types of videos. However, I personally believe that while these are a useful tool for teachers when discussing an author’s work, they do not have the same impact as face-to-face contact with the students because, in my experience as an author, the same type of relationship cannot be established.

It is not only the students who benefit from these meeting authors, either face-to-face or through the internet or letters. In an article by Guy (1999, cited in La Marca, 1999), the Australian author Peter Goldsworthy’s novel *Maestro* which is on the 1999 Year 12 reading list was explored. In an interview with Guy, Goldsworthy said that “I often learn from talking to kids about the book; I often see fresh things in it”. Goldsworthy also expressed that he doesn’t mind having his books dissected in the classroom. Author attitude is important when visiting the classroom, and many authors relish the thought of discussing their novels at length. (Author opinions about school visits will be
discussed in another research project within this folio).

From the literature that was examined in this section, it is obvious that authors can enrich a literature program in a school setting, whether they are physically visiting to speak to the students, or they are contactable on-line. But are author visits to schools viewed as a special activity in which to promote fictional reading, or assist students with their understandings about their set text, or to assist in the improvement of students’ writing skills, or to entertain the students? These questions formed the basis of my research project on author visits.

PART 3: PERCEPTIONS OF AUTHOR VISITS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section discusses my research project about author visits in schools from the English teachers’, teacher-librarians’ and a cohort of middle school students’ points of view.

3.2 METHOD OF CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

For this folio, after consultation with the schools, it was decided that I would interview the English teachers and teacher-librarians as individuals or in small groups, which allowed them flexibility. Thus the interviews would be conducted with groups of four to six students. Each school was requested to supply a quiet room. Due to regulations, a teacher had to be present during the interviews but was not involved in the group discussion. Whilst I had an initial concern that this could influence the responses of the participants, many of the teachers worked quietly in a corner or observed the students from another room, for example, through a glass partition in the library.

My interview technique was to introduce myself, explain what I was doing in terms of my research and also explain that I would be tape-recording the interview. These conditions were set down in the consent forms, but I wanted to ensure that the participants understood why I was conducting the interviews in such a format. A foreseen problem was that I was known as an author by the teachers and students. Prior to the interviews, there were requests for me to sign the students’ copies of my novels, or autograph books. Teachers reported that many of the students wanted to ask me questions about being an author. In order to attend to this problem, I explained at the commencement of each interview that I was in the role of a researcher and I put on a rather formal-looking navy jacket. When the interviews were completed, I explained
that I would remove the jacket and adopt my author role. While I realised that this would not completely distance me as an author from the teachers and students, and at times it might influence their responses, the donning of the jacket would delineate a ‘viable’ working space for my roles as researcher and then author.

Each interview went for approximately one and a half hours, although an opportunity was given to the participants to elaborate further with the answers if they felt there had been insufficient time. I was aware of the need to give equal time to the participants’ response times whenever possible, because sometimes one person could dominate conversation within the group. If a group member became too dominant, I channeled the conversation to another group member. At times, members supported each other’s opinions or built on these, and at other times they differed in their opinions. Once the respondents became engrossed in the discussion, they appeared to be more comfortable and confident with me in my role as a researcher rather than as a visiting author. Furthermore, I suggested to the teachers that I return in my role as an author, at no charge, as a thank-you for their participation, and this pleased the students when I told them this would occur within the next three months.

Issues of confidentiality represented a continuous rather than an intermittent concern for me, because I was aware that I held information about authors that was private and personal. Within the school situation, the researcher is often caught in the tension between meeting an obligation to the subjects of the investigation and an obligation to the audience of the research (Walker, 1980). Therefore I did not want to become embroiled in discussions about the merits of other authors, my own books, facets of authors’ lives, or teaching pedagogies and politics which could distract from the purpose of this research.

One way of ensuring confidentiality was to give each respondent a pseudonym. Furthermore, the taped interviews were kept in a locked cabinet in my home, as were the written transcriptions from the interviews.

3.3 THE INTERVIEWS

Before the actual interviews occurred:

1. I read through the relevant literature pertaining to data analysis.
2. I looked at methods of content analysis which developed themes and categories through which to analyse the data as suggested by Tesch, 1990; Cresswell, 1994,

3. I generated two main categories were generated from my research questions, those being:

(a) What is the value of author visits?
(b) How does the visit integrate with the curriculum?

3.3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section discusses the interviews that were conducted in schools with English teachers, teacher-librarians and a cohort of middle school students from years seven, eight and nine. The students were selected by the teachers with my requirement being that students were ‘average readers and articulate’.

The following table outlines the schools and the number of English teachers, teacher-librarians and students who were interviewed.

TABLE 7: Interviews with teachers and students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>English Teachers</th>
<th>Teacher-Librarians</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St John’s boys’ college</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Ann’s girls’ college</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchton college</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countryside High</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northdown High</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were fifteen English teachers, five teacher librarians and sixty students. The students were interviewed in groups of four for each year level (seven, eight and nine), in a quiet room with a table and chairs. Teachers were not present except at St John’s where there was a glass partition where the librarian could observe what was occurring, but not hear the responses. The students initially appeared cautious when being taped, but soon appeared to forget the tape recorder once the discussions were underway. I endeavoured to ensure that each student was given an equal amount of time by specifically naming the person before asking the question. In order to remember the names, I sketched on my notepad where each was seated around the table and selected the respondents from left to right in order of seating. This was extremely useful when I was transcribing the tapes.
3.3.2 FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

At each school, I was interested in finding answers primarily to my key research question, this being: Why do you invite an author to visit the school? I also asked the subsidiary questions to determine if author visits were planned ahead to integrate into the curriculum or were part of a special event, such as a literary festival. Findings are presented separately for each school.

St John’s Boys’ College

Why do you invite authors to visit?

Kirstin, the teacher-librarian at St John’s, the all-boy school, provided some interesting information about boys and reading and the efficacy of author visits. Male authors who could be seen as positive role models for the boys were one of the main reason for having author visits.

Kirstin: We try to invite male authors so that we can present the idea of writing books as a cool thing to do. That’s not to say that we’d exclude female authors: butt it’s part of our curriculum and school policy that we present the boys with good male role models, as I said before. The year before last, we had Archie Fuscillo and Andy Griffiths. We had John Marsden too, and he did a fifty-minute talk to a large group and then he did small workshops with the students who’d been studying his books in particular. We had Brian Caswell and we’ll get him to visit again

I asked Kirstin about the importance of meeting an author face-to-face rather than ‘on-line’ or through a book rap.

A book-rap on line is not out of the question. I think it can be a valuable experience. But part of our program is getting them (the students) to meet an author, I mean, meeting them in person and getting them to read pieces of their books and talk about what inspired them to write a particular section, like, this person’s based on my grandfather or my best mate at school or whatever, that brings another perspective to it. And it certainly encourages the boys to read the book. Meeting the person, they get to know well, for example, Andy Griffiths, he’s got that great sense of humour. There’s a connection. It’s not a dry, disconnected thing, it’s ‘I’ve met the author’.
Kirstin continued to explain that the ratio of male authors invited to St John’s was proportionally much higher than females, because the overall ideology of the school is concerned with presenting positive male role models to the boys. Furthermore, the teachers selected set texts by male authors in preference to females, again with the role modelling aspect foremost when selecting the texts. As Kirstin explained, ‘We try to select books by males about males for males.’ Kirstin remarked that male authors such as Robert Trickey and Andy Griffiths were invited as a promotional exercise to enthuse the boys in years seven and eight to read more fiction texts. She remarked that there was a difference in the rationale for inviting authors of set texts and those who wrote popular fiction for pleasure reading, although ‘the two are not necessarily different. Marsden writes popular fiction’.

**How does the author visit integrate with the school curriculum?**

Faye, the Head of English at St John’s, discussed at length how author visits were planned at the end of each year, in conjunction with set texts and to fit with integrated units within the vertical curriculum.

_We brought in John Marsden because his work in enjoyed by many of our boys and because one English unit studies So Much to Tell You and the other one studies Tomorrow When the War Began. Plus I had a bit of extra money from a grant. We got him in for a day and he did a presentation to a large group, it was probably about four English classes that were on at that time, and he did smaller sessions that were actually studying his novel._

If Australian authors of set texts such as John Marsden, Archie Fuscillo or Brian Caswell were available to visit the school for years eight and nine within the vertical curriculum, the school would then incorporate the visit as an integral part of the curriculum. However, St John’s was also flexible in that, whilst forward planning was paramount, the curriculum was flexible enough to allow changes if an author was available, especially if an English staff member thought it was beneficial for the boys’ reading experiences.

_With Archie Fuscillo, one of the English teachers recommended him. He was pretty new on the scene, he’d just published his book, so we got him in just because she’d recommended him. And for that sort of middle school group and boys, the purpose was_
to, um, we’re trying to encourage boys to read. That’s another reason for bringing in authors. Also, Archie gave talks and we got him into a class which is a writing-based class and he ran a workshop with them and apparently that was really good.

Faye also discussed Andy Griffith’s visit prior to the introduction of a vertical curriculum. This particular Australian author is renown for his humorous novels, which are seldom used as class set texts, but enjoyed by both males and females for leisure reading. However, Faye said that St John’s had a definite reason for inviting Andy Griffiths. They hoped that he could inspire the boys to read more books and to improve their writing.

We had Andy Griffiths the year before this vertical curriculum and he did workshops with Year 8s. He brought in his three cases of stuff and he got the kids writing. So we’ve had different presentations from the authors.

It is customary for teachers to have a reason for inviting an author to a school, but often the students are not aware of this unless the class teacher discusses the reason in class. If it is an author of a set text which is being studied, the students understood the rationale behind the author’s visit. Most of the students I interviewed realised that by inviting an author to visit, there was a heightened interest in that particular author’s texts. Several mentioned integrated themes within the curriculum units. When asked why the teachers ask authors to visit, some of the comments from the year seven, eight and nine students were:

Tim: (Year 7) Well, I reckon ... I think they ask authors so they can tell the parents, like how this school gets in authors and gives us a chance to like speak to them and it encourages us to read, like it’s a sort of PR thing for parents.

Sam: (Year 7) I reckon this school brings some authors in to get kids reading and have a role model and stuff.

Nick: (Year 8) I reckon it’s, like, so kids get an understanding of how the author thinks and writes.
Marcus: (Year 8) Because when you get to high school people kind of, like, stop reading.

Paul: (Year 9) I reckon it’s because boys don’t read as much as girls do and they’re trying to fix that.

Daniel: (Year 9) It’s to improve our writing and our reading

At St John’s, the general view by both the teachers and the students was that authors, particularly dynamic males, provided positive role models and inspired the boys to want to read more fiction. While this view is at odds with research by Epstein et al (1998), re the dangers of perpetuating male hegemony, for the teachers this approach was the most viable.

St Ann’s Girls’ College

In answer to the question, ‘Why do you invite an author to visit?’, Pam, the Head of English discussed the curriculum in terms of meeting the girls’ reading needs. Although role modelling was not mentioned as strongly as it was at St John’s, St Ann’s had definite reasons for inviting particular authors. Pam had this to say.

Pam: Hopefully, we want authors to inspire the girls and make them more creative in their writing, and to some of them it’s fascinating to meet a real, live author. I think another reason is that having an outsider can often boost the confidence of the particular students, in that they might think they’re no good at English and, I think it helps them see their own abilities. They might like something for the first time when they hear the particular person. We get authors to help improve the students’ writing but I’d love to have John Marsden or someone to improve their reading

Pam continued to discuss the reasons why St Ann’s invited authors to visit. For example, Isobelle Carmody had been invited because there were a number of girls who were interested in reading fantasy. Pam stated that ‘my focus is to inspire the girls to read more, but to have a real live author come to our school and tell them, like Isobelle did, that ‘you can do this if you want to, I did, you can ’, had such a powerful impact.
Pam found that after this author visit, nearly all of the girls wanted to read everything Carmody had ever written.

However, sometimes an author was invited to speak particularly about a certain set text, as in the incident cited by Pam.

*When we had Peter Goldsworthy come to the school, he was able to answer the questions the girls wanted to know and most of those questions were: “Why did you do that in the text?” “Why did that character have an affair with that girl?” so that was important for them. It was easy to go back to the text in the classroom because it added another dimension. They could see beyond the text and understand that it was part of the author’s life.*

Then again, another reason cited by Pam was that, particularly in year seven, the girls needed to enjoy a presentation from an author that would be inspirational and yet fun.

*Well, Christine Harris was invited for that reason, to connect reading with fun and to create an enthusiasm for reading. You see, Peter McFarlane came to year 12 this year more to show how he goes about writing. He created a character and a setting, and then got them to write and read out their stories. We didn’t want that for Year seven. We knew that Christine Harris was full of energy and enthusiasm and could get the girls reading her books once they heard her speak, because we’d heard from other teachers how good she was.*

I also interviewed three English teachers, Andrea and Geraldine and asked them why the school invited authors to visit.

*Andrea: I think to inspire the girls. For example, John Marsden’s been here. He talked to all the girls in year seven, then year eight, then year nine. He was fantastic; he had his old notebooks with all the bits and pieces. He was great! A lot of the year eights said they were going to start journals and scrap books. And of course*
they were mad about his books. Most of them brought copies from home to be signed.

Me (looking at Geraldine): Now, why do you want authors to visit?

Geraldine: Hopefully to inspire the girls a bit and make them more creative in their writing, and to some of them it’s fascinating to meet a real, live author.

The teachers mentioned another reason for inviting an author. They believed that having an outsider can often boost the confidence of particular girls who might think they’re ‘not good at English’. Apparently an author talking about his or her own life could assist the girls to recognise their own abilities. The teachers all agreed that these girls might be motivated to write something inspirational for the first time when they hear the particular person speaking about their work. Annette, another English teacher, worked with a group of year eight reluctant readers. She had this to say:

Annette: I know with Maureen McCarthy, it was to encourage the girls to enjoy reading her book. You get year eight girls put in an elective and they wanted to do something else. Some of them don’t like reading much, and Maureen’s Queen Kat, Carmel and St Jude Get a Life is a big book. A huge book. Just the sight of that book frightens them. So I ask them what they think and what they got out of it, but I also tend to go with the background they’re coming from. If they don’t like reading, the accuracy of the information can be difficult given that some girls didn’t want to be there. I think that by bringing Maureen in, those girls could identify with the book in a different way. Rather than pull it to bits and work through page by page, that’s where the author can make it really interesting for those more reluctant readers. Maureen made the book come alive for them.

Marie the teacher-librarian who had been part of the English team for selecting set texts and organising author visits commented that:

Marie: It depends on the author, doesn’t it? I mean, if they have
an engaging personality and they’re used to speaking to groups of girls, and they can actually engage those girls in what they’re talking about, they’re going to be much more successful. Of course my focus is reading, but to have a real live author come to our school and tell them, like Isobelle did, that ‘you can do this, if you really want to, I did, you can too’, and that just blows the girls away. And then they want to read everything that this woman has ever written.

I asked Marie if she thought the girls would be inspired to read more fictional novels by other authors writing in a similar genre and style.

Marie: We have a hard-core fantasy group in this school. Fans of Isobelle Carmody and what they do is they actively go and recruit. They go out and recruit other girls to read her books and then fantasy by other authors like Anne McCaffery. But they enjoy John Marsden’s books too. He was here as a writer-in-residence another time. He worked with the English department and he also did lots of talks in the library and was very, very well received. That was a few years ago now. And Isobelle Carmody, well. ... Gee, the girls just love her, she’s just fantastic because she reveals so much of herself. And for an author to reveal something of themselves and their history, and what it was like for them growing up really switches the girls on. We’ve had three or four visits by her. We haven’t had her here for awhile, but still her books just walk off the shelves

Me: That’s what I was going to ask. What’s the long-lasting impact?

Marie: Well, John’s books still walk off the shelves.

