Literacy in and for the 21st century

Understanding the lived experiences of teachers in Victorian government schools as they plan and enact literacy for Year 6 students

by

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BA, BT, MEd, MA (Leadership)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University
January 2015
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Damien Lyons, January 2015
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Abstract

This thesis, completed in 2015, explores the lived experiences of fifteen Year 6 teachers in government schools within Victoria, Australia. It looks at some of the factors that influence teacher decision-making and the enactment of literacy, including sociological influences, constructions of childhood, and the lived experiences of teachers. Specifically, this research project explores teachers’ beliefs about what constitutes a 21st century literacy learning environment, what they perceive to be the literacy practices Year 6 students need to be exposed to now, compared to what they may require in the future, how this learning is enacted, and some of the factors that influence their pedagogical practices and decision-making.

The thesis employs two methodologies; narrative inquiry and hermeneutic phenomenology to collect, interpret and present the stories from the research participants. From an ‘insider’s view’, the findings offer insights into teacher practices and decision-making, particularly concerning literacy in and for the 21st century.

Teachers from metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria participated in a one-hour semi-structured interview during which they considered and shared their experiences, beliefs and practices associated with the teaching of literacy in and for the 21st century. The results are presented as a narrative of the lived experiences of the participants. Phenomenological analysis was applied to the individual narratives in order to present common themes.

In the first of two results chapters, the stories from each participant are shared, to provide an insider’s view of their work, their pedagogical beliefs associated with the teaching of literacy, and the factors that influence their teaching.

The second results chapter uses a phenomenological analysis to highlight the common themes. The themes explore conceptions of 21st century literacy,
attitudes towards change, pedagogical orientations, and the influence of school-based leadership. Each theme starts with the voice of the participant, followed by an analysis to theorise the narrative using education and sociological literature, and concludes with my own reflections and recommendations. The ontological orientation of this research focuses on lived experiences, offering many ‘truths’ (Giorgi 1997) in order to better understand how teachers think about 21st century literacy and some of the factors that influence their pedagogical practices.

This thesis advocates for a stronger consideration of the meaning of 21st century literacy, and the enabling pedagogical practices. It considers teachers’ understanding of, and attitudes towards, the sociological and educational influences that impact literacy in and for the 21st century. It explores how teachers construct learning for Year 6 students and presents evidence of the decision-making processes in which teachers engage when crafting and enacting literacy for Year 6 students in Victorian government schools.
1 Introduction to the Research

1.1 Dear Diary—Something feels wrong with my teaching. Is it just me ... or are other teachers feeling this too? The story that led me to beginning a PhD

As I sit down to write this first diary entry, I am reflecting on the story that led me to start on this doctoral journey...

It is July 2010 and I arrive at my Year 6 classroom door. With my smartphone in hand, I have already checked my Facebook and Twitter accounts, replied to several emails from work colleagues, and checked my online schedule. I have had an early morning parent meeting during which I took notes on my reasonably new tablet, and then emailed them to some colleagues. My Year 6 students begin to file into the classroom as I check online media and post to a blog on my laptop. The literacy lesson for the day requires my students to read a section of a book, take notes, organise the notes into a summary and present it to the class as a written document.

I remember wondering why the literacy practices that I used every day were so different to the literacy teaching I was offering my students. The skills that I was asking students to develop were skills that I had learned in primary school almost twenty years before. The activities that I was asking my students to engage with were the same activities I engaged with as a school student.

As my thinking about this deepened, I became aware that my own philosophy of literacy teaching and learning was probably rooted in a 20th century discourse; one where I had the control and I dictated the skills and content sets that ‘my’ students needed to learn, justifying this through standards set by the
state and federal governments. What I became increasingly aware of was that the literacy skills I used to engage in my world were almost the opposite of what I was teaching my students, and I did not have the philosophical or pedagogical understanding to bridge this disconnect. I knew the 21st century was a place of multimodality, of multiliteracies, and of rapid change, yet I was almost shielding my students, and probably myself, from this world. I was focused on a discrete and controllable set of literacy skills that I could easily measure and report on. It was easy to prove that a student had remembered and spelt twenty words correctly on a spelling test; it was much harder to prove that the student could critically analyse an online text and communicate this meaning using literacy skills with which I was not familiar.

I realised that the literacy skills I was teaching my students, while valuable in the context of primary schools, had little currency in the world beyond the classroom. My teaching was becoming less valuable than it once was. Worse, students were teaching themselves the literacy skills they needed to enable them to participate in their 21st century world beyond my classroom.

I began to wonder more systematically about how other teachers were thinking about literacy skills for the 21st century. How were they teaching literacy to their students? Were they experiencing the same disconnect between the skills they were teaching their students and their own practices?

I find myself wanting to investigate and understand better the lived experiences of Year 6 teachers as they consider their own literacy pedagogical beliefs, the literacy skills they believe their Year 6 students need for successful participation now and when they leave school, and the factors that influence their literacy pedagogy, and thus this journey begins…
1.2 A note about reading this thesis

This thesis is traditional in format. In addition I have started and ended each chapter with a journal entry that attempts to capture my lived experiences (thoughts, actions, and wonderings) throughout my doctoral studies. Robert Atkinson suggests ‘we are the story telling species. Story telling is in our blood. We think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story’ (Atkinson 2007, p. 224). Further, he suggests that capturing the researcher’s story allows ‘others to know and understand better’ (Atkinson 2007, p. 236). So while understanding the lived experiences of teachers working with Year 6 students in their literacy learning is central to this thesis, I also felt it was important to capture and understand my own experience. For me, the doctoral journey has been about ‘becoming’ a researcher and understanding how to be a researcher. From an ontological perspective it is about my version of truth, my experience of my research training, and my voice within my research. I wanted to share my journey as a nascent researcher and to represent it as a piece of data within this thesis, in this way demonstrating how my voice has contributed to, and impacted the research.

In order to clarify how to read this thesis, please note that my reflections are prefaced ‘Dear Diary’—and are in italics.

1.3 Positioning the research

1.3.1 A world, and a world’s workforce, that is rapidly changing

‘Never before has the rate or pace of change been so extreme’ (Friedman 2008, p. 4). Historically, change has long been a constant theme within our world. Aristotle in 342 B.C. referred to ‘change as a way of ensuring survival’ (Winn & Jacks 1967, p. 15). The writer Malcolm Gladwell suggests that change happens when we reach a ‘tipping point’; the moment when a critical mass of circumstances come together and set us on a new and unstoppable course (Gladwell 2000).
Like many writers, Ken Kay (2010) argues that the world is changing. He suggests that the global economy, with its emerging industries and occupations, offers tremendous opportunities for everyone who has the skills to take advantage of it. He points out ‘in this era of rapid change, the social contract prevalent for a good part of the last century does not exist anymore. Doing well in school no longer guarantees a lifelong job or career as it once did’ (Kay 2010, p. xii). Kay suggests that there is a new social contract, a contract that the baby boomers (who in the Western world held on average 10.8 jobs throughout their life) (Kay 2010) struggle to understand. Kay goes on to say that in this new social contract ‘only people who have the knowledge and skills to negotiate constant change and reinvent themselves for new situations will succeed’ (Kay 2010, p. xii).

The development of and access to technology, has been a pivotal enabler for change, particularly since the beginning of the 21st century. The Internet is probably the most widespread technological change agent in the 21st century, with many writers such as Funnell (2012) and Cope & Kalantzis (2009) arguing that what the Internet has done is make the world a much smaller place. Crockett suggests that this means that ‘companies have opted for easier, faster and more economical ways to produce products’ (Crockett, Jukes & Churches 2011, p. 10). The outcome of this for many Western countries is the significant downsizing of the manufacturing sector. For example, United States Congressman Bernie Sanders stated that 50,000 factories in the United States closed in the past 20 years (Sanders, 2011). Australia has followed a similar trajectory, with the automotive, agriculture and textile industries all now in a much smaller and more vulnerable state than they once were.

Given this ‘tipping point’—the collapse of once strong manufacturing industries, the outsourcing of mundane labour to developing countries, and the automation of many tasks—I am led to wonder about the place that education should play
in a developing 21st century landscape, and how our young people will develop into productive adult citizens, capable of meaningful contributions.

1.3.2 Western education within a changing world
In a 21st century Western world, where the labour force in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors continues to downsize, questions need to be considered around how schooling prepares young people to be productive 21st century citizens. Crockett suggests that ‘schools were designed for an era in which three-quarters of the population were employed in manufacturing and agricultural jobs’ (Crockett, Jukes & Churches 2011, p. 13). Times have changed, but in some cases our educational institutions still embrace traditional structures, traditional organisation, traditional instruction, standardised learning, and standardised testing, at the same time that our economy is eliminating standardised jobs. Bob Marzano’s research suggests that ‘80 to 85 per cent of the work students do in their classes focuses on factual recall and lower level thinking’ (Marzano 2003). If young people are primarily engaging in learning that requires low level skills, yet have to compete in a Western world that is reducing jobs that require these skills, we have an emerging societal problem.

1.3.3 Highly educated—useless people
Lee Crockett’s chapter entitled, ‘Highly educated, useless people’ (2011) outlines a comparative paradigm of thinking between the learning young people do within school and the skills required to participate successfully in the wider 21st century world. In other words, people being capable of engaging with the practices required to achieve the outcomes they desire. Crockett’s underlying premise is that parts of our education system are representative of a past era of education and consequently are no longer as valuable as they once were.

1.3.4 Positioning Western education within a societal context
Ken Robinson, in his book Out of Our Minds (2011), makes an interesting observation. He describes a 21st century world that is organic, with an education system that is inorganic, hence encouraging young people to learn
skills that are neither useful nor valuable in a 21st century world. Robinson observes that ‘some of our most successful people in the world did not do well at school … Many succeeded only after they recovered from their education’ (Robinson 2011, p. 8). Many schools and school systems within the Western world are entrenched in a mass education model that was established during the Industrial Revolution and that in many ways mirrors the Industrial Revolution’s principles: that is, linearity, conformity, and standardisation. The problem is that the world has moved on from the values of the Industrial Revolution. One of the reasons schooling is no longer working is that the 21st century world is organic, adaptable and diverse, whereas schools in many instances still value conformity and standardisation. Robinson points out, ‘as the world spins faster and faster, organisations everywhere say they need people with skills to think creatively, communicate and work in teams: people who are flexible and quick to adapt. Too often they say they can’t find people with these skills’ (Robinson 2011, p. 2).

One of the challenges we face in the 21st century is to transform education systems into something better suited to the real needs of the 21st century. At the centre of this transformation has to be an evolved view of how we value the different literacy practices required to successfully participate in and contribute to the 21st century.

1.3.5 **Literacy for the 21st century**

At the heart of a rapidly changing world in the early part of the 21st century is a literacy discourse that is evolving to reflect the ‘new’ ways we live, work and communicate. While the illiterate of the 20th century were those who could not read or write, ‘the illiterate of the 21st century will be those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn’ (Toffler 1995). This is not intended to be a binary opposition; rather, Toffler is suggesting that skills that were valuable in the 20th century, while still necessary, are competing with different skills required for success in the 21st century. Focusing on dated skills at the expense of more
current skills is the practice that Toffler cautions against. Literacy for the 21st
century embraces and demands skills in multimodality, digital citizenship, and
information management, within a context of fluidity and change.

A stagnant definition of literacy is likely to work in opposition to the literacy
skills required for 21st century participation. Therefore, a dynamic definition of
literacy is arguably more appropriate. For example, Bull and Anstey suggest
that ‘literacy is represented as having the skills to successfully take part in
everyday life, including economic and social contributions’ (Bull & Anstey
2005, p. 6), while Jukes suggests that ‘we need to move our thinking beyond our
primary focus and fixation on factual recall’ (2011, p. 17):

The skills we learned to read, write and communicate have changed. In the
age of multimedia, hypertext, blogs and wikis, reading is no longer just a
passive, linear activity that deals only with text. Today, it’s essential that all of
our students have a wide range of skills beyond those that were needed in the
20th century, a range that includes the skills needed to function within a rapidly
changing society. (Crockett, Jukes & Churches 2011, p. 17)

While this need for enhanced communication skills seems obvious, in Australia
(where high stakes standardised testing is being introduced and where,
therefore, teachers are either directly or indirectly being encouraged to teach to
the test to improve school data (Breivik, Patricia 2005)), the notion of focusing
on factual recall seems to endure, often at the expense of attention to the
literacy practices in which young people are engaging outside the classroom. If
literacy is a social discourse and is constructed through discourse, what is most
striking are the power relations at play. Young people now have the ability to
create and share meaning in ways that no longer can be controlled by schools
or by the people who traditionally held power. Schools, while trying to ensure
that young people have the ‘basics’ of the English language, are often competing
with the same young people they teach, who are making and sharing using their
own literacy practices.
1.3.6 Literacy skills in the 21st century

What are the literacy skills needed for 21st century participation, and how do we avoid ‘throwing the baby out with the bathwater’? While most researchers offer slightly different versions of what they consider to be 21st century literacy skills, the themes are similar. They hinge around higher order critical and creative thinking, managing change, working collaboratively and participating within a multimodal framework (Baker 2010). It is possible to argue that these skills were prominent in our 20th century world too; however, the percentage of the population requiring sophisticated literacy skills in the 21st century is greater than ever before.

Bransford offers an example of the difference between a 21st century skill-set and its equivalent in previous eras. He suggests that in schools, ‘we tell students the same thing a hundred times. On the 101st time, we ask if they remember what we told them the first 100 times. However, in the 21st century, the true test of the rigor is for students to be able to look at material they’ve never seen before and have the skills to know what to do with it’ (Bransford 2000).

It appears that the world is changing, and changing rapidly. Industrial models of education that were once very successful, and that appear to be holding on within education systems (perhaps even being valued in some education systems), are today failing dismally beyond the classroom walls. Employers are calling for skills that can be grouped under the heading of 21st century skills, yet education systems are still struggling to place sufficiently high value on these skills. In fact, there is some evidence in terms of high stakes standardised testing, to suggest they may be edging towards the opposite (Robinson 2011). The desire to embrace 21st century literacy learning is apparent in many education curriculum documents, but in practice the value that is placed on this aspect of the curriculum seems at odds with the value that society places on these skills. The world is radically changing almost everywhere, and at a pace that is faster than ever before, except in our schools (Prensky 2010). How we
can equip young people with higher order literacy skills that focus on critical and creative thinking, multimodal communication and active participation within an environment of constant change, is the challenge that education faces into the 21st century. There are also implications for teachers, particularly in how teachers consider and enact literacy in their classroom environment.

1.4 Defining the research

1.4.1 Seeking understanding by exploring experiences
There are many factors that influence literacy teaching and learning. This research project seeks to explore what Year 6 teachers in Victorian primary schools believe constitutes a quality 21st century literacy learning environment, what they perceive to be the literacy skills Year 6 students need to be exposed to now, what literacy skills their students may require into the future, and the role that the teacher plays in enacting such learning with Year 6 students.

1.4.2 Research aims
The skills required to be literate in the 21st century are different to those needed in previous eras. The 21st century is a place of multimodality, exponentially increasing amounts of information, and sophisticated and powerful tools for communication. Primary school teachers are charged with the task of understanding what being literate in the 21st century is, and how to enable their students to achieve literacy success, both now and into the future. This research project aims to understand better how teachers are conceptualising 21st century literacy, with a particular focus on literacy skills, how Year 6 students are learning 21st century literacy skills through gathering the stories of their teachers, and the factors that influence a teacher’s decision-making processes in relation to literacy skills.

1.4.3 Research questions
In order to understand how Year 6 teachers in government schools within Victoria, Australia, conceptualise and teach literacy, with a particular focus on
21st century contexts, three research questions (with associated sub-questions) were established. These were:

1. **What literacy skills and practices do teachers in Victorian primary schools perceive as necessary for Year 6 students to be able to participate successfully in their 21st century world?**
   a. What literacy skills and practices do teachers in Victorian primary schools perceive as necessary for Year 6 students to be able to participate in school literacy practices?
   b. What literacy skills and practices do teachers in Victorian primary schools perceive as necessary for Year 6 students to be able to participate successfully in out-of-school literacy practices?