Marie appeared to be cognisant with the girls’ reading preferences to a greater degree than the English teachers, who had not mentioned that the girls were keen on fantasy novels. She was aware which authors’ books ‘walked off the shelves’ and what the girls preferred to read in their leisure time.
St Ann’s had a similar reason for inviting authors into the school as St John’s. They wanted the girls to be inspired to read more. The term role-modelling was not used, but Isobelle Carmody was mentioned as a positive influential factor in the girls’ reading and their lives. Other Australian authors who had visited the school and who were also mentioned during interviews not cited above were Brian Caswell, Margaret Clark, Maureen McCarthy and Jackie French. Of interest was the predominance of female authors to male.

The students’ perceptions were similar to that of the English teachers and the teacher-librarian because they were aware that authors visited to inspire them to read more fictional texts, and, in some cases, help them improve their story-writing.

Sarah: (Year 7) Well, John Marsden, I guess the teachers brought him in because heaps of girls love his books and he told us how he got his ideas and about the book from his point of view, so we all wanted to read more of his books.

Emily: (Year 7) I think an author is supposed to inspire you, like John Marsden, you read their books and everything.

Jane: (Year 8) We had this man who taught us how to write short stories but I can’t remember who he was. Um, Brian …yes, Brian Caswell.

Rosie: (Year 8) We had Myron a few weeks ago, a poet and I liked his political view and the way he went beyond a certain level to get the humour in his poems.

Linda: (Year 9) I think they might get them in to help you learn how to structure stories and how to write stories, like John Marsden.

Bianca: (Year 7) I think it’s to inspire some people who are really interested in writing, like if they’re interested in being authors when they’re older.

Mel: Year 8) I think that the teachers should come to us and ask,
‘You’ve got a choice of which authors you’d like to come, which ones would you like?’ then we might be more interested and it would work better because the students would have the choice.

Although Mel did not answer the question, ‘Why do schools invite an author to visit?’ she had obviously decided that the author visits were not worthwhile because the authors who had been invited were not of interest to her. However, her point raised the issue of a lack of communication between the teachers and the students when selecting authors to visit. This is in accordance with the research by Sanacore (1993) who believed that the whole school community should be involved in the planning of an author’s visit, these being the school administrators, teachers, students and parents.

St Ann’s was committed to author visits, with Marie stating that ‘we have by far the highest percentage of visiting authors at our college’. Both male and female authors were invited, authors with the exception of Isobelle Carmody not being given a high priority as female role models, (compare St John’s and authors as male role models) but rather as people who could inspire the students to read more.

Churchton Co-educational private boarding college

When asked the question, ‘Why do you invite an author to visit?’, Ewan, the middle-school Head of English from Churchton, had this to say:

Ewan: If we bring authors in, that gives them a bit more impetus to get our students reading. And of course we’re also interested in coupling that with improving the students’ writing skills. We like authors to teach writing skills to our students as well as inspire them to read more. At middle school right now, we have a writer, David Harris, in residence and he’s here for three days. The first few years we tried it, the authors came for a week, but then they were exhausted. We used [speaking] agents at the time and we wanted someone who could speak to both senior and junior, like Peter McFarlane, we’ve had him twice actually. So now we do it through personal contact and don’t use agents much now. We’ve consciously tried to focus on the middle school, because that’s when we’ve found that the students slack off with their reading.
Ewan continued to discuss author visits at Churchton College. Double sessions, long hours and speaking to students in the boarding school at night before bed, meant that the authors had to work hard for their remuneration. Ewan justified this by stating that they wanted to get the most out of each author visit for the students’ benefit. Many authors will only work through speakers’ agents because they do not want to work under these exhausting conditions. However, Churchton College did not have difficulty in attracting authors who were prepared to stay for three or four days and work four or more sessions per day and often a session at night.

Ewan: Basically, we want someone who can do both senior and middle school, or middle and junior school. We had Isobelle Carmody the first year, and she was very popular at that stage, um, Arnold Zable, he was great for the seniors but not really for the juniors, Brian Caswell, Christine and David Harris, John Marsden, David Metzehnensen, Barbara Wells ... We’ve actually very consciously tried to focus on the middle school. Grades 5 and 6, and Years 7 and 8 here.

Ewan was extremely enthusiastic about inviting authors for longer-term stays, especially to improve the students’ writing skills.

Ewan: We have a special workshop for gifted writers. It’s very demanding of the author in as much as these children, you know, these kids are good at writing, they want to write, they certainly write a lot, and they want a one-on-one with the author. They (the authors) will look at their writing and make some comments and make some suggestions. We have a writer in residence program. The author goes into every class, and they run little workshops so that a whole range of kids can have exposure to a writer. They stay here at the boarding school, or my place or whatever’s around. If they come through an agent then we adhere to what they ask, so they might do three or four sessions, and if we’ve asked them to do three days then occasionally we might ask them to visit a boarding house at night and read to the kids, but we can’t exhaust them. It’s stupid if the authors get worn out. I’ve learned that. We ask the authors to do four fifty
minute periods a day and maybe some night time work.

I asked Christine the middle school teacher-librarian why the school brought in authors to visit. Did this connect in any way with enthusing the students to read more?

Christine: Well, if an author is in the school they do talks about their work as an author. And they visit my literature groups in the library. The students have a set library reading session with me every Tuesday. We do book recommendations and constantly try to expose them to as much literature as possible, and the visiting author usually comes to these sessions, the aim being to inspire the students to read more books.

However, did the authors’ visits have an impact on the students’ reading and writing skills? Here are comments from three year seven students and three year eight students which summed up the reaction to their interview with me:

Molly: (Year 7) John Marsden came to the school and I went to the writer’s workshop with him and Jan McVeity and Barry Carozzi and he helped me improve my writing a lot by showing me how to get the characters in my head first and let them sort of tell the story.

Vance: (Year 7) And the authors, I reckon the teachers invite them to school because they say they made a career out of writing books and we can do it too, and encouraging us to write and maybe get some ideas.

Anna: (Year 7) But then, after the author talks to us, the teacher makes us answer questions, like, ‘What did the author say about this and that’ and I haven’t a clue because most of the time I’m listening but I’m not really remembering.

Greg: (Year 8) I saw John Marsden do a talk and I suppose the thought comes back into your head to read more books, even though I don’t like reading much.
Harry: (Year 8) The authors, well I met a few at my old school but I can’t remember their names. One was real boring. He just droned on about his boring book, like, it didn’t even sound interesting enough to pick up. It could’ve been a great book but he made it sound boring.

Rachel: (Year 8) The authors get to tell you from their point of view how they get to write the book. And I still write to John Marsden on the email.

Anna saw the visit as a prelude to answering questions about the visit which she did not enjoy doing. However, the students’ comments, in the main, reflected the Churchton College teachers’ goals of having authors visit to improve the students’ understanding of the writing process. It is obvious that this private school was able to attract certain authors and get them to stay in the boarding house for extended periods of time to work with their students. The positives of this are that the students get to see the author in their own school environment and a relationship can be established, and, as demonstrated, even an on-going one, with an example of one year eight student staying in contact with John Marsden. For example, Scales (1997) stressed the importance of accessibility of authors both during and after the visit. Therefore there is a continuity to the author-student relationship, and it is not just a ‘one-off wonder’.

A prolonged author visit and on-going author-student relationships are seldom possible in a rural or government secondary school due to the lack of money to pay for the author’s accommodation as well as the author’s fees.

Countryside High

Countryside High is a rural school separated from most well-known author visits by the tyranny of distance. To import an author for a day was beyond the financial capabilities of Countryside High.

Mel: We want authors to inspire our students to read. These students are basically not good readers overall and reading isn’t considered cool by a lot of them. It’s really important that we get in some authors in to turn our students onto reading. It’s basically the logistics of getting them here and paying for their
accommodation and fees, and as I understand it, most of them don’t like to be billeted in private homes after a hard day’s work and want time out in a motel. Anyway, we got Jonathan Harlen through this Write Away Victorian program. We bought class sets of *The Lamb* and the *Lion*. It all went really well, but I wouldn’t say there was a remarkable change in reading habits subsequent to his visit. Those books sit on the shelves.

Getting well-known authors to visit country areas can be difficult due to their commitments re time needed for writing books and other short-term speaking engagements which fill their diaries. Billeting in homes can be a delightful experience for an author, or it can be a nightmare when the family’s friends and relations are invited to dinner to be ‘entertained’. Usually the author is tired and wants solitude. It is obvious from Mel’s comments that authors are most welcome to visit rural schools but lack of funds prevents this occurring on a regular basis. Book gigs are ‘author talks’ with a brief introductory talk by the author, actors from St Martins acting short scenes from the book, and student questions to the author and actors. These are organised for rural schools through Victorian Write Away and the travelling author program. However, again there were complications for Countryside High.

Mel: *We wanted another book gig but it would have been too expensive, and we would have had to share the book gig with some schools. We needed to have three schools over two days or something to that effect and it was too hard to organise because the schools all had different needs, and wanted different authors, I heard that the high school had been and heard you talk the year before and you were very popular and the kids really enjoyed your books, and you filled all the criteria we needed to get maximum exposure in the school and you were available.*

This response from Mel addresses one reason for inviting an author, with Countryside High’s criteria wanting an author of popular fiction who is a motivational speaker and who will talk to large groups of students and [hopefully] enthuse them about fictional texts.

I also interviewed Maggie, the Head of English and two other English teachers as to why she would like authors to visit the school. Maggie summed up by saying that:
From the English department’s point of view, when we start talking about who’s going to come in, it just seems to go that way, that you think of the sevens and eights, yes they’re doing No Fat Chicks, we want them to read for enjoyment, the nines and tens, it’s more like how do you get your ideas, and the seniors, we always think a writing workshop would be terrific there, rather than talk about a specific book. And that’s the way it goes. Like, Peter Goldsworthy for Maestro, but then we look at it and think, ‘The guy’s got to come down from ... well, and he can only speak to that little group of seniors, and we’d like to see someone with major exposure across the levels’.

Authors who write texts for different ages can satisfy one of the school’s requirements - to speak to students at different levels. Churchton College also mentioned this as a bonus. But what are the students’ impressions and what do they remember about author visits? To find out whether the students saw author visits in the same light as their teachers, I asked a group of year seven, eight and nine Countryside High students about their author experiences.

Mark: (Year 7) I saw Paty Marshal-Stace in primary school and she talked about how she made soap out of pigs’ guts or something, and then I read her book, something about cowboys.

Danny: (Year 7) Now, I think the reason authors are asked to come to schools is like, for something different, you don’t usually hear authors speak and maybe after you hear one, you’re going to be more interested in their books and stuff.

Jack: (Year 7) I remember Terry Denton coming to my primary school, he was funny and a writer and good drawer. Anyway, I’m still reading his books, like Gasp and Zapt and those, like for the cartoons as well as the story.

Caroline: (Year 8) Why invite authors? To make kids read more, read the books.
Katrina: (Year 8) Maybe for something different, like you don’t usually hear authors speak. After you hear one you’re going to be more interested in their books and stuff. And I think people do go and read the books.

Karen: (Year 9) You said about authors we’d seen and stuff. Well, I’ve seen you twice, once in primary school, and at a high school, because last year you talked about Back on Track, and I went and read it and I remembered you talking about the diary you wrote and all, so I started a diary and that.

Lisa: (Year 9) When I was in Grade 6 in Ballarat, I went down to Melbourne to hear Paul Jennings talk, and I read some of his books and that was pretty good. I think it was my librarian, she took us. I think it was Round the Twist and he read short stories off it. I even read them last year because when you do that you get a different point of view.

Mark remembered the author’s memorable stories, whereas both Jack and Karen gained some personal benefits, Jack being turned onto an author’s books and Karen getting ideas for her own writing. Lisa said that it helped her understand the author’s novels in a different way, whereas Katrina saw the author visit as ‘something different’ that had enhanced the curriculum.

Of interest is that some of these students recollected seeing authors when they visited their primary schools. Often rural primary schools will share the costs of an author visit and meet in a central place such as a hall. It is more difficult for secondary schools due to time-table restrictions and larger numbers of students. In the year levels, and, as cited, the costs become prohibitive.

For Northdown High, not only was the tyranny of meager finances a problem for the lower socio-economic school staff, but also the anxiety that the author could be boring or unable to hold the attention of the students.

Northdown High

Laura, the teacher-librarian, discussed why she was anxious about inviting authors to
Northdown High, even though she felt it was imperative for authors to inspire the students to read.

Laura: Basically our big aim is to get the students to enjoy reading and get them interested in borrowing books. The author has to be able to switch them onto reading and be funny and entertaining. But then again I’d never invite someone along as purely a light afternoon’s entertainment. But at this school we have to be careful who we invite. If the author is boring, the kids will start talking and nudging each other and throwing things and then the teachers have to come down heavy and do the crowd control thing through the whole session. Apparently that happened about five years ago and then there were no more authors invited. I’ve only been here for three. So I thought we’d give it another try and I asked Robert Trickey. He used to be a teacher, and I’d heard through my teacher network that he’d be great with the kids. He self-publishes his books. The feedback was really positive and I saw more new faces in the library borrowing books, not just his.

Problematic for some schools is getting the ‘right’ author to turn the students onto reading. Although the intent of some teachers is to inspire the students with an author whose works they love, if the author is boring, the result will be worse than if no-one was invited.

Laura: We’ve lined up John Marsden to come and talk to the Year 9s, but as I said, not much has been done really in the past. Like, this area, we miss out a bit. We’ve got a couple of people lined up for this year. We’re trying to keep it chugging along. Once you get something started the kids look forward to it, and you can put things in place to get the money together so that you can do it. The first year I paid for it out of library and last year we got money out of DSP money. It’s kind of Disadvantaged School Program stuff. We got money, about $500 out of that, for you, and we put in again for $500 for this year, but I wish I’d asked for three times that.
The students whom I interviewed recollected that their author visits to their primary schools and Northdown High were either ‘boring’ or funny.

Jenny: (Year 7) In primary school we had a couple of picture book authors, I can’t remember their names but they went on and on and told us the same thing over and over and it was really boring. There was one male and one female, and all I can remember is the guy said that drawing is fun, I think it was dinosaurs, and the female just raved on about her busy schedule.

Brett: (Year 7) We heard you at the library in year six. I must say that after I had read your books before you came and did the talk and after you came I enjoyed the talk and well, I went and had a look on the shelves and started reading them.

Daisy: (Year 7) After your talk in primary school, I didn’t rush out and buy your books or anything and I don’t think any kids did. I think the teachers hope that we’ll do that, like, buy them and read more.

Mark: (Year 8) Talking about authors, well, we had Elizabeth Honey at primary school in grade six. I remember her because she was really funny.

Charlotte: (Year 8) Authors can, like, help you with the narrative writing and you can look at stuff and just write about it, and you can get autographs on your books.

Narissa: (Year 8) I saw you in Book Week in the library. I was reading quite a bit, but then I sort of started reading your books, then I read more and more, like I think you get more interested in the author’s books when you’ve seen and heard them.

Andrew: (Year 9) The teachers have to be careful who they get to talk to us, because if some of these guys are as boring as their books sound, then everyone would go to sleep or walk out.
Kate: *(Year 9)* Authors visit probably to make kids read more.

Nicole: *(Year 9)* I think to get them interested in the author’s career, like they do totally different maybe to what another person does, and so kids can realise what they’re like and what sort of books they write, and sort of get to know them as a person.

The students appeared to be aware of potential problems if the authors chosen by the teachers were ‘too boring’. However, as Brett, Nicole, Narissa and Nicole remarked, an exciting author could inspire them to read more books.

Laura, the teacher-librarian, was understandably cautious about instigating her author visitation program, due to a past history of unsuccessful author visits. Lauren remarked that she wanted authors like Robert Trickey, John Marsden, Andy Griffiths, Christine Harris, Hazel Edwards, Krista Bell and Jackie French because she had been told by other teacher-librarians that these authors could motivate students and excite them to read.

**PART 4: DATA ANALYSIS**

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As with Research Project 1, I used content analysis to examine the interviews. From the data, I devised two categories which I believed would best allow me to interpret the data, these being the teachers’/librarians’ reasons for inviting authors to schools and how the author visit integrated with the school curriculum.