2. **How do teachers in Victorian primary schools define 21st century literacy, and how do they enable this learning for their Year 6 students?**
   a. How do teachers define 21st century literacy?
   b. How do teachers expose Year 6 students to the literacy skills they believe are necessary for successful participation in the 21st century, and how do they enable them to practise these literacy skills?

3. **Who or what influences teachers’ practices associated with the development and enactment of literacy learning for Years 6 students in and for the 21st century?**
   a. What factors influence teachers’ decision-making processes related to literacy learning for their Year 6 students?
   b. Is there a contradiction between the literacy skills teachers believe are valuable for Year 6 students and what school stakeholders expect?

1.5 **Methodological orientation of the research**

This research project is a qualitative investigation that seeks to hear the stories of Year 6 teachers in Victorian primary schools: how they think about literacy in the 21st century, the literacy skills they consider to be important now and into the future, what factors influence their literacy teaching, and how they enact literacy teaching with their Year 6 students.
1.5.1 Understanding through narrative

‘Narrative inquiry is set in human stories of experiences … [that] provide researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories’ (Webster & Mertova 2007, p. 23).

At the heart of this research project was my desire for teachers to be able to share their story; to be able to construct and present their view of their reality. To do this and understand their perceptions of 21st century literacy, how they enact it and the factors that influence this enactment, requires a methodology that enables the full social fabric to be considered and explored. ‘Narrative inquiry aims to fully understand how various pieces of data relate to one another under the demands of the setting in which they are articulated’ (Marvasti 2004, p. 101). I chose to use the narrative inquiry methodology to investigate teachers’ perceptions and actions, because it enabled consideration not only of what the participants do as part of their work, but also of the social discourse of which they are a part, hence affording a better understanding of the complexities of teaching literacy in the 21st century. Teachers often make decisions based on complex factors; some of these factors may be external, such as school policy or leadership direction, while other factors may be very private, perhaps associated with their own lived experience. Narrative inquiry gives the researcher the ability to capture, interpret and analyse both internal and external factors, for a richness that allows the complexities of teaching to be better understood.

It also offers the researcher an opportunity to consider why these views have been presented in particular ways. As Riessman, cited in Marvasti (2002) argues, we [the researchers] should be asking ‘how do people present themselves in their personal stories’ (Marvasti 2004, p. 100)? Further, she suggests that ‘interview narratives could be treated as descriptive performances’ (Marvasti 2004, p. 101). Thus narrative inquiry allows for exploration and
consideration of the social context in which the story is being told, as well as consideration of the choices that research participants make within their performance (the interview) that relate to the identity they are wishing to portray.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured in a traditional manner. Following this introductory chapter, I present a literature review (Chapter 2), which reviews four broad themes, namely:

1. The sociological landscape of the 21st century, focusing on globalisation, change and the place of education.
2. The sociology of childhood, focusing on how childhood studies have influenced (or not) education in and for the 21st century.
3. Literacy theories and pedagogies.
4. Factors that influence the teaching of literacy for Year 6 students in and for the 21st century, namely, teacher learning and school-based leadership.

In Chapter 3, I present the two methodological orientations (narrative inquiry and hermeneutic phenomenology) that I used to collect, interpret, analyse and present my data. I describe the theoretical perspectives of the methodologies and explain the rationale for this research project.

The following chapter (Chapter 4) expands on the actual method I used in this research. Within this chapter I outline the practicalities of my research project, using justifications from the methodology chapter. I describe my research questions and process, how I recruited my participants, how I collected and analysed the data, and the ethical issues that I considered.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I present my data. Chapter 5, entitled ‘Narratives from the Field’, describes the individual narratives that are then analysed against the
research questions. The subsequent chapter, ‘Exploring a Gallery of Themes’, takes the data from all the research participants and, using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, identifies themes.

In my concluding chapter (Chapter 7) I draw together the findings from the research, suggest future areas for research and offer reflective thoughts about the research process.

At the beginning and end of each chapter are my diary notes. As this thesis draws on narratives to demonstrate understanding, I decided to capture my own narrative, as a way of bringing into consideration my own learning and understandings as a research student.

1.7 Dear Diary—My Colloquium experience…

The word Colloquium still makes me shudder! While my Colloquium was really the introduction to my doctoral studies, it was not a positive experience. In fact, looking back, it was my Colloquium experience that caused me to turn away from my doctoral studies for a period of time, almost for good!

It is fair to say I was under-prepared. I had an idea of what I wanted to research, an idea of how I wanted to research it, and I had read a narrow selection of the literature. But I was a novice. I was a child at the start of a journey. My Colloquium document was genuine in its intent, but it was the document of a beginner. I was deflated, discouraged, and disheartened. To be really clear, the comments I received were fair. I was under-read, my ideas lacked theoretical insight and I was not writing like an academic. I decided that the PhD path was not for me and so I eventually deferred my studies and instead enrolled at the University of London.

They say things happen for a reason, and maybe in this case it’s true. My time at the University of London inspired me back into the world of research!
completed my studies in leadership and returned to Australia re-focused and re-energised, and wanting to be a doctoral student once more.

I re-enrolled, and fortunately my Principal Supervisor was willing to take me back on. She is another hero in my narrative. She had the wisdom and skill to guide and nurture me along the PhD path, knowing when to push and when to step back. The conclusion of our work together comes with writing this introductory chapter.

It’s fair to say that without the wonderful academics at the University of London, a terrific Principal Supervisor and a range of Associate Supervisors at Deakin, I wouldn’t be here. Doctoral work for me has been about identity, understanding and transformation. As Wells suggests, ‘the concept of identity itself is not a fixed and coherent set of traits, but … something complex, often contradictory, and subject to change across time and place’ (Wells 2007, p. 58). My doctoral journey has been an authentic demonstration for me of how an identity evolves from teacher to student to researcher, and of the complex issues that emerge as a consequence of identity transformation.

This thesis, while reporting on questions about which I passionately believe, is also about me as a researcher, a thinker, and a person undergoing transformation.

I’m proud to see myself as a novice researcher, one who has been on a physical and metaphorical journey that has led me to places and people that I would never have discovered otherwise. I built a research project on understanding the lived experience of others. What I didn’t expect to discover was how important understanding my own lived experience would become. If the doctoral journey is partly about learning how to be a researcher, then capturing my own journey seemed important to me and this is why I begin and end each chapter of this thesis with my own lived experiences; with how I thought about
and engaged with the study along the way; and on how I worked with my wonderful research participants, my teachers, my friends and my family. The reflections in this thesis are my personal account, not just of what I did and what I thought, but who I was, and who I am becoming …
2 Literature Review

2.1 Dear Diary—The Literature Review is ‘forcing me to clarify’ …

It’s August 2013 and I am back in Australia. I have completed my leadership studies and I am settling back into being a PhD student. As a way of re-engaging with my doctoral studies, my supervisor and I have agreed that first I need to read, read, read! This will allow me to enjoy the experience of reading. I know I will gain more insight and more understanding because I won’t have the pressure of writing. I also know that I am going to need to read widely. I have to step out of the literacy space, and begin to read more broadly. I hope that the combination of the two will allow me to develop a much clearer vision for my Literature Review.

I want to understand what influences the way in which teachers enact literacy in and for the 21st century. Therefore, in my review of the literature I am going to have to pay attention to trends, global realities, and systems that enact literacy. Part 1 of my Literature Review will therefore need to have a specific focus on the trends and global realities that have an impact on literacy. While I don’t see the primary role of education as preparing young people for work (in fact that’s almost the opposite of what I believe), I do think that schools have a responsibility to ask questions about the sort of skills and dispositions young people need to be able to participate successfully, and so I will also need to touch on employment trends.

A second theme that has emerged in my reading so far is that of childhood sociology. Initially I was not expecting this to be a part of my Literature Review, largely because I had not read or considered it carefully enough, but I have become aware that if I believe that literacy is socially constructed, and has
interwoven within it elements of power relations, then considering how young people create and engage with meaning making is very significant and I am going to need to address this.

The 21st century is probably the first time that traditional notions of power are being challenged by young people. Some of the ‘tools’ used to make meaning in the 21st century disregard notions of power or authority. Young people have a voice and an opportunity to make and communicate meaning in ways that were unimaginable even a generation ago. In addition, there is the social construction of childhood as a theoretical construct. A significant and radical change in the way children are seen, represented and understood is taking place. Children are no longer seen simplistically as ‘empty vessels’ (something I’ve never believed), rather they are seen as people with rights, with lived experiences that need to be understood and valued. I have also observed that part of the challenge some teachers are facing is that they have a dated view of childhood, and this dated view often clashes with how young people see themselves, and the rights and responsibilities they expect to be afforded. As my research is concerned with understanding how teachers enact literacy in and for the 21st century, it is going to be important that I pay attention to understanding young people in the 21st century.

Of course, I also need to look at literacy theories and studies. In my Literature Review I want to offer breadth rather than depth, and so I want to look at a range of theories, primarily focusing on whole language theories. I also want to explore sociocultural theories and concentrate on literacy theories specifically focused on the 21st century. Of course as this is a research project that explores pedagogies, I will have to devote a separate section to literacy pedagogies.

So as I think about what I want my Literature Review to be, I’m cognisant of the need to focus on more than just literacy definitions or literacy pedagogy. My research is about understanding the social context and social practices of people
who enact literacy for Year 6 students. It’s also about understanding the perspectives of teachers regarding what skills and dispositions they believe young people need to be successfully literate in and for the 21st century. Therefore, my Literature Review is going to need to consider time, place, and space. It needs to look forwards and backwards. It needs to locate literacy theories within a social context, with historical and future influences.

I suspect that while this is a review, it’s therefore going to take me on an enlightening journey!

2.2 Introduction

In a 21st century world that is powered by knowledge and innovation, with societies focused on renewal and productivity, in a landscape filled with risk and opportunity, but facing environmental, health, technology, scientific and political challenges, the creativity, ingenuity, and skills of Australians are vital to our continued prosperity. The ability of Australia [and other nations] to participate globally, to attract and maintain intellectual capital, and to produce a knowledge-based economy, suggests that the way we think about education in the 21st century needs to be considered. Sardone and Devlin-Scherer suggest that one aspect of education should be ‘enabling people with the skills needed to participate socially, intellectually, and economically in the 21st century’ (2010, p. 10).

This Literature Review explores four broad themes:

1. The 21st century: What are some of the 21st century’s sociological characteristics and global realities? This theme surveys some predictions of the skills and dispositions that people and societies may require for participation in the 21st century. The question of literacy education is then located within this discussion.
2. The sociology of childhood: Literacy is a social construction, and the way we create and make meaning is socially constructed. This research project looks at how teachers are teaching Year 6 students to make meaning and so reviewing the literature on childhood sociology is relevant to help understand the sociological discourses that teachers find themselves having to navigate.

3. Socio-cultural theories of literacy: In this theme focus is given to reviewing the literature on the history of literacy and schooling. Attention is also given to reviewing the literature on the characteristics of 21st century literacy and to pedagogies that may have a meaningful impact on the enactment of aspects of 21st century literacy.

4. Factors that influence the teaching of literacy in and for the 21st century: This theme discusses teacher learning and school-based leadership.

2.3 PART ONE: The 21st century—some observations and predictions from the literature

Education in the 21st century should be different to that of the 20th century. The latter, more often than not, was concerned with a factory-like setting, producing ‘workers’ with specific literacy skills. In the 21st century the skill-set required has changed, and is much more fluid and change-oriented than in the 20th century. ‘Skills such as teamwork, collaboration, communication, leadership, critical thinking, and problem solving have moved into prominence with the ever-increasing demand for workers to think and respond to complex problems and ever-changing work tasks’ (Graff 2010, p. 636). These conditions require pedagogies that encourage students to learn and practise these skills. Additionally, 21st century learning requires a classroom environment that embraces the integration of 21st century skills, to ensure that students are
prepared to meet the requirements of a modern world, and have the capacity to participate in 21st century societies.

One example of a changing world is the attitude towards, and the focus on, work-readiness. In acknowledging that schooling is not just about preparing students for work, I draw on the writings of Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996) who caution against this view. I also draw on the work of Heidegger (1977) who opposes technology determinism, where technology drives human practice rather than humans controlling their own negotiations of the discourse of work and technology. Nonetheless, work-readiness as one of many examples of how the focus on literacy is changing in the 21st century, is important to consider.

Vance (2010) suggests that to participate successfully in the 21st century, people need skills that were never imagined by earlier generations. Deep-seated changes in society and in workplaces have restructured the nature of work and society in ways that were unimaginable to previous generations. Australians are part of a world that is diverse and technology-driven. Workplaces and social literacy(ies) have evolved in line with changes in technology and society. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority agrees that ‘technology has greatly changed the complexity and intensity of literacy’ (2014, p. 22). The 21st century requires that a literate person acquire, and be skilful, within a broad range of competencies, from traditional literacy skills, to digital literacy skills, to social literacy skills. Further, the seamless integration of these literacies is expected to be the ‘norm’, rather than the exception. Based on a summary of the literature (Baker 2010; Barton & Hamilton 2000; Cervetti, Damico & Pearson 2006; Kelley 2013), there appears to be some agreement in defining the characteristics of 21st century literacy. These include being able to:

- Competently use a variety of technological tools in diverse literacy environments.
• Develop relationships with others, using a variety of communication mediums, to solve and pose problems cross-culturally and collaboratively.
• Plan, create, and share information, locally, nationally and internationally, using a range of literacy modes.
• Analyse, synthesise, and evaluate various streams of information simultaneously.
• Create, critique, analyse and evaluate multimodal texts.
• Enact ethical and responsible dispositions within multimodal environments.

It should be noted from the outset that there does not seem to be one theory or definition of 21st century literacy, rather, our understanding is informed by many theories, and by consideration of life within a social context.

2.4 Education in Australia

Education is a paramount consideration for Australia’s future, as it ‘encourages young people to live and learn in a world by exposing them to values, skills, and knowledge that can be applied and developed within their context’ (Anstey & Bull 2006, p. 13). Schools are an important element in the development of intellectual, social, physical, moral and ethical growth and development.

According to the Australian Curriculum (ACARA 2013), in both the 1999 Adelaide Declaration and the 1989 Hobart Declaration, the State, Commonwealth and Territory Education Ministers committed to establishing ‘a “first-class” education system for all young Australians’. The 2008 Melbourne Declaration approved major modifications that set new stipulations for the education system in Australia, with a focus on world-class teaching and assessment, and using the resources of the 21st century.

Equally important, the Declaration also encouraged inclusivity and respectful social practices. It acknowledged the increased power that students have over their own learning and social practices, and the impact this may have on
communities and societies. ‘International mobility and global integration have progressed swiftly in the last decade’ (Barnett 2003, p. 16). As a result, exciting new prospects for young people have emerged that have increased the need to cultivate cultural awareness and social diversity, as well as global citizenship. Countries in the Asia Pacific region, such as China and India, are developing rapidly, with increasing localised and global impact. Barnett adds that ‘technological change and globalisation are exerting greater pressure on skills and education development in Australia’ (2003, p. 72).

The Australian Curriculum (ACARA 2013) highlights that Australia has created a premium schooling system with international standards, one that performs well compared to other countries that belong to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In a global benchmarking of educational results in the OECD carried out in 2006 on students aged 15 years, Australia was positioned highly; among the best 10 countries, across all three fields evaluated. However, the situation is not all positive. In striving for both excellence and equity, there were many areas where Australian education must improve if the Declarations agreed to by Government are to be fulfilled. Two major examples are suggested by Boyles (2012). First, despite some genuine efforts, Australia has in general been less than successful in improving educational outcomes for many Indigenous Australians. Second, there is an under-representation of Australian students from low socioeconomic backgrounds among high achieving students. By contrast, there is an over-representation of low socioeconomic students among low achieving students.