4.2 CATEGORY: THE REASONS FOR INVITING AUTHORS TO VISIT

All of the schools had similar reasons for why they would like authors to visit. Although integration across the school curriculum was only discussed in a formal way by St John’s (vertical streaming/integrated curriculum), the responses by the English teachers and teacher-librarians indicated that an articulate and motivated author could inspire the students to read more.

The main reason for author visits as cited by both teachers and students, was to inspire the students to read more texts, to enjoy reading these and to be challenged to read other
texts.

A second reason was that the author would help the students understand the nuances of a particular set text, as cited by the English teachers at St John’s, St Ann’s, Churchton College and Countryside High.

The third reason was to improve the students’ writing skills. However, the teacher-librarians did not mention this as a goal: this was cited by the English teachers.

The students had similar views, realising that the author was supposed to inspire them to read more (whether they did or didn’t had not been evaluated in a formal way by the teachers except with comments like ‘His books walked off the shelves’. Those students who had been visited by an author to primarily discuss a set text had found the experience enlightening and this had helped them with their understanding of the text. Furthermore, the students were cognisant that the authors who were conducting writing workshops were trying to help them improve their writing skills.

However, an author visit could be a negative experience if the students were bored and not excited by the visits. It is seen as of great importance by Raum (1994) for the teacher to match the author with the students’ needs, suggesting that the teacher read as much material as possible about the proposed author. Raum then posed the following questions:

- Would your students relate to this type of writing?
- Is the author’s subject matter appropriate for the classroom?
- Does the writer’s genre or subject matter complement a certain area of study?
- Do you like the writer’s style?
- Do you think that this writer will excite your students about the craft of writing?

(Raum, 1994, p.229).

In all of the schools, the need to match the needs of the students to the talents and suitability of the author was recognised by the English teachers and teacher-librarians. This was often dependent on the author’s style of writing and furthermore, on the students’ favouring of popular genres, such as fantasy science fiction, adventure and mystery (boys) and relationships and fantasy (girls).
These needs were cited as the authors ‘being interesting’, ‘being able to inspire the students to read’, ‘being able to improve the students’ writing’, and generally adding another dimension to adolescents’ reading experiences. This is born out by the work of Smith (1992), who reported that if the author-student match is a good one, it is possible that the students will search for that author’s books on the shelf, will read more of the books by that author and may even search out other authors who write in the same style of genre. Wheat (1999) agreed, believing that by meeting the author, new life was put into the book because the reader gets a greater understanding of the text.

The following table shows what the English teachers, teacher-librarians and students think about author visits.

**TABLE 8: Reasons for Author Visits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Teachers</th>
<th>Teacher Librarians</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School A</strong></td>
<td><strong>School A</strong></td>
<td><strong>School A</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive role modeling</td>
<td>More fiction reading</td>
<td>Positive role modelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting boys to read more fiction</td>
<td>Inspiring boys to read</td>
<td>Get us to read more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help the boys understand texts</td>
<td>Help us to understand texts</td>
<td>Help us to write better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help students with their writing</td>
<td>Help us to write better</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School B</strong></td>
<td><strong>School B</strong></td>
<td><strong>School B</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To inspire the girls to read more</td>
<td>More challenging literature</td>
<td>Get us to read more books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To boost confidence in writing</td>
<td>Fantasy authors</td>
<td>Show us how to get ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet real, live authors</td>
<td></td>
<td>We learn how to structure stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain their set texts to the girls</td>
<td></td>
<td>We should help choose the authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School C</strong></td>
<td><strong>School C</strong></td>
<td><strong>School C</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get students reading</td>
<td>Importance of reading</td>
<td>Get us to read more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve students’ writing skills</td>
<td>Challenging readers</td>
<td>Improve our writing skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors across year levels</td>
<td>Writing workshops/camps</td>
<td>Show us how to get ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading in a boarding school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing with some authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School D</strong></td>
<td><strong>School D</strong></td>
<td><strong>School D</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire students to read</td>
<td>Get kids to visit library</td>
<td>Get us to read more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letting them see a real author</td>
<td>Library is a ‘cool’ place</td>
<td>Have a boring or funny time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link authors into our texts</td>
<td>Inspire students to read</td>
<td>Something different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors who work across levels</td>
<td></td>
<td>Get a different point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School E</strong></td>
<td><strong>School E</strong></td>
<td><strong>School E</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get students to read more</td>
<td>Turn kids onto reading</td>
<td>Make us want to read more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switch kids onto reading</td>
<td>Meet a real live author</td>
<td>Get someone funny to make us read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature enrichment</td>
<td>Non-boring</td>
<td>Help us with our writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why authors write what they do</td>
<td></td>
<td>Meet someone famous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
School A = St John’s boys’ Catholic college
The table shows that the English teachers in school A chose authors to promote a positive role model whereas the English teachers in B and D wanted their students to experience ‘a real live author’. English teachers in schools A and C wanted authors to help students with creative writing. Linking to school texts was seen as important by English teachers in B and D.

The teacher librarians in School A wanted authors to inspire the boys to read, as did D and E, whereas D hoped that an author visit would encourage students to visit the library.

In all schools, the students thought that authors were asked to visit so that they would read more books. Some school C students had developed an on-going relationship with the authors. School A saw authors as helping them to understand texts and ‘write better’ as did Cand E. However school B said they should be allowed to help choose the authors.

My findings indicated that author visits can be valuable from both the teachers’ and students’ perspectives. However, it is important to integrate the visit with the curriculum.

4.3 CATEGORY: INTEGRATING THE VISIT WITH THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM.

It was apparent that forward planning was extremely important. This meant articulation with English teachers, teacher-librarians, and school administrators and their philosophy concerning literature. St John’s and St Ann’s planned their author visits at the end of each year when discussing set texts for the following year. St Ann’s reported a similar experience to an American study, in which Maminski (1993) stated that her staff commenced their next year’s plans with material about the authors’ books as a priority.

However, picking books first and authors second may not be the best strategy for a school such as Northdown High. Fortunately, Laura, the teacher-librarian, was aware of this when planning her author visits. She planned to base visits around popular authors who could ‘hold an audience’, who were entertaining, and their books interesting.

Problematic for both curriculum and organisational issues is an individual teacher or librarian’s solo instigation of an author visit, because if this person is absent at the time
of the visit, there is resultant confusion. Research by Smith (1992), Maminski (1993) and Raum (1994) found that author visits should be planned by a small committee, with different members taking on specific roles. Furthermore, Sanacore (1993) suggested contacting the author prior to the event, putting up displays, ensuring that the students have read the author’s books, ensuring that there is a display table, microphone, enough seating, ensuring that all classes have a time-table, ensuring that the author is hosted, and is paid at the end of the day.

PART 5: IMPLICATIONS

A number of implications arose from the findings concerning author. Firstly, in order to maximise the author visit, the students need to be familiar with the author’s work, preferably have read a number of texts by the author, and have prepared in advance for the visit (posters, displays, questions to ask the author).

Secondly, most schools pay a fee to have an author visit. Therefore it would seem logical that the whole school is involved in making the visit special, perhaps by holding a fund-raising event such as a mini readathon. If the visit is linked to the curriculum and texts being studied or read in the library, it is far more meaningful for the students.

Finally, the findings indicated that an author visit is usually more successful when a team of teachers have worked together to organise it, which creates on-going enthusiasm.

PART 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A school committee should be formed to ascertain which authors should be invited. This should be established towards the end of the year when set texts are being discussed.

2. The authors can be contacted through agents or their web sites, and a written contract should exist between the two parties outlining schedules, fees, travel/accommodation arrangements and other pertinent details.

3. Prior to the visit, the author should be contacted to finalise any further organisational details.

4. The author’s novels should have been read by the students prior to the visit and the students should have written questions to ask the author.

5. The author is a visitor to the school, so reception should be welcoming, displays to promote the visit should be arranged in prominent places, and the author treated
with respect and enthusiasm.
CHAPTER 5 : RESEARCH PROJECT 3:
AUTHORS’ NARRATIVES

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

This folio piece differs from my other research projects in that it investigates my own workplace. From my own perspective as an author who visits schools, I wrote of my experiences in personal professional journal. However, I knew that there were other authors with viewpoints about school visits. This folio piece is unique because it explores the personal opinions of a cohort of professional authors who are also my colleagues. The narratives provide a perspective that allows entry into the authors’ thoughts and feelings about these school visits.

Schools are sometimes part of an author’s workplace, but most times are not. The author works at home in solitude to produce work. While primarily economic, there are also personal and social reasons as to why an author ventures into a school, these being to meet their readers, to assist them to understand a particular text, to inspire the students to read more, to help the students improve their writing skills, to discuss the texts with the teachers, to ascertain the influence of their particular texts in the curriculum, to get feedback on their work from the teachers and students, to gain status and recognition, to increase book sales and to receive an income from such visits. Publishers often persuade authors to ‘go on tour’ to schools when a new book is realised. Agents contact authors seeking their involvement in literary festivals and special events. English teachers and teacher-librarians request visits, and students write to authors asking them to visit their classrooms. Professional authors sometimes have difficulty in leaving their home workplace due to pressures from publishers to meet deadlines and other family/business commitments. In summary, the author’s school visits can be, to a degree, part of an author’s workplace, depending on how many visits an author undertakes during a year. From the perspective of an author, the visits need to be fulfilling in terms of feeling valued and respected.

English teachers and teacher-librarians are seldom privy to the ‘inside story’ as related below in the email to myself from a fellow author, and my response.

Dear Marg,

Gorgeous time at Sharleywood: incredible relaxed friendliness, great audiences, wonderful gossip with other authors- if only it could always be like that! Suspect I’ll now go off to the next one all happy


and confident and have another horry where I get lost, the room is booked for trumpet practice, the receptionist is doing an ‘how to be a psychopath in three easy lessons’ course and I catch the six different strains of flu from some snivelling kids. It really was a fantastic time at Sharleywood. But I have found I’m getting increasing- not nervous, that’s gone - is it apprehensive? about talks. I can’t sleep, in case I sleep in (probably because most mornings I can just sleep till I want to wake) and the most exhausting- mentally and physically- part of school visits is finding the place, then finding a parking place, then finding the front door, then attracting the attention of the receptionist, and then getting home again. Taxis are no better as they don’t arrive half the time; or go to the wrong gate, or don’t know where it is and demand I look up the street directory without my glasses on then go in circles for an hour; or say they DO know where it is when it isn’t there and are too pigheaded to admit mistake. The worst is when I have the wrong instructions and I go to the senior campus in the taxi and the talks are at the junior campus and it’s kays away and of course by then the taxi’s gone off. Love, Jay

Dear Jay,

I love schools and the energy that the kids generate, but, like you, the mechanics of getting there wear me out before I start. I also toss and turn and keep waking up to look at the clock. The talking does not worry me in the least. Like you, it’s the getting there! It’s nerve-wracking trying to drive and look at the street directory and there’s hardly ever any car-parking at the schools. And some don’t have communal coffee or tea, and after driving from Geelong for two hours, I need a restorative. At my last school, the English teacher (who only drank herbal tea) was standing in the staff room shouting, ‘Does anyone have some coffee they can spare?’ as teachers scuttled back and forth to pigeon-holes or did their staff room thing. But more annoying yesterday was when the year sevens I was booked to talk to had gone off on a school excursion ‘and now you’re doing year ten.’ It’s okay for me, as I have the age range in books (and experience) but I know some authors just freak. However, it’s not all about tea and scones with jam and cream. Some of the private school teachers are just so nice to me while they smile, show me their basket of freshly baked scones/muffins and then tell me that they know I’d be happy to do three double sessions, even though they know full well that only three single sessions were agreed upon in the agent’s contract! Grr. And they look so disappointed when I say no. Some of these schools seem to be after their pound of flesh!

But, Jay, there is hope! I have to tell you, last week I had the ultimate dream school in Melbourne. I finally found the school, drove through the gate, and there was a big sign indicating ‘Visitor’s Car Park’ and another notice, with witches’ hats, saying ‘Reserved for Margaret Clark’. Then as I was hauling out my folio and books, a nice friendly
man came down the steps, introduced himself, welcomed me to the school and carried my stuff past reception (where I was introduced to the receptionist who smiled brightly at me and even knew who I was) straight to the staff room where I was given coffee and cake. The room where I was to talk was set up with a microphone, display board with posters, racks with my books, a book seller seated at the rear of the room, kids all organised to buy books if they wanted and get them signed, white board, glass of water, flowers, chairs arranged with an aisle down the middle. By this time I was waiting for St Trinians type kids because it was all too good to be true! But the students were an absolute delight. They listened intently while I spoke, had read the books in class and had lists of intelligent questions to ask. I was very impressed. Hope your next school is as good if not better. Love, Margaret

1.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF AUTHORS’ PERSPECTIVES

‘Stories are the closest we can come to experience when we and others tell of our experience’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, p.415). It can be illuminating for English teachers and teacher librarians to learn about the ‘behind the scenes’ stories of authors who visit schools so that they can understand the impact of a visit from the author’s point of view. In terms of the authors telling me their personal, professional accounts of school visits, Glesne (1999, p.196) points out that ‘the beauty of a good story is its openness. It encourages you to compare its descriptions and analyses to your own experiences and to, perhaps, think differently about your own situation’.

Most authors arrive at the school, perform, and leave. They do not usually discuss their triumphs, anxieties, frustrations and other pertinent issues because they are trying to behave in a professional manner. Furthermore, a formal evaluation is seldom sought from the authors. From the school’s point of view, (see research project 2), the visit is deemed a success if the author enthuses the students to read, explains the set text, expounds on where he/she gets ideas, or assists with the students’ creative writing. Indeed, if the students are attentive and ask questions of the author, it is felt by all to be very successful.

What I believe might be gained from this folio piece for educators, particularly English teachers and teacher-librarians, is ‘inside information’ about what authors think and how they assess a successful visit. This can assist schools to ensure that the author visit provides optimum learning for all who participate.
1.3 **KEY RESEARCH QUESTION**
What factors make a successful school visit from an author’s perspective?

1.4 **SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS**
What are the authors expectations in regard to school visits?
What orientations/disorientations affect the author’s presentation?
What factors show that authors are respected and recognised when visiting schools?

1.5 **SELECTING THE AUTHORS**
The first step was to ask a cohort of my colleagues if they would like to tell me their experiences. I did this by emailing them and requesting that they write me a short story about their school experiences. I felt that this would harvest the richest data. My assumption was that if I gave the authors ‘free rein’ to write about their own personal professional experiences as authors visiting schools, I would gain their valuable perspectives. I chose four authors, two male and two female, whom I had worked with in schools or at literary festivals, and who had vast experience as visiting authors in schools over a number of years. Also they were not all from Victoria, three being from NSW and one from South Australia, because I was interested to find out if experiences varied between State education systems in schools. (My own experience of author visits had found no noticeable difference as noted in my personal, professional journal).

In order to find out the authors’ experiences, both positive and negative in schools, I asked them to email me their own stories. I asked for one narrative about a dream school (positive experience) and one narrative about a nightmare school (negative experience). From my own personal experiences, I was aware that between these two extremes are a number of other experiences that authors could write about, but I thought that through the description of one positive and one negative experience from each author, I would be able to analyse the narratives for key phrases and words within generated themes.

In relation to school visits, I found that the author’s narratives were concerned with having their expectations met, their problems with orientations/disorientations and their need for respect and recognition. Therefore I generated the following themes:

(1) Expectations
(2) Orientations/Disorientations
(3) Respect and recognition
Within these themes I found that there were particular foci, these being:

(a) Arrival at the school
(b) Author’s presentation at the school
(c) Author’s well-being at the school.

Using these themes and foci, I was able to interpret the authors’ narratives to gain maximum useful information about their experiences when visiting schools.

PART 2: THE AUTHORS’ NARRATIVES

The authors were contacted by email and all were asked if they could write an excerpt that best described the most desirable conditions for a school visits, and the least desirable conditions for a school visits. I suggested they write about their Dream Schools or Nightmare Schools, given that they had lengthy stories to tell, and I only wanted narratives of approximately one thousand words. Within the Dream and Nightmare School stories, I hoped (without prompting) that the authors would discuss the issues that also concerned me as an author.