Numeracy, literacy, and knowledge of the major disciplines remain the foundation of schooling for young Australians in the 21st century. However, the skills required for successful learning and for the enactment of these disciplines are very different now, compared to the 20th century. In particular, rapid progress in information and communication technologies (ICT) is revolutionising
methods through which people develop, process, use, share and communicate information.

If schooling is to equip all young people with 21st century numeracy and literacy practices, then schools and teachers must have the knowledge, competencies and dispositions to enact pedagogies that enable their students to learn the skills and dispositions associated with digital and global challenges (including cross disciplinary integration, higher-order thinking, and social and cultural awareness).

This idea is partly informed by Rowan, who cautions that the discussion must evolve beyond merely ‘computers in schools’. Rather, Rowan suggests that we should:

Examine and re-examine the traditional relationship between schools and technology, between schools and diverse learners, and between schools, children, technologies and knowledge. (Rowan & Bigum 2012, p. 3)

Her description partly characterises the 21st century learning environment. Relationships in the 21st century are being defined and redefined, and in many cases young people are leading this redefinition. Short-sighted conversation restricted just to acquiring different skills, is counterproductive to understanding how young people learn and the expectations they have for their learning in the 21st century. Examining the relationships between learning styles, communities and practices would appear to be timely and important in informing 21st century pedagogy.

2.5 Research-based practices

2.5.1 21st century students and teacher learning
According to Brown and Tryon, ‘students in the 21st century need to collect relevant information from several sources, analyse its dependability, and evaluate it efficiently’ (2010, p. 145). Significantly, there is a suggestion that
‘Australian students in the 21st century have a preference for digital content’ (Brooks-Young 2010, p. 32), but the challenge with digital content is that often the skills necessary to identify, interpret, and evaluate the information are lacking (Buckingham 2008, p. 7). Many writers, such as Cope and Kalantzis (2009), suggest that teachers need to offer overt instruction in approaches such as interpreting and analysing digital information, and argue that the skills needed to do this in the digital environment are different to those in the print environment.

Burke (1997) agrees, and suggests that a critical element in enabling students to be competent users of digital literacies in the 21st century is professional learning for teachers. She argues, ‘teachers have many skills to equip students for a print based literacy environment, but skills and pedagogical practices for 21st century literacy are not as well developed’ (Burke 1997, p. 265). Burke suggests many reasons for this, but at the forefront is a historical consideration: ‘Many teachers were “trained” before the digital era’ (Burke 1997, p. 266). Budgetary constraints also have had an impact; many schools have been unable to afford technology, and therefore their professional learning priorities have reflected a more traditional approach to the teaching of literacy. Burke concludes by suggesting that ‘this era has now passed, and both schools and students are firmly embracing the technology era, and teachers need skills and practices to reflect this’ (Burke 1997, p. 223).

One point that is prominent within the literature, but one that is often less appealing to schools, is the notion that professional development is a dated concept (Blake 2004), and should be replaced with professional learning. Professional learning for teachers is not immune from the pressures of the 21st century, and consequently is dynamic in nature and changing rapidly. Teacher learning needs to be about exploration, criticality, creativity and innovation. Teacher learning should not be about being ‘told’ what to do; yet often this is what is expected from professional development (Bell 2010).
2.5.2 The Australian Curriculum and technology

‘Technologies influence the way we interact and communicate within local, national and international societies’ (Bennett, Sue, Maton & Kervin 2007, p. 14). This in turn has altered the way we work, learn and live together. Australia therefore requires people who can innovate and create in order to consider the issues and challenges likely to be encountered in the 21st century (Paige 2009).

The Australian Curriculum (2014), recognising the impact technology is having, advocates the meaningful integration of technology into all learning areas, to develop skills, understanding, and knowledge. Moresch offers a more detailed interpretation, suggesting that students in the 21st century need to have the skills, understanding and knowledge to:

• Innovate and create when using conventional, emerging and contemporary technologies, and comprehend the process of technological development over time.
• Demonstrate responsibility and effectively manipulate and select appropriate equipment, tools, systems, data, materials, resources and technologies, when creating and designing digital environments.
• Critique and assess technological processes, with the goal of identifying and developing responses to a variety of opportunities or problems.
• Investigate, devise, plan, organise, develop, generate, and assess solutions using technology (2010, pp. 20-23).

Given the realities of globalisation and accelerating societal transformation, it is evident that the content learned by students, and the methods used to learn that content, are evolving to reflect the world in which we live and learn (Australian Curriculum 2012). Over the last decade, progress has been made in the field of learning. Consequently, more is now known regarding how people learn and think (Australian Curriculum 2012). For example, research reveals that students learn more through relevant and meaningful learning tasks that they can connect to their lived experiences (Fogarty 1997).
2.6 Pedagogy in the 21st century

2.6.1 Educating global citizens

People have been interacting with different people globally for millennia. This suggests that people, to varying degrees, have always had some awareness of globalisation. Chanda argues that the peak of globalisation took place in the decades before World War I. The outbreak of the First World War resulted in a slowing of globalisation (2007, p. 2). However, Bevan and Gitsham identify that following World War I, human networking/trading resumed, continuing to grow at a rapid rate ever since (2009, p. 435).

An increasing variety and number of authors have attempted to describe what globalisation means. For instance, Thomas Friedman explains that ‘the globe’s economic playing podium is being intensified through communication and technological advances’ (2007, p. 21). On the other hand, Richard Florida describes the ‘global economic background as “spiky” instead of flat’ (2005, p. 49). He explains that the ‘tallest points are the regions and cities that drive the global economy. They continue to become greater while the valleys continue languishing’ (2005, pp. 49-50). Spiky or flat, though, there appears to be common acknowledgment that we are in the middle of a philosophical transition to an extremely globalised world. In the same way, ‘humanity is moving into a new age of intensive and compressed interconnections among cultural, socioeconomic, and natural resource forces’ (Friedman 2008, p. 169). According to Dupont and Reckmeyer, these shifting stipulations are not only producing fresh international veracities, they are also resulting in the growth of fresh international relations (2012, p. 34).

These new veracities, characterised by extensive uncertainty and turbulence, need a more collaborative and innovative approach than was formerly so (Meadows 1991). Schattle argues that ‘global citizenship is defined broadly and covers both global civics and global careers’ (2009, p. 3). This means that as
globalisation continues, there is a much greater demand for global citizens who have developed the necessary proficiencies to work and live in a progressive interdependent world (Schattle 2008, p. 34). Such citizens hold the necessary values, attitudes, tools, skills, and knowledge that allow them to be enlightened about crucial global features, and connected in constructing a better world regardless of resident area or occupation (Elliott-Gower, Falk & Shapiro 2012, p. 23). These wide-ranging abilities rely on the aptitudes of people to comprehend the interconnectedness and complexity of cultural, social, and political contexts.

Elliott-Gower et al. assert that people ‘will also need suitable leadership proficiencies to solve problems and communicate effectively with those from different sectors and cultures of society’ (2012, p. 24). Individuals who do not have applicable global proficiencies are expected to be at a disadvantage (Reade et al. 2008, p. 3). The shifting global stipulations also pose considerable issues for higher education institutions, which are accountable for educating people who can prosper and thrive under new conditions.

While there have been heartening indicators that several universities are starting to institute giving greater prominence to global education, Stearns (2009) identifies that most attempts are slow. Nevertheless, it is suggested that universities should make it a priority to guarantee that all students grow to be internationally aware, not the least because they will be expected to work and live in an exceedingly globalised world (Cooperrider & Fry 2010). At the heart of these proficiencies is a small but crucial identify shift, namely ‘with the world growing smaller (in accordance with space and time, i.e. it is becoming more compact), individuals need to grow bigger (through expanding capabilities and world-views)’ (Cooperrider & Fry 2010, p. 65). It is this point that locates globalisation back to literacy for Year 6 students. Literacy in the 21st century is not just about equipping students with skills to use technology efficiently, although it is often portrayed this way (Coiro et al. 2008); it is a bigger
construct, part of which necessitates beginning to locate literacy learning within a global rather than a local framework. Literacy theories that work towards achieving this will be considered later in this Literature Review.

2.7 PART TWO: The sociology of childhood

2.7.1 Overview

Thus far this review has considered some of the sociological changes that are influencing the 21st century, and attempted to explore the impact of globalisation and learning within this world. One area that requires significant attention is the changing sociological nature of childhood. In the 21st century many children have the capacity to be knowledge-makers and knowledge-sharers. They are critical consumers, and are empowered in ways that would have been unimaginable even a generation ago. This section of the Literature Review attempts to locate childhood sociology within a Western 21st century context. It offers a review of the research that considers how children live and learn, how communities and societies see children, and how these constructions have evolved.

How childhood matters and how children are thought about and understood, in terms of ideas, theories, and views, influence the mode by which societies engage and treat children in their daily practices and life. (Davis & Hill 2006, p. 12)

So what exactly is childhood? The language applied is of significant importance. The dictionary definition of a ‘child’ is illuminating. In the 20th Century Chambers Concise Dictionary, its delineation starts with the discussion of a ‘child’ as being a very young individual, either aged up to 16 years for the function of particular Parliamentary acts, or under 14, in criminal law. This implies that the word ‘child’ bears specific legal implications.

According to Aries, a definition should go on to explain that a ‘child’ is also a ‘daughter or son: one filling a relationship or origin or adoption (to a place or
place among others’ (1979, p. 23): thus emphasising the relational nature of childhood. Davis and Hill (2006) likewise talk about the relational nature of childhood, and the modes by which children and adults are linked to each other using family ties. Additional definitions refer to inhabitants, descendants, offspring, and discipline. Childhood is the ‘act of being a child: the period of being a child’ (Buckingham 2000, p. 43). Historically, innocence and docility have been used to describe the state of being childlike (Buckingham 2000).

For the greater part of the 19th century and for the first half of the 20th century, in the United Kingdom and Australia, the state of being a child was defined relative to the age that signified children leaving school (Ennew & Morrow 2002, p. 23). This translated to the idea that the term ‘child’ was supple, because the school leaving age slowly rose over time. According to the UN Convention on the rights of children (UNCCR), a ‘child’ is described as all individuals who come under the age of 18 years, although people have frequently overlooked this in the past.

2.7.2 Childhood constructions in social policy

‘Notions about childhood and children are also inclined to vary between diverse segments within communities, different professional teams, and even between different departments of Government’ (Hart 1997, p. 21). In education, for example, children are mainly constructed as citizens and learners in preparation for adulthood and ‘these notions become obvious in social policy’ (Hart 1997, p. 23). In many countries, the school leaving age has increased, demonstrating the changing perceptions of society about young people’s transition to adulthood (James & Prout 1997). For instance, in the United Kingdom during the 20th century, children were allowed to leave learning institutions a year early if they were going into favourable employment. Nevertheless, by 1944 the school leaving age was set at 15 years (James & Prout 1997). In Australia however, the school leaving age differs between states. Recently, a number of increases have been seen; the age was increased to 17
years in NSW in 2009, and rose from 15 to 16 years in Victoria in 2006 (Montgomery 2009, p. 3).

2.7.3 Sociology of childhood in Australia

According to Funder, ‘it is reasonable to suggest that childhood sociology in Australia is inclined to follow the revolutionary work performed in other parts of the globe’ (1996, p. 2): work begun in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and in Scandinavian countries. Relevant studies have looked at the changing schooling experience, the migrant experience, changing gender constructions, children and divorce, children’s rights, child health, and children at risk.

At the same time, Postman conveys that some facets of childhood experience are Australia-specific and he supports this with distinct social research about the children of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, and about the position given to Aboriginal children (1982, p. 13). Within the sociology research community of Australia, while engagement persists with issues and questions specific to children, it is less dynamic than one might expect.

According to Qvortrup, ‘the social research field studying the issues of childhood has been engaged through a diverse interdisciplinary amalgamation that, alongside sociology, comprises political science, social work, social policy, and health education’ (1985, p. 32). However, the lack of an educational framework for childhood sociology in Australia means that the networks and linkages are moderately weak, with only sporadic communication between research initiatives and projects (Qvortrup 1985, p. 33). ‘It is not entirely clear whether this is the outcome of the specific attributes of the position of children in Australian society’ (Qvortrup et al. 1994, p. 34) or whether it is more about the specific position held by Australian sociology in contrast to sociology internationally.
Postman identifies ‘that the problems and issues characterising Australian childhood experience are the consequence of contradictions and tensions between other, wider social processes and forces’ (1982, p. 65). These include contradictions between personal life and work (or private and public spheres), tensions between European and Aboriginal societies, and tensions between the world and Australia (Mayall 1994, p. 25). This situation facilitates the possibility of viewing all these disciplines as being about other societal processes, rather than positioning children and their respective experiences at the centre of one’s focus of research.

2.7.4 Childhood sociology in the 21st century

The past decade has seen recognition of childhood studies as an important research area in its own right, as evidenced in several successful publications. ‘As an academic field, childhood studies provides the possibility for interdisciplinary research and this research can add to a surfacing paradigm where novel ways of perceiving children can be theorised and researched’ (Montgomery 2009, p. 24). The disciplines of sociology and psychology have made considerable contributions to modern childhood understanding. While psychological research has centred upon the child as the entity, sociological research has shown interest in children in social groups.

‘Sociological advances by contrast have been concerned with socialisation issues, the methods of surveying the learning process of children, and the means by which they transition to be society members’ (Holland, P 2004, p. 192).

The shift towards accepting and recognising the voices of children in ascertaining their individual view of the world has resulted in a fragmented perception, which questioned childhood’s structural norm and led to a theoretical position regarding childhood pluralities. Instead of one general childhood, it would be more helpful to use this theory to discuss several childhoods, and take account of the diversity of experience both within and across cultures, including diversity according to disability, health, place of residence, culture, gender, ethnicity, or class. (Mandela 2000, p. 21)
In the 21st century children are dynamically developing their individual peer cultures and social lives and thus should not be comprehended merely through an adult-centric perception. Fitzgerald suggests that ‘childhood is viewed as socially developed with children being actors in their individual social worlds’ (Fitzgerald 2009, p. 26). Novel childhood sociology has triggered discourse, discussion, and studies among political scientists, anthropologists, psychologists, educationalists, and historians that have led to interdisciplinary advances. In addition, with the application of digital communication, new methods of taking part in conversations are surfacing (James & James 2008, p. 54).

2.7.5 A critique of childhood studies

Blaiklock states that, ‘20 years have passed by since the “new” childhood sociology surfaced out of a dynamic critique of family studies and child development’ (2013, p. 51). Drawing upon insights, especially from social anthropology and sociology, leading researchers and theorists argue the concept of childhood to be a structural element of society.

In this vein, young people and children are perceived as participants in the division of labour. Instead of centering on childhood development norms, the ‘new’ childhood sociology stresses childhood social construction. It also involves respect for childhood and children. (Leggett & Ford 2013, p. 50)

Children should be viewed as social holders and actors of rights instead of being perceived as dependent and passive.

Other research areas and disciplines, from education to law to geography, have merged with childhood sociology, leading to the development of an academic field of interest usually described as ‘childhood studies’ (Aldridge & Becker 1993, p. 13). My discussion will focus on the development of childhood studies.
There has been some agreement between studies of children’s rights and academic childhood studies, around practices and policies (Burman 2008, p. 45). In particular, both fields support the contribution that young people and children make in relation to decisions concerning their individual and collective lives. This is also a feature of the framework of childhood studies, with its focus on young people and children’s agency. Additionally, support comes from the innovative approach of setting out young people and children’s contribution rights in the UNCRC.