Author A’s Dream School:

*When the teacher-librarian rings with the invitation, it’s clear that she’s familiar with your books and you are being invited personally, not just as any author to fill a book week or literacy week slot. It’s assumed you charge a fee and expenses, and this is handled professionally with a tax invoice required in advance, so you can be paid discreetly on the day, with the cheque in an envelope. Either a bookshop has been organised to supply your books for students and the library and you’re asked to autograph them on the day or you’re asked if you supply books for sale. Fine. Not just ‘entertainment’, the author visit is part of a unit of work and you’re asked to cover specific areas. You’re asked how many students and how many sessions, and supplied with microphone, water and a ‘minder’ who greets you at the front gate. Your lunch is provided. Students have genuine questions as they have actually read your books. Questions like: ‘If you had a*
dinner party and invited one of your characters, who would you invite?’ You leave ideas for students to work on. Later, students send on their reviews and comments and access author web site. Teacher responds with a personal thank you letter about the ways the kids have benefited from the session. You’re asked if it is okay for a photographer from the local newspaper to photograph you with the students, and this is done with a feature article written by students which also runs in their school newsletter. A courtesy copy is e-mailed to you later. They invite you back next year and you go.

This extract highlights the importance of organisation within the school, in particular, the planning stage before the actual visit. In her guidelines for successful author programs, McElmeel (1994) suggested that the staff ‘sketch out the visits’ and think about what type of event or program would work at your school. Do you want small groups in the library or large groups in the auditorium? Should the program consist of lectures or readings or workshops for student writers? When would be the best time for an author to visit? You need to at least tentatively answer these questions before you contact and author’ (McElmeel, 1994, p.22).

Without careful forward planning, the following can result:

Author A’s School Visit from Hell … Never again!
A vague request for a vague date. No confirmation until author checks. Amazed that an author requires a fee. Multi-campus school and room and campus changes at the last minute. No one to greet you. Heavy book case and demo material to haul from street park (car later booked by council) No help. Stand unattended for ten minutes in school office because ‘all out to lunch’. Not welcomed into staff room, ignored by staff … thought to be a book rep. Venue is gym with no table for book, mike, terrible echoing acoustics , loud music next door from band practice and the sessions have been re-organised with no break and triple numbers because teachers are away sick today. (Often happens when author is visiting) ‘This is okay for you, isn’t it?’ Use the wrong name when you’re introduced. Students are not interested. Talk or fool around. Takes lots of energy (and voice)
to get them interested, in between constant interruptions from monitors coming to drag away sports participants or kids with music lessons. One teacher sits up back and marks. The other yawns. The attitude is that it’s a ‘free’ period for them. School and library have none of authors books and don’t want to buy any. ‘How much do you make?’ is the only question. Why would you want to be an author unless you make millions was the student attitude. You have to ask for your fee, the teacher says ‘that’s more than I earn for a half day’ and no-one is available to sign the cheque. No cheque prepared and eventually arrives for wrong amount, months later, after several follow ups.

It is obvious that either little preparation had been organised, or the organising person has worked in isolation and the benefits of an author visit had not been discussed at length. The physical surroundings had not been considered. The authors’ books had not been read by the majority of the students. Paladino (1999) suggests that teachers/librarians rouse the curiosity of the student well ahead of the visit by reading to them from the authors’ novels or short stories … and know the authors, their body of work, and the issues or concerns the authors write about’ (Paladino, 1999, p.6).

Author A also requested that I include the following narrative which was referred to as the ‘rude freebie visit’, but which, in the end, had one benefit not anticipated.

As a personal favour to an 8 year old child whose teacher did not believe I had written a story about him, I agreed to be his ‘Show and Tell’. His mother negotiated with the teacher for a time and date which suited the teacher. I agreed to talk to the grade and explain how I had written that book. I arrive at the school 20 minutes before the afternoon session begins, the office is unattended and I’m left waiting until 2pm when school starts for the afternoon and the teacher returns from her lunch. I had not had lunch after a very busy morning elsewhere a long way from that school.

Meanwhile, a student teacher invites me to sit in the staff room. At 2 pm I’m taken to the classroom which has three classes (two extra), and three teachers, (two extra) introduced by name, and invited to talk which I do for the 40 minutes. I include the child,
but not too obviously. When question time comes, one of the teachers asks quite seriously if I saw in polar bears in Antarctica. I explain they were only in the North Pole. Then ‘my child’ is asked to thank me, on their behalf and escort me to the car. He gives me a thank you card and a present (organised by his mother). ‘His’ manners were beautiful and this is a child who is normally exuberant. Annoyed by the school rudeness, I was prepared to write it off as a wasted afternoon, until his mother rang to thank me. ‘It was so important to him. He has never been popular before.’ The wasted afternoon had been worthwhile. Later, ‘he’ was given ‘student of the week’ for bringing an author to class. That mattered to him. But it had cost me half a day of messing around to be at that school which is not local for me. I think some teachers need a course of basic manners. My decision not to charge [a fee], meant I was not valued. But it was worthwhile for the child.

In this instance, there are separate agendas. Obviously the teachers were delighted that a ‘free’ author was coming, viewing the event as an opportunity to cram as many students in as they could to hear the author. The classroom teachers at the ‘freebie’ school presumed that the author would be willing to talk to more students than arranged. If Author A had been consulted, no doubt the inclusion of the extra students would not have been an annoyance. Author A had made a special effort to visit this particular school, not charging a fee. Sadly, Author A felt devalued and ‘used’ after this experience.

Author B’s Dream school:
Alliston Girls Grammar: I go there every year. About 120 girls who have read all my books, and studied one for a term; really thoughtful questions about why I used this or that literary technique or maybe a nice perceptive history question; cheque in my hand at the end and a big bunch of flowers; a library with great acoustics, so no microphone needed; comfy chair, table, jug of water with ice, whiteboard, and don’t have to ask for ANY of it; a few really enthusiastic kids brought in to say hi beforehand and any kid who’s blind, partially deaf etc so they can have a chat too as they may miss some of the nuances and
need to feel loved, and no one had conniptions if I give a kid who can't see a hug or squeeze her hand; a cup of tea and a nice bit of something one of the teachers have brought in but no muggings by all the staff. Not one of whom asks exactly the same questions (where do you live where do you get your ideas etc) so you're out of breathe by the time you start with the kids... and the best thing about Alliston is that everyone- me, the kids, the teachers- really enjoy the whole afternoon and all feel like springing up and taking over the world at the end of it, it's so much fun and we get so much out of it- you know the kids have new insights, new techniques to use, ditto the teachers, and I have an insight into what the kids love or question and feel like writing another hundred book for them that evening. That sort of school is a dream school.

Author B’s narrative indicated that there is mutual benefit for teachers, students and the author when the students have studied the author's texts and have prepared some questions that are extrapolated from these studies.

An author's program can be ‘a viable part of the school’s belief system’ (Sanacore, 1993, p.3) For example, courtesy and appreciation were extended to the author at all times. The inclusion of students with physical disadvantages or learning problems who received personal attention from the author showed that the teachers were ‘in tune’ with those students’ personal and educational needs. From the consideration extended to both the author and the disadvantaged students, it can be assumed that this school values people highly and that belief system forms an integral part of the school ethos.

Conversely, here is Author B’s narrative of another school visit experience.

*Author B’s Nightmare school*

Nightmare school? I got lost finding it. Teacher said later: Ooh yes, taxis can never find us, because this is UPPER Rabbit Flats and they all go to Lower. Refrain from muttering: why didn’t you tell me then. Receptionist is talking on the phone, obviously personal, a friend. Ignores me. I am now five minutes late due to taxi circling for three quarters of an hour. (Tried to ring her but school phone engaged, probably due to conversation with
friend). No chair to sit on, back killing me as I've had to lug my suitcase too up and down the school looking for the office. She finally deigns to notice me, puts call through to teacher. Teacher no there- in the hall of course waiting for me. I suggest this. 'Oh,' she says, 'why don’t you go there?’ ‘Where?’ I say. She gives directions. I lumber off, with bags, finally find hall, sweating and out of breath. There's grade one through to year ten and the problem learners class as well. No microphone. At least 500 of the 700 kids have coughs. After five minutes- and this is not a joke- the high school band comes in and starts to practice. I stop. They say Miss Prichard said they could and the competition is tomorrow. Teacher says vaguely, 'Well, you can cope, can’t you?’ I say no and I tell the kids to go to the library to practice as there is no one there; a bit stunned at the unexpected voice of authority they march off. I start again. At this stage one of the disabled kids in the front row starts to scream, on and on, not at me: it's part of the poor kid’s illness, but no one takes him out or even to the side door. I keep talking. Kid next to screaming boy starts to cry. I stop, say,’ Honey, it's okay’, then ask can someone look after her? Start again. After 15 minutes, and the kids are just starting to really get into it and become enthusiastic, all year six’s have to leave for the sport's carnival. By now I am coughing due to voice strain. (will come down with laryngitis the next day; this leads to infection and I can’t work for another week). Lawn mower starts up outside. Turns out only a few of the kids have read any of my books as the librarian- Again no joke- doesn’t like books taken OUT of the library, and my books are too long to read in a sitting. Then...no, I can’t continue. too painful. Let's just say it included 620 scraps of paper(the year 6’s have left), and I'm literally suffocating under the crowd and the teachers do nothing to help, and even though I yell 'All in a line', with 620 kids most can’t hear me; teacher afterwards smiles nastily at me and says, ‘Well, it’s all right for SOME,’ in reference to my cheque, ignoring the fact that she gets sick leave, rec leave, superannuation and doesn’t have to travel for a day and half to get the said cheque, nor work half as hard for it ... AND I JUST WANT TO GO HOME
Author B also presented me with a list of the most common problems when visiting schools. When I read them, many were my common problems as well.

1. No microphone although that was stipulated when author agreed to visit.

2. 700 kids with bits of paper to sign - often twice for their best friend too (author wants to be available for kids with books to sign, or autograph books, or real questions to ask privately).

3. Authors need proper direction to get to the school- and office- some offices are hidden as the schools grow larger, and it takes a tracker dog to find them.

4. Outside noises i.e. lawn mowers, jackhammers, chainsaws, people mending the roof directly above, netball team outside the window.

5. Teachers or parents who gossip in the back row and disrupt the kids’ concentration (this happens often- never have a problem with kids, but do with parents and teachers talking).

6. Miss Grimsby who yells out mid suspenseful moment in my talk- ‘I’ve got my eye on you, Jim Blotter!’

7. Teachers who say, ‘Well, good luck, I don’t think you can get anything into this lot.’ (Those audiences are invariably wonderful as the kids respond to something and someone new and interesting).

8. Schools who expect you to do a freebie even though none of the teachers have done a day’s unpaid work for anyone in the past five years: don’t mind freebies for local schools i.e. I am a parent and citizen, or really needy schools, or ones I have close relationship with, or if a kid writes a darling letter and I offer: but it’s my job, and I do it well, and if you don’t argue about payment with your doctor, lawyer, gardener or ironing lady, don’t argue with me.

9. Parents with babies who cry at full throttle and who jig them vaguely while I yell over them … have full sympathy with yelling babies but on the other hand, have only one finite voice to yell with.
Author C’s Dream School
I have been author visits to schools for over ten years. I don’t expect to be treated like a movie or rock star - that would be totally inappropriate. But I expect to be welcomed enthusiastically by staff and students who are expecting me, so that it’s worthwhile giving up my writing time, and travelling considerable distances to be there. I make phone contact with the organising teacher some weeks before the visit to ensure that the students will be familiar with my books, and on the day of the visit, I assume that the students are there to listen, learn, and ask informed questions. At the conclusion of my visit, I need to feel that I have contributed positively to both the students’ and the teachers’ experience of books and writing, otherwise there’s been no point to the exercise for them or for me. I value feedback about my books and enjoy meeting my readers.

Author C’s Nightmare School
Nightmare! My worst case scenario involved arriving at a state secondary college in a major city after an hour’s driving, to find that no one expected me. The organising teacher, who had sounded so enthusiastic over the phone, was away sick. No preparation had been done, I was kept waiting about twenty minutes with no offer of a cup of tea, while teachers and students were rounded up and assembled in a cold, over-sized gym, with poor acoustics and uncomfortable bench seating. It turned out that no one had ever picked up a book with my name on it, let alone read it. I had attempted to engage a hostile audience of 150 year 9 students who had no idea who I was and absolutely no intention of listening. Continuous chatter undermined my talk, couples held hands and kissed behind folders - the few students who were interested found the situation as impossible as I did. There was no teacher intervention until right at the end when I announced that I had had enough and I was leaving - only then did the deputy principal come forward and announce that because of their rudeness the entire year would do a Friday
detention. Such creative teaching really sealed my fate. It guaranteed that none of those students would ever pick up a book with my name on it. After such a demeaning experience, I phoned my agent and swore off visits to state secondary colleges for ever! Nothing I have heard from colleagues since has reversed that decision.

I have not questioned Author C as to the identity of the school, but a number of cameos flitted through my mind of nightmare schools with discourteous and unruly students. However, I would like to emphasise that some nightmare schools experienced by me and other authors have been from the private school sector, not just state secondary colleges.

Author D’s Dream school
They send me a map, with advice on how long the drive will take, the best route at that time of the day and ask whether I need any special equipment. They call me the day before, just to check that everything’s still all right. Two students meet me brightly at the car park, take me to meet the principal, she says, ‘You’ve got no idea how much we’re looking forward to this!’ She introduces me to the teacher who will be my host during the visit. The teacher shows me the toilet, then the display of books and welcome pictures the students have prepared in the library. She asks me if it will be all right to speak to two smaller groups rather than one big one. Two teachers accompany each group. The teachers are fully engaged with the talk and the students are too. The teachers ask questions during question time, just as the students do. The teachers hold a lunch for me in the staff room and all sit round asking questions and talking about books and even apologise if they have to leave when the bell for playground duty goes. When I have to leave myself, several teachers say, ‘I hope you’ll come back again,’ and the host teacher walks down to the car park with me. This is not a dream - it’s real. Unfortunately, so is the nightmare school.

Author D’s Nightmare school:
When I finally track down the library, and a student tracks down
the librarian, she tells me that they forgot to send the note home to the parents about books. The publisher has arranged for a bookseller to come, but she sells five books out of the boxes she lugs in, because the kids haven’t got any money. Three teachers and two hundred kids, chunks of concrete literally falling off the walls, the male teacher screaming at the kids till the veins bulge on his forehead, (I know why the concrete’s falling), no heating, no microphone. It’s so cramped that half the kids have to sit on the lino, where they pinch and shove each other constantly (yes, they’re secondary students); the two female teachers sit in the back row - one knits and gossips, the other drinks coffee, marks papers and gossips, while in the front row the class lovers try every trick in the book - except one - to attract attention. And I try every trick in the teaching manual to involve them and stop the constant talk and giggling. When it’s finally over, the knitter up the back says, ‘Well, that went all right.’ And I say, as politely as I can, ‘Except for the lovers in the front row’ and she says, ‘Well, you could have done something.’

Problematic is an expectation that the author knows how to ‘control’ students. It must be a consideration when inviting authors, that many are not trained teachers, and even if they are, it is the school’s responsibility to maintain control. Teachers who talked to each other or marked papers have been mentioned by other authors as well as Author D. McElmeel (1994) and Raum (1994) both contended that the most successful author visits occurred when the teachers are involved as well as the students, and as Author D stated,’ the teachers ask questions during question time, just as the students do’. This type of teacher-behaviour then models appropriate behaviour for the students, in addition to the teachers showing an avid interest in the proceedings.

When interviewing the teachers for research project 2, their responses regarding author visits were, in the main, positive. Some schools had experienced ‘boring’ or ‘inappropriate’ authors. Some authors had arrived late and thrown the schedule completely askew. When the author is late, the school routine is upset, but also the author is usually flustered, stressed and tense, as demonstrated by the authors’ narratives in my study and in the following personal journal extracts.