2.7.6 The ‘new’ childhood sociology

Through the 1990s the theorisation of children was sharpened, partly through a critique of the research on children: ‘Conventional concepts, for instance Piagetian child development and Parson’s socialisation theories, saw adults as competent, rational and mature, whereas children were perceived as incomplete, unfinished, or below fully human’ (Walsh 2007, p. 79) and Dearden and Becker developed explicit links to the social construct concept of childhood, which considered children as ‘human becomings’ instead of ‘human beings’ (Dearden & Becker 2000, p. 10).

From this construction of children as ‘human becomings’ arose the idea that children did not have rights, because they lacked rationality and/or competence. It was also argued that they required protection, not independence, and should not be entertained as ‘complete citizens’ (Holland, S 2010, p. 164). Childhood sociologists had argued that childhood had been inaccurately perceived as ‘a long-term, historically consistent and global construct’ (Cole 1996, p. 23). Through childhood studies, alternative conceptualisations are being offered that have affected the research of childhood in several nations around the world (Tisdall & Punch 2012, p. 249).

‘The re-conceptualisations of childhood have resulted in a huge growth of research on childhood studies’ (Cline et al. 2009, p. 29). In the United...
Kingdom, for example, there is a tendency to privilege the voices of young people and children. Moreover, ways of working directly with young people and children have been built up. The methodological debates have been centred on the degree to which research studies on young people and children are different from or similar to research about adults (Craft 2012, p. 173) in relation to ethical issues, the development of inventive tools and methods, and the degree to which young people and children are dynamic contributors to the research process (Valentine, Marsh & Pattie 2005, p. 24).

2.7.7 Childhood and technology

Tisdall and Punch suggest that ‘technology has influenced childhood in the 21st century’ (2012, p. 249). Digital technology has modified lives through practically ubiquitous Internet access, gaming devices, laptop computers, mobile phones, and other forms of technology, the majority of which are pocket-sized (Craft 2012, p. 173).

Furthermore, as the technological landscape shifts, youth and children transform with it. More and more, young people and children are linked around the clock. They also possess a parallel subsistence in virtual space, which they effortlessly incorporate within their lives. Moreover, they are skilful teammates, able to make knowledge and seek information. They connect in social networks while steering digital gaming, and they manipulate and generate digital content. (Cline et al. 2009, p. 29)

The intermingling between technology and people produces a potential network, as investigated by Bennett, Weigel and Martin (2002). All this is accompanied by dangers, risks, and opportunities. Historically, the lives of children were restricted to the home, which was viewed as a cocoon. The authors add that this position shifted radically with the introduction of television in the 1950s. This made the television set a means of mass-communication that in turn merged the broader world (and most importantly the marketplace) to the home, where the children were restricted. Thus began the empowerment process of children as consumers in a shifting (and progressively globalised) economy. Childhood marketing is now rooted in multiple forms of novel digital
media, which according to Van dewater et al., ‘facilitates children producing and consuming and therefore affecting the direction of market change and growth’ (2007, p. 15).

2.7.8 Childhood sociology and 21st century literacy
A review of some of the broad themes within childhood sociology reveals that the way children are seen and constructed within policy and society has changed. Further, it demonstrates that the way children see themselves has changed. Western constructions of childhood are beginning to see young people not as ‘empty vessels’, but rather as active citizens capable of meaningful contributions. This has implications around how learning, and in particular literacy learning, is constructed and enacted.

The following section begins to explore some pedagogical constructions of learning, considering the sociology of childhood in the 21st century.

2.8 Classroom management in and for the 21st century
Considering the changing sociological characteristics of the 21st century and of constructions of childhood in the 21st century, some attention will be paid to how the literature describes and critiques classroom management for the 21st century learning, including suggestions for how teachers can create climates for learning, and the advantages and limitations of these suggestions.

Researchers make the distinction between classroom management, which they define as the ‘routine procedures that teachers use to ensure that the class learning process is smooth, and classroom discipline, which involves the strategies that teachers use to deal with bad behaviours conducted by a learner’ (Magableh & Hawamdeh 2007, p. 97).

Effective classroom management is vital if collaborative, non-authoritarian classroom cultures are to develop. Dyal and Sewell talk about the link between educational success and the successful classroom management strategies
deployed by teachers (2002, p. 5). Effective classroom management helps ensure that a teacher can concentrate on the core activity of learning.

Various findings indicate that a chaotic classroom undermines effective teaching, because the teacher is required to digress from teaching to adopt an arbitration role. In contrast, the research also indicates that a teacher using effective teaching strategies is able to engage the students in the learning process and therefore to minimise the likelihood of students engaging in disruptive behaviours. In fact, much of the literature emphasises the key role that teachers play in handling students’ behaviour. For example, Siebert argues that disruptive behaviour among students is occasioned by poor instructional strategies (Siebert 2005, p. 387).

Berry takes this idea one step further in suggesting that students engage in disruptive behaviour due to their inability to grasp the knowledge content that the teacher is delivering. Hence, a student faced with academic work beyond his/her skill and academic level is more likely to engage in disruptive behaviour, due to frustration (Berry 2003, p. 29).

The literature on this subject is in general agreement that teacher behaviour has important influences on a student’s willingness to cooperate and persist with learning tasks, particularly in the 21st century (Gurney, 2007, p. 90; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005, p. 24; Archer, 2004, p. 14). Teachers who are too strict and directive may get a lot of work out of their students if they are physically present, however that engagement will drop once close supervision is removed (Pintrich & Schunk 2002). Research in this area indicates that the attitude of the teacher affects both his or her performance and his or her students’ performance.

Some effective instructional strategies include, teaching of knowledge content that is educationally relevant, a carefully planned teaching approach that
matches the students’ knowledge levels, guided practice, and instant feedback (Oliver & Reschly, 2007).

It has to be noted that ‘effective classroom management is connected to teachers’ abilities to use effective instructional strategies and to make lessons engaging for their students’ (Pintrich & Schunk 2002, p. 20). Some scholars have learned that teachers who are unable to manage their classroom, unfortunately, leave the teaching profession due to high levels of stress; this is particularly true in 21st century classrooms (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Many articles suggest that classroom management is the most significant challenge facing teachers in the 21st century (Foggarty 1998; Burke 2001).

As this research project explores teachers’ perceptions of literacy learning in and for the 21st century, it is important to understand some of the theoretical constructs affecting teachers’ work and so I have focused my Literature Review to this point on the characteristics that define the 21st century, including the changing nature of how we communicate, the rapid pace of change, and the changing landscape of work. I have also reviewed the position of childhood sociology within the 21st century in order to locate constructions of childhood therein. Finally, I reviewed the literature around creating an effective learning environment for the 21st century, to identify what researchers in the area consider necessary for an effective learning environment.

The following section moves on to look specifically at literacy. As this research project seeks to explore teachers’ perceptions of literacy theories, how they enact these theories, and the factors that influence their enactment I decided to contextualise learning with a focus on sociological influences, and then to locate literacy theories and debates within this context.
2.9 PART THREE: Locating literacy theories within a 21\textsuperscript{st} century context

2.9.1 Literacy definitions

There are many varying definitions of literacy. For the purposes of this Literature Review I draw on the definition of literacy suggested by Bull and Anstey (2005):

Literacy is represented as successfully taking part in everyday life. Literacy is a state of being and a set of capabilities through which the literate individual is able to utilise the interior world of self to act upon and interact with the exterior structures of the world around him/her in order to make sense of self and other ... Literacy is not just a number of discrete skills but is an active, dynamic and interactive practice, which can be used to get meaning from, and to build meaning around, the world and the texts encountered in the world. These social practices may occur in the classroom, the playground, at home, among different social and cultural groups, in fact anywhere where social situations occur. (p. 137)

This definition of literacy implies that reading and writing are conceived and practised within particular social settings, influenced by socio-cultural elements (Bull & Anstey 2005).