*August, 2000*
I had to get a train to Central then to Westland, a journey lasting more than an hour and a half, lugging a bag of my books and a cumbersome folio. There were no taxis in sight at the railway station so I asked directions and started to walk, a twenty minute uphill struggle. There were homeless people in doorways and in the rotunda when I crossed the park, some of whom muttered and shook their fists, unnerving me. I phoned the school and they said I was only ten minutes away and to keep walking. I finally found the school, arriving fifteen minutes late, and they were friendly, but I was already fractious, had a headache, and just wanted to go home. I will never get the train again in Sydney, I swear.

September, 2001, Sydney, staying at my son’s house.
Today I was just so anxious and stressed. The taxi didn’t come. I rang again and again. Finally my daughter-in-law left her work and drove back to get me. I arrived terribly late at the school and was tense for the rest of the day.

Since I have now learned to negotiate the subways in Tokyo when travelling to schools, train travel in Sydney probably will not seem so daunting.

However, sometimes the schools do not give the author enough details, or forget to inform the author when the visit is cancelled. Or the teacher in charge informs the agent who then does not pass on the message.

April 6th, 1998
I drove to the school, arrived at the campus as instructed by X, and found that a) it was the wrong campus, b) it was the wrong day. I then had to drive all the way back home, a two and a half hour drive, and come up to the school again later in the week.

And

8th May, 1999
After driving for over two hours, I arrived at the school only to be told that it was a curriculum day, there had been a mess-up in the dates and the agent should have informed me.

13th August, 2000
Why is it always raining when I have to go to Melbourne? I drove to the airport to pick up Mark Macleod [publisher] then to the school for the first talk. The agent had assured me that the following talk was in a neighbouring school, but it turned out to be nearly twenty kays away. I was angry. But I had to swallow that because it wasn’t the school’s fault, and give a good performance By the time I did the talk,
it was dark. A tired publisher on board, a wet road, a long drive to Geelong, and seething anger. Not a good combination.

From discussion with my colleagues over the years, I have ascertained that most authors, including myself, enjoy talking to students about their work. Once the author arrives at the school, the success of the visit is not only dependant upon the author’s presentation to the students, but more importantly, the school organisation and how the students are prepared prior to the visit. I illustrate this with an excerpt from my personal, professional journal.

Monday 9th July
Government high school in eastern suburbs. Three groups of students. The first group of year 8 were apathetic, yawning, restless, had not heard of me or my books. Teachers were chatting to each other at the back of the room and then, when I’d politely asked them if they could be quiet, they marked students’ work. The second group (year 7) were enthusiastic, motivated, had read a book in classes, had questions prepared. The third group of year 9 had made a banner, had brought samples of their writing which was highly imaginative and energetic, and had read my books in their classes.

My thoughts: Problems are not entirely administrative ones, or ‘school’ ones but can be reflected in the attitudes of the individual teachers to an author visit. To some, perhaps it is just another school-imposed activity in an already crowded day, to others it is a fantastic opportunity to extend students’ experiences in a fun-filled way. Or maybe the year eight teachers would have preferred a different author and were out-voted.

In the narrative analysis, I will discuss my findings, particularly to highlight the main factors that result in a successful author visit from these authors points of view.

PART 3: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

There are many ways in which narrative analysis can be conducted. Using the authors’ narratives as my data, I applied lexical networks to identify key concerns. I then examined the concerns within the themes of Expectations, Orientations/Disorientations and Respect and Recognition.

3.1.1 SOME APPROACHES TO NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

One of the difficulties in narrative analysis is that there is a tendency to use totalising,
singular accounts within the narratives. In an attempt to explain the content of narratives, Doan (1997) suggests that the following question be asked by the researcher.

Who has the power?
Is there room for optional stories or are these subjugated?
Who authored this narrative?
What sort of power practices does it employ?

(Doan, 1997, p.130).

In each author narrative, the author’s point of view is paramount and power of the story telling is held by the author.

Lincoln and Denzin (2000) discuss the Crisis of Representation in qualitative research and the social sciences. They raise the question of how best to describe and interpret the experiences of others. They ask the questions: Who is the Other? Can we ever hope to speak authentically of the experience of the Other, or an Other And if not, how do we create a social science that includes the Other? (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000, p. 1050). In my research, the author is self-disclosing and the school and those who are part of the visit are the Other.

Indeed, Lincoln and Denzin (2000) state that different researchers interpret these questions differently. For some it means participatory or collaborative research processes. For others it means the inclusion of the Other as co-authors in narrative adventures. For others it means the creation of texts where multiple voices speak. It can even mean the presentation of research ‘results’ as personal narratives, lived experiences, poetic representations and autohistories and, in my research, a personalised account of issues that impacted on these particular four authors. The researcher (in this case, myself) becomes the connection between the field text, the research text and the community - ‘in making certain that such voices are heard’ (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000, p. 1051).

One of the central difficulties with narrative analysis is the decision about how to structure and analyse the data in ways that portray what people claimed for and sought within their specific contexts. It raises the question of whether to focus on key themes or to aim for depth and complexity by keeping data within single sites (Savin-Baden, 2000).
Stronach and MacLure (1998) state that:

One goal of educational research must be to provide accounts that do not necessarily provide the reader with the comfort of shared ground with the author. It foregrounds ambivalence and undermines the authority of the reader’s own assertions. If we open up the definition of different contexts, we provide opportunities to serve this purpose.

(Stronach and MacLure, 1998, p.57).

As the researcher, I believe that all the authors who took part in this study freely told their own stories. Hopefully they were not influenced in their story-telling to the extent that they were concerned with the comfort of the potential readers (that is, English teachers and teacher-librarians). Truth is an issue that has been addressed by the Personal Narrative Group (1989) who concur that when people talk about their lives, they lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused and get things wrong (Personal Narrative Group, 1989, p.261). However, this is not viewed as problematic by me because:

narrators are revealing truths. These truths don’t recall the past ‘as it actually was’, aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead truths of experiences. Unlike the truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open proof nor self evident


The authors’ narratives in my research project represent a social production of data, and as such, are framed within the various discourses which have produced that data. I created the concept of the authors writing about their ‘dream’ and ‘nightmare’ schools, but these dream schools and nightmare schools are representations of social constructs within particular situations, as experienced by each author.

3.2 ANALYSIS OF THE AUTHORS’ NARRATIVES

3.2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the initial research design I decided to use content analysis, but later decided that a type of critical discourse analysis that examines the lexical networks or threads in narratives would provide a more thorough analysis of the narratives. As I discussed the previous section, texts are shaped by relations of power (Doan, 1997). Although I did not undertake a full linguistic analysis, linguistic methodologies provided a generative framework for analysing the narratives. I drew from the work of Fairclough (1992; 1994), Kress (1994), Kamler, McLean, Reid and Simpson (1994), and Kamler (2001),
using lexical networks which reveal the positives and negatives of the authors’ experiences in three areas, those of expectations, orientations/ disorientations and respect.

3.2.2 DISCUSSION

When I initially began to analyse the narratives, I found dimensions that relate to the broader relationship between authors and schools. In early studies, Halliday and Hassan (1976) believed that these dimensions call for an analysis that goes beyond content analysis and explores the relationships between these narratives and the broader context within which these authors’ narratives occur. In order to understand the data, I needed to look not only for common themes but underlying nuances in each of the narratives. This is what Clough (2002, p.4) calls ‘troubling the common-sense understanding of data’, in order to produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently. Therefore I decided to seek the words in each narrative that define positive and negative thoughts about dream and nightmare schools. From the highlighted words, I determined three particular themes which run through each narrative. These themes are:

1. Expectations.
2. Disorientations.
3. Respect and recognition.

Clough (2002) recommends that the analysis of themes should be reflexive and flexible to the extent that the researcher can consider the data from many (although not all) perspectives.

‘By the theory of productive consumption, you can understand the text only if you bring to it relevant experience of discourse and context’ (Fowler,1996, p 9). In other words, the efficient reader can draw on previous experience of similar texts in a similar context, with a similar purpose or in a similar genre, as well as apply personal world experience to the focus of the text.

Lexical networks are woven through texts. These lexical networks, amongst other factors, tie texts together. Hoey (1991) postulates that at least fifty percent of textual ties are lexical. Lexical cohesion ‘is the single most important form of cohesive tie.’ (Hoey, 1991, p 9). In fact, lexical ties are impossible to quantify accurately, because ‘there is nothing to prevent a lexical item forming a relationship with more than one other item.’ Hoey concludes that ‘lexical cohesion is the dominant mode of creating texture’ since it
is ‘the only type of cohesion that regularly forms multiple relationships’ (Hoey, 1991, p 10).

Kamler (1994) discusses lexical classification schemes even further, defining lexical terms as the content words in a text; the nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs, identifying the patterns of wordings or namings that build up a particular representation of the words. Thus the focus on a network of words rather than individual words, allow the lexical schemes to stand out. By identifying words that describe positive and negative thoughts and experiences in the four authors’ narratives, I believe that I will be able foreground the concerns of the authors.

3.3 THE PRINCIPAL FINDINGS FROM MY RESEARCH PROJECT

Within three themes of expectations, disorientations and respect/recognition, I have traced lexical networks from the content words that designate positive or negative thoughts or experiences, with the focus upon the authors’ arrival, presentation and well being.

**Theme 1. Expectations**

From the Dream School narratives, it was evident that the authors held certain expectations concerning school visits. These expectations were ‘signposted’ in their narratives through positive words during certain phases of an author visits, these being the author’s arrival, the author’s presentation and the author’s well-being. I analysed the Dream and Nightmare experiences for authors A,B,C, and D using lexical networks of single words that indicated positive or negative experiences. In the case of some words such as ‘meet’ and ‘minder’ I found that perceptions of what constituted as positive and negative words were in part shaped by my own experiences as an author visiting schools. I acknowledge that my perceptions of some particular words could be construed from a possible biased viewpoint. However the majority of the words that I analysed are ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ in connotation.

The following table indicates the themes of Arrival, Presentation and Well Being in relation to each author’s positive or negative experiences. I defined these positive or negative experiences from particular words that the authors used throughout their narratives.

A legend below the table explains the coding used for each author’s positive or negative
words.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 9: Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
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<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>welcomed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enthusiastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brightly</td>
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<tr>
<td>invitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advice</td>
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<tr>
<td>best</td>
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<tr>
<td>nice</td>
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<tr>
<td>minder</td>
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<td>greets</td>
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<tr>
<td>front</td>
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<tr>
<td>principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cuppa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A = Author A, B = Author B, C = Author C, D = Author D
**Discussion**

One of the commonly cited expectations for the authors was being welcomed. Their positive words included ‘meet’ ‘minder’, ‘cuppa’, ‘friendly’ ‘warmly’ All of the authors had experienced negative experiences at reception, using words such as ‘unattended’ ‘waiting’, ‘lost’, ignored’.

The authors expected to speak to the pre-arranged age levels and groups in a reasonably comfortable venue with a ‘microphone’, ‘water’, ‘whiteboard’, ‘table’ and ‘chair’, and without constant ‘interruptions’. They used positive words such as ‘warm’ and ‘comfy’ when discussing the venue. Negative words such as ‘cold’ ‘hard’ ‘noisy’ ‘interruptions’ ‘cramped’, ‘uncomfortable’ were sued to describe venues.

Another expectation was that the students had read the authors’ books and have prepared ‘questions’. It was expected that teachers would contribute by also asking questions, and control the students, not ‘mark’ papers’ or ‘gossip’ or ‘chatter’ with other teachers.

In terms of well-being, the authors expected to be treated with respect. They mentioned positive experiences such as ‘cuppa’, eat’, microphone ‘comfy’ ‘chair’ books’, display’ ‘posters’.

**Theme 2. Orientations/ Disorientations**

In the Dream Schools, orientation issues are solved for the authors, often prior to the visit. However, a reoccurring theme in the authors’ narratives was that of disorientation - getting to the Nightmare School, the office and the actual venue at the Nightmare Schools.

**Discussion**

From the narratives, it was apparent that the authors feared ‘getting lost’, both before arrival and in the school. Words such as ‘lost’, ‘unfamiliar’, ‘ignores’, ‘deigns’ ‘waiting’, were used in regard to arriving at the school. The word ‘change’ was mentioned in regard to room changes and changes to group year levels and changes to the size of groups. The authors appeared to feel disoriented and this affected their work performance in a negative way.
The following table shows the orientations and disorientations experienced by the authors

**TABLE 10: Orientations/Disorientations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arrival</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Well Being</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>map</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>can’t</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>books</td>
<td>BCD</td>
<td>no (books)</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>quietly</td>
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<td>interruptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>advice</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>receptionist</td>
<td>AB</td>
<td>preparation</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>no (preparation)</td>
<td>ABCD</td>
<td>interest</td>
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<td>disruptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>best</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>rude</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>interested</td>
<td>CD</td>
<td>gossips</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>thoughtful</td>
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<td>screams</td>
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<tr>
<td>nice</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>late</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>questions</td>
<td>AB</td>
<td>coffee</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>organized</td>
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<td>rudeness</td>
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<tr>
<td>minder</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>no (chair)</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>bookshop</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>n (help)</td>
<td>BCD</td>
<td>autographs</td>
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<td>suffocating</td>
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<tr>
<td>greets</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>office</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>listening</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>chatter</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>learn</td>
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<td>cope</td>
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<tr>
<td>meet</td>
<td>BCD</td>
<td>lost</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>show</td>
<td>BD</td>
<td>unfamiliar</td>
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<td>interested</td>
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<td>cramped</td>
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<tr>
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<td>ABC</td>
<td>ignores</td>
<td>BCD</td>
<td>interested</td>
<td>CD</td>
<td>giggling</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>microphone</td>
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<tr>
<td>enthusiastic</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>deigns</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>students</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>changes</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>teachers</td>
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<td>no (help)</td>
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<td>BCD</td>
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<tr>
<td>expecting</td>
<td>CD</td>
<td>notice</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>organized</td>
<td>BD</td>
<td>sick</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>nice</td>
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</tr>
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<td>ACD</td>
<td>waiting</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>acoustics</td>
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<td>interruptions</td>
<td>ABCD</td>
<td>enjoy</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>ABC</td>
<td>no cuppa</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>library</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>gym/concrete</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>valued</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>coughs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A = Author A, B = Author B, C = Author C, D = Author D
Disinterested students and staff members caused distress to the authors, as did constant interruptions that disorientate them as they were trying to work with the students as indicated by words ‘interruptions’ ‘scream’, ‘gossip’, ‘coughs’, ‘cope’, waiting’. The word ‘no’ was peppered throughout the narratives in regard to no microphone/table/chair/ whiteboard/ cuppa/ food/preparation/ books/ questions.

Inappropriate venues was also mentioned by the authors - ‘noisy’, ‘cold’, ‘cramped,’ and again, ‘interruptions’ as causing stress to the point where one author stated that ‘I lost my voice’. This resulted in being unable to work in schools the following week.

**Theme 3. Respect and recognition**

All of the authors spoke about respect, and recognition of the fact that they are a visitor in the school. The Dream Schools treated the authors with courtesy, whereas the Nightmare Schools treated the authors with disrespect and discourtesy.

**Discussion**

While the positive words highlight courtesy and respect being shown to visiting authors, it is the negative list that pinpoints the fact that authors are not accorded recognition and respect when in schools, both in the private and state sectors. ‘lost’, ‘ignored’, ‘waiting’, ‘screaming’ ‘cramped’ ‘cold’, ‘rude’, ‘disruptive’ ‘gossip’ ‘yawn’, are indicative of disrespectful behaviour by both staff and students.

The word ‘interruptions’ appeared in all of the negative lists across the three themes. There were interruptions with students leaving the room to attend other activities., interruptions from lawn mowers, students talking and giggling, students yelling outside the room, teachers gossiping and talking while marking papers, monitors entering with messages, or to collect students for various activities, in addition to interruptions from the office over the loud speakers. Schools are busy places, and for teachers and students, interruption are a normal part of the school day, but for visitors, interruptions intrude.

The following table shows whether the authors’ expectations in regard to respect and recognition are realized.
TABLE 11: Respect and Recognition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arrival</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>B</td>
<td>nice venue)</td>
</tr>
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<td>CD</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>brightly</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>haul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>whiteboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forward</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>lug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>comfy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>toilet</td>
<td>D</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>BC</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>expecting</td>
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<th>Negative</th>
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<td>ABD</td>
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<td>BCD</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>ABCD</td>
<td>no prep.</td>
</tr>
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<td>ABCD</td>
<td>nice</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>screaming</td>
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<td>ABCD</td>
<td>no (micro)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>ABCD</td>
<td>enjoy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>interruptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>no (micro)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no water</td>
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<td>no (w/board)</td>
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<td>no water</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ABCD</td>
<td>enjoy</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>interruptions</td>
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<tr>
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<td>no water</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Well Being</th>
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<th>Negative</th>
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<td>BC</td>
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<td>learn</td>
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A = Author A, B = Author B, C = Author C, D = Author D
While authors’ preoccupations with words such as ‘microphones’, ‘water’, ‘table’, ‘chair’, ‘toilet’, ‘books’, ‘lunch and ‘cuppas’ may be surprising, it is these small marks of respect that indicate to authors that they are being valued as visitors to the school. Prepared questions, availability of the authors’ books and good organisation of the venue and proceedings may appear almost secondary. If the author is made to feel valued through the accordance of respect, the problematic organisational aspects of venue and other issues seem to be more easily accepted.

Positive words used by the authors (‘meet’, ‘welcomed’, ‘enthusiastic’, ‘payment’, ‘books’, ‘comfy’, ‘interested’, ‘prepared’, ‘questions’) indicate polite, respectful students in schools, both public and private, where the schools had obviously been eagerly awaiting the visit, the students had read the books, had lists of questions, had made displays and posters and were very involved with the coming event.

Doan (1997) discussed who holds the power in narratives. While the authors had the power to tell the stories in their own words, it was obvious that, when visiting schools, and particularly in regard to negative experiences, they held little power. Their negative words (rude, ignored, lost, cold, coughs, strain, gossip, interruptions, and the constant ‘no’ - no microphones, water, food, cuppa, chair, table, books, preparation, organisation, payment) indicated that they felt powerless and devalued in these types of school settings.

PART 4: IMPLICATIONS

(a) The authors’ perspectives.

When my author colleagues discussed their ‘dream’ and ‘nightmare’ schools, it was apparent to me as both an author and a researcher that there are many common factors that can lead to a positive or negative school visit.

From my perspective of that of a professional author, I have an empathy with the these authors, particularly in what they have experienced when actually arriving at the school. On arrival at the school after a stressful journey, the lack of car parking and directions to the front office cause even more stress. Upon arrival at reception, the visit can be viewed with enthusiasm or dread depending on the initial contact with school personnel.

From my perspective as a researcher, the narratives revealed that if the author was welcomed warmly, the attitude of the visiting author was positive towards the visit. If
the author was not treated with courtesy and respect, there was a feeling of being devalued both as a professional who had ventured outside the customary workplace, and as a visitor to the school.

Problematic, and noted in all of the authors’ narratives, is the break-down of the event when the organising teacher is ‘away sick’, on leave, or has left the school. Within a word context, this is disorienting for the authors. In my experience as an author, this problem is minimised when a group of teachers and the teacher librarian have planned the visit.

The narratives revealed that the relationship between the author and the school can break down when hospitality is not forthcoming. The authors feel rejected and ignored when there is no offer of refreshment and food, and if they are ostracised in the staff room.

Once the authors were ready to perform, they became annoyed when they discovered that there was no microphone or place to display their books, and that the ‘goal posts had been moved’ in terms of student numbers, year levels and venue. Constant interruptions interrupted their presentations, disinterested and disruptive students and teachers made them feel that they had wasted their time in agreeing to visit the school. Indeed, several authors had received scathing comments about their payment and others had not received their payment, which again made them feel devalued and misunderstood.

(b) What schools can do to ensure that an author visit is successful.

From my perspective as a researcher, it is useful to return to the literature review. In a USA study of author visits to schools, Maminski (1993) recommends that a committee be formed to organise author visits. In this way, if a teacher is absent on the day, others are cognisant of the arrangements.

As the authors mentioned, and also from my personal experiences, another facet of the planning stage before the actual author visit is that the students should be familiar with the author’s books. Maminski (1993) suggests that schools should:

Develop a year-long focus on authors in the library and school system, culminating in an author conference open to all county middle school students. Students will participate all year in reading activities which emphasise authors they have chosen. At the end of the year the
students will have the opportunity to hear some of their favourite authors speak to them, to meet them and to receive a personally autographed copy of an author’s book.

Maminski, 1993, p.35.

In yet another USA study by Sanacore (1993), it was found that students should be prepared for an author’s visit through reading several of the author’s books. ‘As teachers provide time in school to read and discuss the books, parents can support these literature-based activities at home’. (Sanacore, 1993, p.5) According to Sanacore (1993), prior knowledge of the texts is the key to a successful author visit. English teachers and teacher-librarians should ensure that there is a plentiful supply of the authors’ books that are easily accessible to the students, that the students have read several and discussed these in class, and have prepared questions to ask the author.

Schools should be aware that the physical work space can be problematic for authors. Usually the library is an excellent venue, because the students are surrounded by books, thus promoting the notion of the library as a user-friendly place to be, as suggested by Chambers (1991) when expounding upon reading environments in schools. Gymnasiums can be acoustically difficult, students often have to sit on a cold wooden floor for more than an hour, and there is more chance of interruptions from groups of students sent to practice for the school band, dramatic festival or leaving en masse during the talk to attend some other activity as cited in the author’s narratives. Also discussed in the narratives was the issue of signing autographs.

McElmeel (1994) discusses the issue of autographs on scraps of paper or in notebooks. Obviously the students would like a souvenir of the visit. Acceptable to most authors are proper autograph books, or the author’s own novels, either brought from home to be signed, or purchased on the day of the visit from an attending book seller. McElmeel suggested that ‘the day’s schedule should include times when students can come to the library or designated location to have their books signed. When scheduling time, consider the number of books to be signed and discuss this point with the students prior to the visit [and with the author prior to the visit]’ (McElmeel, 1994, p.25). This avoids the ‘Nightmare School’ incidents as outlines by Author C, where she was deluged by ‘620 kids with scraps of paper’.

When organising an author visit, these factors need to be considered by the school- that the students are well prepared beforehand, the staff are all involved in the experience and not marking papers or chatting to each other, the physical environment is conducive
to learning, and the author has the required items to ensure that the talk is a success, such as a microphone, table, display of books, a bookseller, posters made by the students—evidence that the visit is regarded as something special for the students.

As discussed, authors visit schools for numerous reasons. Teachers want students to read and improve their reading - and inspire them to read and to enjoy reading, as indicated through research by Soto (1992) and Hirschi (1994). Literature enrichment is expected, also, and it personalises the whole language arts program. Some teachers want their students to experience the thrill of meeting ‘a real, live author’ (Maminski, 1993). Other schools expect authors to do writing workshops, talk about writing and their own books, get children to enjoy writing and become more creative writers. (Carson-Shaw (1994) discussed using authors for the sole purpose of improving students’ writing, with authors mentoring the good student writers to extend their writing skills. Some authors enjoy doing this; others (like myself) would rather talk to large groups of students.

It is apparent that an author visit can be an important part of the school curriculum. How this is conducted can be extremely meaningful for the students. For example, after the author visit is completed, a selection of the authors’ books and posters should be kept on display to maintain student interest. It is useful to encourage the author to continue working with the school, possibly through teleconferences, web link-ups and email. Furthermore, give short evaluation forms for students to complete. Their input can help make the next author visit even better.

In my own professional work as an author, I’ve found e-mail corresponding exciting and the feedback has been extremely helpful. Students are inquisitive! They want to know how an author ticks - what makes us work. Sometimes their letters are amusing, other times very thought provoking. Here’s an example:


dear margaret clark,
i got ur email address off the home page. i wasn’t intrested in writing till i read ur books. u reealy seem to understand how teenagers think and feel. and now i want to becum a writter. be4 i moved to syndey i lived in a hippie town so i th ink i cou ld write about this stuff, and i ran away for three months. i could write a book like the diary of me. but i’m not sure. like, do you write about real things? in dairy of a street kid, was that girl real? i thought she was. i’m not sure if i have enough experiencecs to do
a whole book. do u roam round with a tape recorder and talk to people? Or do u just watch them? Are the characters really real or do u make them up. how many words do u have to write? if the publisher likes most of it and not some bits do they make u change it? and what if u don’t want to? and do u have to write every day? i think i’d h8 having to do it if i couldn’t think of anything. how long does it take for u top write a full book. i’m not a fast typer, only 2 fingers. well, if ur interested i can send u some of my poems and a bit of my diary and be honest if i can write books. if you say i can’t that’s ok and i’ll still read urs cos i think u are a very good writter. Bye from Suz

Indeed, it is important for teachers and administrators to appreciate the importance of inviting authors into their schools and to develop a process in organising authors’ programs. To ensure that the experience is meaningful in terms of learning, the visit should be structured to enhance and enrich the ongoing English curriculum. More emphasis should be placed on the assessment of authors’ visits, both qualitatively and quantitatively, by teachers, librarians, parents, and the authors themselves. And more importantly, emphasis could be placed on the opinions of the students concerning the texts that they like to read by their favourite authors. My final quote is from a fifteen year old girl.

Hi Margaret Clark
I want to tell you how you helped me to want to read in my spare time...i am a 15 year old girl who does not really like reading and your book “Hooking up” gave me the want to read...then after that i read about 5 or 6 more of your books all in the space of 1 month. (i know it doesn’t sound like a lot but it is for me) so thank you again and good night.

The final implications are that if an author visit can give an adolescent ‘the want to read’, the visit has been a success.
CHAPTER 6: DISSERTATION: PART 2. CONCLUSION

1. INTRODUCTION

My doctoral research has investigated adolescents as readers, and the role of set texts and author visits in schools in engendering interest in reading. I have explored this issue through three research projects, drawing on a broader spectrum of theory which has looked at critical theory, critical literacy, schools and curriculum, culture, class and gender, and the notion of adolescent readers as ‘struggling’ or good readers.

2. READING THE READER

In this folio, I examined factors surrounding the teaching of literature to adolescents. I explored the background of cultural heritage, that is, why English literature is taught in schools, and in particular the influence that critical literary theorists have had on subject English, and have shaped the way that literature for young people is presented to students today. As indicated in the dissertation, I found that issues such as gender roles and literacy, critical literacy, culture, specific reader identities, the redefining of adolescent literacy and the potential for introduction of national standards for subject English can influence adolescents and their reading of fictional texts.

I examined gender differences concerning adolescents and reading. The literature indicated that there are marked differences, not only in what adolescent boys and girls want to read, but how they read and how they interpret what they read. My research has confirmed that it is important that adolescents have choice in their reading preferences. Most girls preferred fictional texts about relationships whereas the boys in these studies preferred adventure and science fiction. Girls were reported to enjoy subject English and the assignment work on fictional texts which involved revealing their thoughts and feelings about the text, whereas boys on the whole did not succeed as well as girls at subject English, particularly in areas where they had to express thoughts and feelings about fictional texts.

Australian studies suggested that adolescent girls perform better in single-sex schools with curricula that concentrates on critical literacy. Issues of masculinity appeared to influence adolescent boys and reading. Adolescent boys appeared to perform better in single-sex schools in areas such as subject English and reading. It seems reasonable to
assume on the basis of my research that the fictional texts selected in single-sex schools are more representative of the genres that these students want to read and enjoy discussing in class. Further studies need to be conducted in the area of adolescent reading and single-sex schools.

In my dissertation and in the research projects, I examined the issue of which texts middle school students want to read in class. Concerning adolescent boys and their reading of fictional texts (Research Project 1), the literature indicates that middle school students are at risk if they are turned off reading in the secondary school. This can be due to many factors, from self-labelling as a slow reader to dislike of the texts and the way they are presented and assessed. My research suggests that students should be able to choose their preferred texts, because personal choice for texts was found to be closely aligned with positive reading experiences.

In the literature review, I examined the impact of critical literacy on pedagogy. I considered the implications of moves towards establishing standards for the teaching of English in Australia as proposed by the STELLA project, and assessment of subject English. In particular, I considered this in relation to its possible impact on text selection in the classroom if teachers were required to meet nationally established criteria.

Literature on the role of the school library and teacher-librarian in the promotion of fictional texts to adolescents stressed the importance of user-friendly libraries. A positive reading environment was seen as essential, in addition to other issues such as students assisting to select the acquisition of fictional texts, on-line discussions about books with authors, and collaboration between school and public libraries to promote reading.

My three research projects investigated specific issues related to adolescent reading in a number of different ways.

2.1 ADOLESCENT BOYS AND THE READING OF FICTIONAL TEXTS
2.1.1 INTRODUCTION

In focusing on my research into boys’ reading preferences and habits, and whether the curriculum should differentiate between the teaching of reading to adolescent boys and girls, I now draw attention to the following points.
• the structure and organisation of English curriculum in schools in regard to the reading of fiction within gender-differentiated criteria for the selection of set texts.
• the effects of dominant models of masculinity which structure the ways in which students perceive subject English and in particular, the reading of fictional texts and how this affects their motivation to read particularly in the classroom.

I agree with the argument put forward by Aird (2002) who contended that both of these factors are important in consideration of the ways in which learning is regulated for students on the basis of gender. At the institutional level of the structure and organisation of the curriculum, it is important to have explored these issues as they are embodied in the historically contingent practices which have produced gender-differentiated bodies of knowledge in schools:

Subjects which become designated as masculine can conflict with girls’ developing sense of femininity and, hence, influence their participation and motivation. The converse of course can be applied to boys whose developing masculinity comes into conflict with subjects such as English which is attributed a feminine status. As Aird (2002) also found, the gender regime which influences the structure and organisation of the curriculum clearly has the capacity to influence patterns of learning and the motivational dynamics for girls and boys, depending on students’ differential training as gendered subjects.

2.1.2 FINDINGS FROM MY RESEARCH

From the responses of the boys in my research project, particularly in government co-educational schools, their notions of masculinity and femininity clearly influenced their performance and participation in subject English and reading if fictional texts which they felt was suited more to girls. In my research with these boys in the government lower-socio-economic and rural co-educational schools, I found that many boys viewed subject English [and the reading of fictional texts] as a subject that required them to express their emotions. This conflicted with their notions of ‘toughness’ and being ‘cool’, so that reading was not considered ‘manly’. To express emotion was perceived by this cohort of boys as a sign of effeminacy or of being girlish, which is considered to be a put down. One boy stated that ‘the others would say I were gay if I was to be seen reading a book’. Rejecting what is considered to be a feminine attribute is one of the ways in which masculinity is regulated. The boys in the two government schools, in fact, rejected reading, perceiving it to be a girls’ practice or activity which clearly
conflicted with their developing sense of masculinity. Through the reading of fictional texts, these boys apparently believed that their masculinity is not supported or validated; rather, it appears to be part of a subject [English] which requires them to express their emotions and to behave in what they perceived as unmasculine ways.

However, the boys at the private co-educational college did not seem as threatened by the notion that reading fictional texts is unmasculine. Though the boys I interviewed here were less than enthusiastic about reading fiction, most preferring non-fiction, they viewed the reading of their set texts as a means to an end. In other words, they wanted to achieve in school, subject English and therefore reading were an integral part of this goal.

Interestingly, the boys at the all-boy private school were comfortable with subject English, the reading of fictional texts and concepts of masculinity, although they did not appear to enjoy reading their set texts. This appeared to be due to the genre and style of the texts rather than any qualms about reading and masculinity. I contend this was because the school promoted reading as a masculine activity, with role modelling by males, that is, male staff members, fathers/step-fathers, and male authors who were invited into the school. The reading of fictional texts was given a high priority right throughout the curriculum. Whether this would have been different if girls were at the school is a matter for further research. My own findings indicate that understanding the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is produced, sustained and regulated in co-educational schools, and the impact of this on the reading of fictional texts, requires a closer scrutiny of this on the lives and learning patterns of both boys and girls.

My research project concerning adolescent boys’ reading identities and their perceptions of subject English and reading is important for a number of reasons. Mechanisms and processes which affected the boys’ learning on the basis of gender were identified, whilst gendered patterns in styles of learning and selection of texts by the English teachers were also identified. Like Aird (2002), I found that the gender-inflected nature of subject English can influence and affect learning for boys and girls on the basis of particular models of masculinity which they have internalised. Research project also points to the need to move beyond thinking about masculinity and femininity as oppositional categories or sets of traits or behaviours. Strategies need to be developed to encourage boys to think beyond such a gender bind. More flexible ways of approaching subject English and the reading of fictional texts within a range of learning styles is required.
2.2 AUTHOR VISITS TO SECONDARY SCHOOLS

2.2.1 INTRODUCTION

From the literature, and my two research projects which looked at the perspectives of English teachers, teacher-librarians and students (Research Project 2) and the authors’ narratives (Research Project 3) I contend that it is possible to compose guidelines for successful author visits. The success of a visit depends on many factors, some of which are ‘matching’ the author with the students’ needs, integrating the visit with the English curriculum, and careful preparation by a team or group of teachers prior to the visit.

2.2.2 FINDINGS FROM MY RESEARCH

2.2.2.1 Organisation of visits

Concerning Research Project 2, it was found that the staff, especially the English teachers and the teacher-librarian, need to consult with each other about whom they want to invite, particularly in regard to their agendas. Several English teachers may require an author to discuss a certain set text, yet others want an author to work with small groups to improve their writing skills. The teacher-librarian may wish to promote a certain author to the students with the aim of getting them enthused about reading more fiction. Both English teachers and teacher-librarians need clear goals about why they want an author to visit the school and what they hope to achieve for their students from such a visit.

Well known authors are often booked six months to a year in advance. If a particular author is required, the organisers should give as much notice as possible, such as the case in St John’s and St Ann’s, where set text selection and author visits were planned in the preceding year to a greater extent than those of Churchton College, Countryside High and Northdown High. Lesser-known writers are often willing to visit schools and share their work with students. They can be inspiring and probably charge lower fees. Dependent upon this factor is whether the aim of inviting an author is to discuss set texts, inspire the students to read more, or to teach writing skills.

My research found that the most influential author visits for promoting positive adolescent reading identities were those that were planned in advance, so that the students had ample time to read the authors’ novels and prepare pertinent questions.

Concerning Research Project 3, the authors need to feel that they are respected as
visitors to the school and that their work and opinions are valued. In part, this can be achieved if the students have studied, or are familiar with the author’s novels.

2.2.2.2 Funding the author visit

Before an author is contacted, the organising team needs to consider how the author will be paid. St John’s, St Ann’s and Churchton College had a mechanism in place for extracurricular monies being incorporated into the general school fees.

The minimum fee recommended by the Australian Society of Authors at the time of writing this thesis is $400 per day ($200 for half-day), plus expenses such as travel and accommodation. Often authors who talk to large audiences charge higher fees, while newcomers and those who insist on working with small groups could be a little less. For established and well-known authors schools should expect to pay substantially more. Partial funding may be obtainable from the Victorian State Library’s ‘Writers on the Road’ project, the National Centre for Youth Literature, and similar schemes, particularly if rural schools are involved. In my study, Laura from Northdown High was able to obtain a Disadvantaged Schools Grant which enabled her to organise the author visits. Furthermore, publishers frequently sponsor authors as part of promotional tours for new books, so it can be advantageous for the schools to contact publishers at regular intervals.

From the author’s point of view, the narratives revealed that prompt payment on the day for the correct amount is paramount unless other previous arrangements have been made between the author/agent and the school.

2.2.2.3 Structure of the Visit

As it was found in Research Project 2, it is important that the author’s visit be connected to the curriculum and viewed as an extension to the teaching of literature in the classroom. The students need to know that the author will be visiting, and have prepared appropriate questions.

As indicated in Research Project 3, It is important for schools to be realistic about the content and length of sessions throughout the day and the numbers of students involved. Most authors do not appreciate changes to sessions and number of students on the day of the visit (see Authors A,B,C narratives and my personal professional journal extracts in Research Projects 2 and 3).
From the interviews with English teachers and teacher-librarians, it was found that authors were expected to perform different tasks – talking to large groups of students about their work and inspiring them to read more, or working with small groups to teach the craft of fiction writing,

From the authors’ narratives, it could be seen that a writing workshop is very different from a large-group author performance, and a class-group is very different from a whole-school assembly. Not all authors have teaching experience, and not all understand that complexities of school life with constant interruptions to the physical environment and time-tabling. This does not infer that authors should have teaching experience, as some of the most sought-after authors as school visitors in Australia are from non-teaching backgrounds. Authors do vary in what they can offer, but schools need to be aware that the authors are visiting in an authorial capacity and not as teachers.

My research found that schools often make unreasonable demands on authors - an hour-long session with students seated on the floor in a cold gym hall is extremely difficult for both the students and the author. Above all, it is not advisory to tailor the visit to ‘fit’ the convenience of the existing timetable rather than the needs of this special occasion. This was one of the most common complaints made by authors visiting secondary schools.

2.2.2.4 Preparing the students

From the interviews with the English teachers and teacher-librarians in Research Project 2, it was evident that preparation for an author visit was essential. From the students’ perspectives, knowing the works of an author then led to a curiosity about the author and a more enthusiastic approach to the impending visit, with the making of posters and displays, class discussions about the author’s texts, book reviews, and the preparing of thoughtful questions in class.

From the authors’ narratives in Research Project 3, I found that it is necessary prepare the students for the visit with appropriate pre-reading of the author’s books, background information and discussion. (see Author C’s comments in Research Project 3). Indeed, their narratives revealed that it is important to encourage the students to be critical thinkers and prepare appropriate questions for the author prior to the visit. The most successful school visits, in both enjoyment and educational terms, were those which have been keenly anticipated and worked towards by both the staff and the students.
2.2.2.5 Assisting the author

As noted in all of the authors’ narratives in Research Project 3, travel to the school can be extremely stressful for an author. In fact, it appeared to be the main stressor. Therefore, the author’s journey to the school should be well organised with clear, concise directions, ensuring that the author arrives in an optimistic and enthusiastic frame of mind. In author B’s dream school, the school had supplied a map showing the best route, and a timetable of the days events.

2.2.2.6 The Visit Itself

From the interviews in Research Project 2, I found that, according to the English teachers, teacher-librarians and students, the most successful author visits had occurred when the authors were motivational, dynamic speakers who were able to capture and hold the attention of the students. Authors who could conduct successful workshops and inspire students to write more creatively were also mentioned as being important to the success of the visit.

From the authors’ narratives in Research Project 3, it was apparent that the ‘meet and greet’ stage is of importance to the author, and in many instances, set the tone of the visit for the rest of the day. Indeed, it is important that the school assign a ‘minder’. The minder can check that all requested materials and equipment are actually in place, greet the author on arrival and sort out any glitches throughout the day. This person can be a teacher, a member of the school council, or PTA, a local volunteer, or a senior student. The author narratives reported that breaks and lunch times were often stressful because they were ignored in staff rooms or no lunch was provided. Such a ‘minder’ is especially valuable so that there is no danger of the author being left feeling awkward and embarrassed as staff go about their normal mid-day business.

Each author session should be exclusively for those who have been organised to take part, and ‘out of bounds’ to everyone else, as interruptions can be very disruptive for both speaker and listeners as indicated in the authors’ narratives. The ‘minder’ can monitor people attempting to enter, and be aware of outside distractions that can be temporarily halted (for example, mowing lawns, noisy sport outside the windows).

In Research Project 2, some of the English teachers, teacher-librarians and students remarked on the importance of getting books signed, or autographs. The authors’ narratives in Research Project 3 showed that this was a highlight of the visit. However,
it was apparent that a’ minder’ is essential during bookselling and booksigning. (see Author B’s distressed account of being ‘suffocated’ by 620 students with scraps of paper). If the ‘minder’ ensures that each student’s name is written on a piece of paper, this eliminates incorrect spelling of the student’s name when the author is signing their books for them. The authors in my study were happy to have photographs taken, but permission should be sought first as a matter of courtesy. From the authors’ narratives, the signings and photographs formed the perfect climax to the day, as well as being the most obvious way to prolong and deepen the benefits that meeting a writer brings to the students.

Two of the authors in my study referred to the sale of books at the event. Several Australian authors will not accept school visits where their books are not available for sale. Where possible, a local bookseller could be invited to the sessions to provide the authors’ novels. However, as author D remarked, teachers need to alert students and parents to the fact that they can buy the books and have them signed.

2.2.2.7 After The Visit

In Research Project 2, Lauren from Northdown High commented that evaluation of the author visit was important. She gave the students brief evaluation forms after the author visit in order to ascertain whether the students had viewed the visit as successful in terms of motivating them to read more.

Evaluation of the visit by students and teachers is essential. If the visit was less than successful, this evaluation can ensure that subsequent author visits are successful. Was the author inappropriate for the students? Was the timer-tabling too tight? Was the physical environment inappropriate? Were the students well prepared prior to the visit? Are there enough of the authors books available for the students to read before and after the visit? Were questions prepared in the classrooms prior to the visit? Was the bookseller present? The author visit should not just wither. Indeed, most authors are contactable by email or letter, and student feedback and evaluation is valuable, as demonstrated in author C’s narrative.

4. SUMMARY

Overall, my study investigated the reading identities of cohorts of adolescents. I focused on the selection of set texts by English teachers and issues of culture class and gender when selecting texts. I explored the ways that secondary schools promote fictional texts to their students. As a counter-balance, I interviewed cohorts of middle-school students
to gain their opinions about set texts, classroom reading and out-of-school reading, investigating their reading preferences and reading habits. In particular, I investigated the reading identities of adolescent boys, and the impact that author visits could have on middle-school students from both the schools’ and authors’ points of view.

I found that schools could change their curriculum to better meet the fictional reading needs of their students. This can be accomplished by allowing students to have input into choosing their set texts and classroom literature, by encouraging critical thinking skills, by developing curriculum strategies which encourage positive male role modelling in regard to the reading of fiction, and by inviting authors who can best meet the needs of the English curriculum, into their schools.

Reading is crucially important to students’ success in secondary school. If students are to manage the literacy demands of school subjects and, indeed, those of the world beyond school, they need to be competent and fluent readers. The English classroom, and particularly the study of the set text, has a crucial role to play here. If we want our young people to succeed as readers, as my research has shown, it is essential to create an environment that encourages positive reader identities. It is my hope that the research presented in this thesis will provide some directions for creating enjoyment and satisfaction for adolescent readers inside, and well as outside, the English classroom and the secondary school.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX 1: DEAKIN UNIVERSITY ETHICS COMMITTEE FORMS
CONSENT FORM

I, of

Hereby consent to be a subject of a human research study to be undertaken by Margaret Clark, a Doctor of Education student at Deakin University, and I understand that the purpose of the research is to investigate author visits in relation to students.

I acknowledge

1. That the aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks/hazards of the research study, have been explained to me.

2. That I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my participation in such research study.

3. I understand that results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.

4. Individual results will not be released to any person except at my request and on my authorisation.

5. That I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.

Signature: Date:
CONSENT ON BEHALF OF A MINOR TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I, of

**Hereby give consent** for my son / daughter / dependent

…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

to be a subject of a study to be undertaken by Margaret Clark, a Doctor of Education student at Deakin University.

I understand that the purpose of the research is to find out what some students think about having author visits at school.

**I acknowledge:**

1. That the aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible hazards/risks of the research study, have been explained to me.

2. That I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my child’s / dependent’s participation in such research study.

3. I understand that results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.

4. Individual results **will not** be released to any person including medical practitioners.

5. That I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, during the study in which event my child’s/dependent’s participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained will not be used.

Signature: Date:

**NOTE:** Probably both parents should consent if both parents are living together. If divorced or separated, certainly the parent who has legal custody of the child should consent, and it would be prudent to obtain the consent of both even in this event. If such consent of the other parent is not readily obtainable the consent of the custodial parent would be or should be sufficient unless the second parent actively refuses consent. If this occurs, the child or dependent person should not participate. Joint guardianship of a dependent should be treated in the same manner.
APPENDIX 2: FORMS FOR SCHOOLS
Department of Education
Victoria

APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Summary

Applicant(s) Margaret Dianne Clark (Ms)
Phone: 0352 241 708 Fax: 0352 241 525 Email: mdelc1ark@deakin.edu.au
Address: PO Box 454 Geelong, Victoria 3220
Title of proposal: Authors' School Visits to Teachers, Librarians and Students

Summary of proposal:
The overall objective of my Doctor of Education research, which is entitled Reading the Reader: Investigations into reading of Fictional Literature, is to investigate how fictional literature is promoted to students. Part of this research is concerned with authors’ visits to schools.

Literature is seen as a major objective of the school curriculum, with the promotion of reading for enjoyment as a key component. As a means to achieve the literary objectives, many schools invite authors to speak to the students.

However very little research has been undertaken to explore the nature of these visits and their effectiveness, the only known research being in England (1994) which investigated the effect of author Michael Murapago visiting primary schools. Therefore the purpose of this project is to investigate the nature of author visits and whether they have a positive impact on the English curriculum.

As an educator of long standing, and more recently as the author of childrens and teenage books, I have developed an interest in authors’ visits to schools and what happens as a result. As a researcher, I am interested in investigating what factors are perceived by teachers/librarians when they invite an author, what are the students perceptions, and what impact do such visits have on students’ reading.

Contribution study will make to understanding of students and/or the education process:
As a result of this study, it is anticipated that teachers/librarians and other educators will be interested to learn the criteria used for selection of an author to visit, how this is congruent with key components in the English curriculum, whether there is an impact on students’ reading for enjoyments after such visits, what the students think was the intention of the activity, whether it has impacted on their reading, and whether their views are congruent with the views of teachers/librarians.

Research questions:
Key questions for teachers/librarians include expectations from authors’ visits, what criteria did they use for selection of a particular author? And books for students? How could the visit be more effective? Key questions for students include: Why do you think authors are invited, do such visits have any impact on you in terms of your reading or views on literature, how do you think fictional books are selected for your year level and do you enjoy reading them, have you ever followed up a visit by writing to an author and if so, for what purpose?

Methodology including sampling and procedure:
The research methodology could be categorised within the critical interpretative mode and follows qualitative theories of education. Data will be collected through structured interviews with teachers, librarians and groups of students with six students in each group. Five schools will be selected from different demographic areas in Geelong, government and non-government, co-educational and single-sex schools, and will have had author visits within the last twelve months. Teachers and librarians will be interviewed individually and students in groups, having been selected in consultation with teachers,
having parental consent, and being willing to participate. Timing of the interviews with respondents will be negotiated, and interviews will take approximately thirty minutes.

Interviews will be tape-recorded and all students, their parents, and teachers will be given copies of the interviews for approval.

**Have you ever previously applied to conduct this or similar research within Victorian Government schools?** No.

**Research instruments:** (Note: a list and only a brief description is required here -the actual instruments must be attached)

The research instruments will be a tape-recorder and cassettes to record the interviews from teachers, librarians and students.

**Method of data analysis:**
The data will be transcribed from the interviews using a critical interpretative approach, the notes will be typed up as the interviewees’ stories about their interpretations of the questions and events, and will be given to the participants to peruse so they can delete or add comments. The resultant data will then be compiled as a series of participants’ stories about their responses to the questions, and their experiences of authors’ visits.

**Procedure for obtaining consent of participants and where appropriate parents or guardians:**
The approval from principals of the individual schools will be obtained. Plain Language Statements and consent forms will be given to each participant. (see enclosed forms for teacher/librarians, parents, and students) Confidentiality will be ensured by adherence to Deakin University guidelines for a minimum of six years.

**Timetable for research:**
If approval is granted it is envisaged that the school principals will be approached in April, and interviews of thirty minutes each, will be conducted in May, June and July at times convenient to the school. The data will be interpreted and written summaries will be given to the participants (and parents) in September/October for their approval, and to make any changes.

**Intended Use of Research**
The Authors Visits to Schools is part of the overall research for Doctorate in Education, and therefore the findings will be disseminated in education journals and at teacher/librarian conferences, to inform educators what teachers, librarians and students have experienced when authors visit, and how to maximise the impact of such visits in schools for optimum enhancement of the curriculum.

**Is the proposed research part of a tertiary course?** Yes.

**Qualification:** Doctor of Education.
**Supervisor:** Professor Mary Emmitt
**Institution:** Deakin University
**Faculty:** Education
DEAKIN UNIVERSITY
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENTS FOR TEACHERS/LIBRARIANS

Date 9th May 1999

Project: Author Visits to Schools

My name is Margaret Clark and I am studying for a Doctor of Education (Ed D). My research is titled ‘Reading the Reader: Investigations into Students and their Reading of Fictional Literature’. A particular project, Author Visits to Schools, is part of the overall research.

The aim of this project is to see whether visits by authors encourage students to read more books and how such visits might achieve the curriculum objectives.
I would like to interview individual English teachers and the school librarian about their criteria and expectations for selecting an author to visit, about their criteria for selecting fictional literature, and about their expectations from author visits and any outcomes of these visits.

I also want to interview small groups of students from years 7, 8 and 9 about reading and also their impressions of author visits and will be consulting with teachers/librarians concerning the students to be selected. All participants will be given plain language statements and consent forms. The interviews will be taped and will take approximately thirty minutes. The information will be transcribed using a coding system for the school and participants. Pseudonyms will be used. Each participant will be given a copy of their own interview to approve: in the case of students the parents will also be given a copy for approval.

Participating teachers, librarians, and parents will be given a copy of the final report of the Author Visits to Schools project.

No findings will be published which could identify any individual participant or school. Anonymity is assured by the interview procedure. Access to any data is restricted to me and my university supervisor, and all data will be stored in accordance to Deakin University guidelines. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and if teachers or students agree to participate they may withdraw their consent at any time and the information will not be used.

My supervisor is Professor Mary Emmitt, School of Cultural Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, Deakin University Burwood Campus, 221 Highway, Burwood. Vic 3125 Phone 9 244 3933

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Clark

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, please contact the Secretary, Ethics Committee, Research Services, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood VIC 3125 Tel (03) 9251 7123
Date:

**Project: Author Visit to Schools**

My name is Margaret Clark and I write books for children and teenagers.

I want to do some research on what teachers, librarians and students think about authors visiting their school and how useful this is for the students, especially in regard to their reading of books. This research is undertaken as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree at Deakin University, under the supervision of Professor Mary Emmitt.

The teachers have helped me to choose some to talk with about reading in school and author visits, and your child was nominated.

I am asking your permission to talk with your child in a group with five other students at school and at a time convenient to the school and to the students. The interviews, taking about thirty minutes, will be tape-recorded. All information collected from these interviews will be stored safely in accordance with Deakin University guidelines, for a minimum of six years.

Real names will not be used. I will write out the information and then give it to you and your child to read. Once you have approved it, it will then become part of the research. When the final report about everyone’s comments on Author Visits in Schools is written, you are welcome to a copy of this report on request.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and if you agree that your child can participate you or your child can withdraw your consent at any time.

If you have any queries please contact me through my supervisor, Professor Mary Emmit, School of Cultural Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood 3125. Vic. Phone 9 244 3933

Thank you,

Margaret Clark

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, please contact the Secretary, Ethics Committee, Research Services, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, VIC 3125 Tel (03) 9 251 7123
PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT FOR STUDENTS

Date:

Project: Author Visit to Schools

My name is Margaret Clark and I write books for children and teenagers.

I want to do some research on what teachers, librarians and students think about reading and also authors visiting their school and how useful this is for the students, especially in regard to their reading of books. This research is being undertaken as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree at Deakin University, under the supervision of Professor Mary Emmitt.

The teachers have helped me to choose some students to talk with about author visits, and you were selected.

I am asking your parents’ permission to talk with you in a group with five other students at school and at a time convenient to yourself and the school. The group interview, taking about thirty minutes, will be tape-recorded. All information will be stored safely in accordance with Deakin University guidelines for a minimum of six years.

Real names will not be used. I will write out the information and then give it to you and your parents to read. Once you have approved it, it will then become part of the research. When the final report about everyone’s comments on Author Visits in Schools is written, you are welcome to a copy of this report if you like.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw your consent at any time.

If you have any queries please contact me through my supervisor, Professor Mary Emmit, School of Cultural Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood 3125. Vic. Phone 9 244 3933

Thank you,

Margaret Clark

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, please contact the Secretary, Ethics Committee, Research Services, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, VIC 3125 Tel (03) 9 251 7123
APPENDIX 3: TRANSCRIPT FROM ST. JOHN’S COLLEGE
SAMPLE OF DATA ANALYSIS (FOLIO PIECE 1)
CODE:

Adolescent boys’ opinions of author visits.
Adolescent boys’ reading habits.
Adolescent boys’ reading preferences.
Adolescent boys’ opinion of set texts.

ST JOHN’S COLLEGE, JULY 1999

A quiet room with four year eight boys and the librarian sitting in next room with glass partition.

Marg: Marcus, Have you gone to any author talks or workshops in schools?
Marcus: No
Marg: So you haven’t seen any authors who’ve come to visit the school?
Marcus: Except for you.
Nick: I’ve had one in Grade 6. Robert Trickey.
Marg: And did you go out and read his books after it, or …
Nick: Um, I read his books. Yeah.
Marg: And did it encourage you to read more of his books?
Nick: No, not really.
Marg: Okay. Elias?
Elias: Yeah, I had one, I think in Grade 5 but I can’t remember their name. But after it I read a few of their books, like it was a famous person, so I went and read a few of their books.
Marg: It was a famous person, you can’t remember who, but then it was a long time ago. Okay, what about Daniel?
Daniel: Um, no I didn’t meet any authors. They don’t come here.
Marg: Okay, well, um, well, say your English teacher DID invite an author, say they invited a famous Australian author, why do you think they’d want to do it?
Daniel: Try to encourage kids reading, and like, have a role model and stuff.
Elias: Well, that’s exactly what I was going to say, to encourage kids to read.
Marg: The author’s book or whole piles of different books?
Elias: Oh, mainly the authors.
Marg: What do you reckon?
Nick: I reckon it’s, like, so kids get an understanding of how the author thinks and writes.
Marg: Okay. What do you think, Marcus?
Marcus: Because, like, when you get to high school people kind of, like, stop reading, and um,
Marg: You think a lot of teenagers stop reading when they get to high school?
Marcus: Um, most of them do, like, um, I used to read a lot, now I don’t do it much.
Marg: Is that because you are loaded with other things or because the books are boring or, or, what’s the reason?
Marcus: Yes, um, there’s not enough time to do everything.
Marg: Um, okay, what about you other people, do you find it hard to find time for reading? I mean fiction, I mean books of your own choice, not the ones you have to read.
Daniel: Now and then I want to read, but I never have time to sit down and read. Like I try but I go to bed at about 10.30 and I just doze off before I can read the pages.
Marg: Like, the ones you have to read for school, do you mean?
Daniel: They’re the ones I have to, um …
Marg: Are you a person who’s always read before you go to bed?
Elias: Um, I usually try to read, um, one or two pages, it usually calms me down and helps me to sleep.  
Marg: So Elias has a reading habit before he goes to bed. What about anyone else? Daniel?  
Daniel: In English we had this book, *Strange Objects*. Every night for about two weeks I just went to bed and read it. I was real quick. I enjoyed the book.  
Marg: Do you know who wrote it?  
Daniel: Gary Crew.  
Marg: Yes.  
Marg: So if you enjoyed it did you go and get some more Gary Crew books to read?  
Daniel: No.  
Marg: What about Elias? Do you read in bed every night?  
Elias: Yes, when I get the chance. I love to read, like the Paul Jennings series, *Unmentionable*, like that, they're good to read.  
Marg: Why those particular books?  
Elias: Oh, you get a bit of a laugh. You know.  
Marg: Okay. Nick. Do you have a reading habit? Read every night? What would you choose?  
Nick: I used to read every night, um, and if I’d a choice of books I’d read science fiction, you know, something like Robert Jordan, *Wheel of Time*, um, or David Eddings.  
Marg: He seems a popular one.  
Nick: He’s very popular with people.  
Marg: What about you, Marcus?  
Marcus: Yeah, like if I’m interested in the book, I’ll read it, but I’d prefer to read comics, science fiction or kind of adventure. And there’s K. A. Applegate, and she’s written *Animorphs*, and I’ve got all, like, twenty five books.  
Elias: What I find is like, books that are fitting..., oh, like I’ve read this book *The Secrets from School Underground* and that will have to do about, like teenage life, and I enjoy this kind of book.  
Marg: So how do you find out about this underground book, like, does the teacher give you a list or do you look in the library or on the computer, like how do you find the books?  
Elias. Yeah, well, I was just looking around on the shelves one day for a … you know, reading, and I saw this book, like, pretty interesting title, I turned it round and it had this, um, what do you call it on the back?  
Marg: Blurb.  
Elias: Yes, so I read it to see how it was, and then I got into it so I kept reading it.  
Marg: So you were attracted by the title, were you?  
Elias: Um, yes.  
Marg: Is there anybody who’d like to meet … if you could meet any author in the world, living or dead, just say you had the choice, who would you actually want to meet?  
Elias: Morris Gleitzman and Rohald Dahl.  
Marg: One’s living and one’s dead.  
Elias: Gleitzman’s dead?  
Marg: No, Dahl is.  
Marcus: Paul Jennings  
Nick: Probably Robert Jordan. He’s American  
Marg: And (looks at Daniel)  
Daniel: I’d like to meet Gary Crew because I liked that book.  
Elias: Have you met any authors? Like Rohald Dahl?  
Marg: I didn’t meet Rohald Dahl because he dropped dead before I could, but I met the others you’ve mentioned - not Tolkien or the American ones, but I’ve met all the others. Um, did your parents have influences on what you read? When you started off reading …  
Marcus: Not really.  
Marg: Not really?  
Marcus: No. They just really encouraged me to get into the reading habit.  
Daniel: Well, they helped me a bit because in primary school we got readers. We had to read them for a certain amount of nights.  
Nick: I hated those.  
Marg: What novels are you studying in English at school? Are you all studying the same ones?  
Daniel: Yeah, we’ve done *Strange Objects* by Gary Crew.
Marg: This year?
Daniel: Yeah, about two weeks ago. And everyone else is at it, we’re still going on with it.
Elias: We’re in the same class.
Marg: So Elias and, um, Daniel are all studying Strange Objects. Or you’ve just finished
Daniel: Yes.
Marg: What about you, Nick?
Nick: We did The Gathering.
Marg: Oh, Isobelle Carmody
Nick: Yeah. And it’s a killer book to read. (?)
Marg: Oh (laughs) Right.
Marg: Okay. What about you, Marcus?
Marcus: We’re doing To Kill a Mocking Bird.(grimace)
Marg: So who wrote it?
Marcus: I don’t know.
Marg: (laughs) You don’t know and you’re reading it? Okay, tell me about To Kill a Mocking Bird. Why do you think the teachers have picked that book for a set text?
Marcus: Well, the main topic for the whole semester is, the subject is Gendered Fiction, like males and females and stuff and racism and stuff like that, and there’s a black man in the story and he gets blamed for raping a girl and it actually wasn’t him, and he was a black man and he was in court and the jury was all white and then he was proved innocent, but the jury still convicted him of guilty.
Marg: Sounds a really good book
Marcus: Have you ever read it?
Marg: Yes. I’m saying it sounds a good book. So what do you think of To Kill a Mocking Bird?
Marcus: It’s a pig of a story, like, we also watched the movie, and like, the movie went straight into that part of the book, but like there’s ten chapters that went on about nothing.
Marg: Okay, so Nick, back to you. What about The Gathering?
Nick: Oh, well our teacher didn’t really have a choice in choosing it. Um, probably the reason why it got chosen was because the unit’s called Tell Someone Who Cares.
Marg: Why do you say the teacher didn’t have a choice. Wouldn’t they all sit around and talk about what books they were going to use?
Nick: I don’t think they’ve even read it.
Marg: I see. So, Nick, what did you think of the book?
Nick: Oh, it’ was a good book. Yeah.
Marg: Have you met Isobelle Carmody?
Nick: No, um, but one of my friends has met her, and the book that I’ve got signed by her.
Marg: What do you think, Elias?
Elias: I think it’s because we’re doing that subject, Science Fiction and all that, this book, like the setting out’s got newspaper articles, like parts, like Stephen Messenger he’s kind of the main character, he writes sort of, like it’s sort of related to science fiction.
Marg: Would you, would you go and choose that book off the shelf?
Elias: Um well, the first time that I bought it it didn’t really appeal to me but once I got into it a bit it was okay.
Marg: What about you, Daniel? You said you read it and you kept going and you quite enjoyed it.
Daniel: Yeah, I did, I liked it.
Marg: But then you didn’t go back and look for more of his other books, did you?
Daniel: No
Marg: Okay. So do you know what books you’re doing next semester?
Marcus: We’re reading Animal Farm and Julius Caesar. That’s Shakespeare.
Marg: Who wrote Animal Farm?
Marcus: George Orwell.
Nick: We’re doing Animal Farm and Shakespeare.
Marg: Say you all had the power to select the books you have to study for this next semester, what would you choose?
Marcus: I’d choose something more exciting, not these boring old books, like Stephen King’s The Red King, something like that. (The Red King’s by Victor Kelleher)
Marg: Do you think most boys would like it?
Marcus: Well, I did, but we did it in primary school and most people didn’t like it, but I did.
Marg: Why didn’t most people like it in primary school?
Marcus: Probably because they couldn’t understand it.
Marg: Would you pick any other Stephen King books?
Marcus: I’d choose Morris Gleitzman, like *Sticky Beak*, this girl who couldn’t talk.
Marg: Have you heard of his new book that’s out?
Marcus: Oh, *Belly Flop*.
Marg: Since then he’s had *Water Wings*, *Bumface* and *Gift of the Gab*. Now, Nick, if you had the power to choose the books to study, you’re thinking, now what would these boys like to read, what would you choose?
Nick: Um, probably something science fictiony.
Marg: Can you give us some examples?
Nick: Um, *Wheel of Time*, something, like, David Eddings books.
Marg: A lot of boys like those sorts of books?
Nick: Yeah
Elias: Are you doing all the English teachers?
Marg: I don’t know, because Mrs M has set it up. What I’m actually trying to find out is what impact author visits have on this school, but it’s a bit hard to find out because you say you haven’t had any
Elias: We were all in Year 7 so we didn’t get to see the authors.
Marcus: Yeah, most of the people that, um, come, only go to certain English classes.
Marg: Daniel?
Daniel: I’d like science fiction books, things like alien invasions, some of that, because I liked the movie *Independence Day* and it’d be good if they had books like that.
Marg: You reckon you’d enjoy that?
Daniel: Yeah.
Marg: Now, you said some of the books could be more interesting. Like *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. Now is it the book, or what they do with it?
Marcus: Like for the first ten chapters it goes on about the two children and the single parent and like, just how they grow up. And then it leads up to the main part, like the whole community is divided, so it takes too long.
Marg: So you’re saying it takes too long to get going even though the teacher might try to make it interesting.
Marcus: Yeah
Marg: So it’s the book and not the teacher.
Marcus: Yeah.
Marg: Anyone like to make more comments? Should you have more visits from authors and could that make the books more interesting?
Daniel: I reckon there should be more.
Elias: Yeah, like two authors a year. But everyone needs to get to go.
Nick: How long have you been doing this research?
Marg: You’re the first group. Um, I was a bit worried about the questions. Were they okay? Is there something else I should have put in?
Daniel: No they were fine.
Marg: Well, if you think of something I should have added you can tell me later okay?

End of discussion.