At the core of literacy discourse is the assumption that literacy is flexible and ever changing as societies change. Muspratt et al. acknowledge this in their definition:

Literacy is the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the text of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken language, print and multimedia. (1997, p. 9)

Bull and Anstey make the following observation:

This definition acknowledges the issues of change by suggesting flexibility and sustainability are necessary. That is, a literate person will need to acquire a range of literacies over time, hence the need for a repertoire of practices that
can be combined and recombined or reformed for different social contexts and used with different technologies. (2005, p. 35)

In summary, to be literate in the 21st century means having the ability not only to ‘read and write’, but to be able to interpret, analyse, and respond using a variety of modes to many varied and changing audiences.

The definition of literacy becomes particularly significant when comparisons between adults and children are created. ‘There are shallow definitions, extended definitions, and broader definitions, all of which have some part to play in literacy discussions’ (Reeves 2006, p. 303). For example, ‘an extended definition involves the attainment of a wide range of skills, rooted in technological and cultural contexts, whereas in a definition centred on culture, reading may not present as a crucial element of literacy; for instance, an individual who can declaim memory-oriented religious texts without being capable of reading them is incorporated in such delineation’ (Barton & Hamilton 2000, p. 7).

According to the National Association of Educational Progress, literacy refers to ‘employing written and printed information to operate in society, to attain one’s objectives, and to build up one’s potential and knowledge’ (Alvermann 2002, p. 9).

Drawing on the various definitions, this research project adopts the view that literacy is a social practice, influenced by culture and participation.

In the following sections this Literature Review explores these concepts further and locates them within a theoretical construct.

### 2.9.2 Conceptualising literacy as a social practice

Cope and Kalantzis identify that for the ‘larger part of its English history, the expression “literate” implied to be “learned”, “well educated” or “recognisable
with literature’’ (2000, p. 6). ‘Only from the late 19th century has the expression come to imply the capabilities to write and read text, while upholding its wider meaning of being “educated” or “knowledgeable” in a certain discipline or disciplines’ (Brandt 2009, p. 12).

From the mid-20th century, researchers and scholars have paid significant attention to conceptualising literacy. According to Prensky, ‘academics from fields such as history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, economics, and psychology have contributed to continuous and sometimes highly disputed debate’ (2001, p. 23). ‘This concerns the definition and meaning of the “literacy” term and the mode through which it is connected to the wider ideas of knowledge and education’ (Nisbett et al. 2001, p. 291).

‘Sociocultural views on literacy are connected to sociolinguistic views of the methods in which language influences culture, the methods in which language utilisation differs in relevance to contexts, the association between power and language use, and communication ethnography’ (Levy & Murnane 2005, p. 13). This is the definition of literacy that this research project draws most heavily upon. Gee’s research adds to this definition. Using a functional linguistics viewpoint, he advocates ‘that realisation of culture occurs through language. Therefore, language is never independent of a social universe because it always takes place within, and it is a structure through, a cultural framework’ (Gee, J 2000, p. 195). Lave and Wenger agree, saying that language ‘always occurs through full linkage to “other stuff”: to cultural models, politics, powers, social relations, perspectives on attitudes—values and experience—as well as places and things in the world’ (1991, p. 23).

Reacting to calls for positioned comprehensions of literacy and language in use, many empirical studies, which have resulted in such a growth of sociocultural viewpoints, have surfaced from discourse analysis of ethnographic research (Anderson 2009). Others have emerged from situated case studies rooted in the
practice of literacy (Brandt & Clinton 2002, p. 340). From sociolinguistics and from anthropology-focused research studies, different standpoints have emerged on the methods with which people utilise writing and reading in distinct contexts. As stated by Street:

> The diverse cultural disparity in these conceptions and practices facilitates us to re-evaluate what we mean through them as well as to be cautious of presuming a single literacy whereby we may merely be inflicting assumptions obtained from our individual cultural activities onto the literacies of other people. (Street 2003, p. 77)

The larger part of the socio-cultural literacy research, thus, is developed on the presumption that comprehension of literacy requires in-depth and detailed accounts of authentic practice in diverse cultural settings (Luke & Freebody 1999). However, Brandt warns that it is inadequate ‘to extol only the variety and richness of literacy activities made available through such ethnographic features’ (2009, p. 102). This means that bold theoretical concepts are needed that realise the central part of power relations in literacy practices (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

### 2.10 Major sociocultural literacy theories

In this section, theories of literacy as social practice, multiliteracies and critical literacy will be discussed. Elements common to the three theoretical perspectives, as well as their differences, will be described. Given that literacy as social practice strengthens other theories within the broader expanse of sociocultural literacy, more attention will be given to the description of this theory than to the other two.

#### 2.10.1 Literacy as a social practice

The theory of literacy as a social practice was informed by Street’s early activity in Iran (Street 1984). Embedded in data that explained the different methods in which people utilised writing and reading for diverse reasons in their daily lives, Street’s theory compared ideological and autonomous literacy models (Jacobson, Degener & Purcell-Gates 2003, p. 11).
Here, Kress’ description of literacy in strict technical terms is helpful:

The autonomous theory, under which the majority of formal literacy instruction functions, conceptualises literacy in strict technical terms, thus presuming literacy to be a group of neutral, de-contextualised proficiencies that can be employed in any circumstance. Using this theory, literacy is seen as an element that an individual either possesses or does not possess; individuals are either illiterate or literate, and an individual who is illiterate exhibits deficiency’ (Kress, 2000, p. 153). The autonomous theory also describes significant outcomes both to society and to individual cognition through the intrinsic traits that literacy is presumed to have. (Kress 2000, p. 183)

On the other hand, literacy as a social practice ‘conceptualises literacy as a group of practices (in preference to skills) that are embedded in specific perspectives and inextricably connected to the power and cultural society structures’ (Jacobson, Degener & Purcell-Gates, 2003, p. 12). The conceptual research of Hamilton, Barton, and others, performed at the UK’s Lancaster Literacy Research Centre, has also been especially influential in building literacy theories as social practice (Lewis, Enciso & Moje, 2007a).

Purcell-Gates (2000), Luke (2003), Luke, Enciso, & Moje (2007), and others explain that the theory of literacy as a social practice has been influenced by the ‘New Literacy Studies’ (NLS). According to Street:

What is currently defined as ‘New Literacy Studies’ (NLS) embodies a new custom in considering the nature of literacy; focusing not too largely on skill acquisition, but instead on what it translates to when considering literacy within the social practice. This involves the realisation of multiple literacies differing in space and time. These are also disputed in relevance to power, a phenomenon that has led to the questioning of ‘whose literacies’ are overriding and who are resistant or marginalised. (Street 2003, p. 77).

Fundamentally, NLS is comparable to literacy as a social practice. However, what is ‘new’? Lankshear and Knobel suggest that ‘the New Literacy Studies consist of a fresh paradigm for viewing literacy, in place of the paradigm
founded on psychology, that has been well recognised over time’ (Lankshear & Knobel 2003, p. 13). Alternatively, Luke suggests that the New Literacy Studies can be considered as disregarding autonomous literacy paradigms (Luke 2004).

Theorists who advocate literacy as a social activity note that it is about what individuals do with writing, texts, and reading in real world circumstances, and why. Mazak postulates, ‘in the easiest logic, literacy activities are those that individuals carry out using literacy’ (2006, p. 3). Additionally, Luke cautions that these ‘activities entail more than practices with texts: actions link to, and are modelled through social relationships, feelings, attitudes, and values’ (Luke, 2003, p. 132). Social relationships are vital, because in practical terms it is easier to comprehend literacy practices as taking place in the associations between communities, between people, and within groups.

2.10.2 Multiliteracies
The theory of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis 2000, p. 23), created through the New London Group (NLG), is both distinct to, and derived from, literacy theories as a social practice. Perry explains that the focus of the group from the outset was ‘the big picture: shifting universe and the new stipulations being put forth on individuals as meaning makers in shifting workplaces’ (Perry 2007, p. 61). Individuals were viewed as citizens in varying dimensions and in public spaces in the lives of the community, which were presented as ‘lifeworlds’. Similar to the perspective of literacy as a social practice, the theory of multiliteracies stresses the real world contexts in which literacy is practised by people (Purcell-Gates & Waterman 2000, p. 82). Additionally, this model also gives prominence to the role of power relationships in moulding literacy and literacy learning.

Multiliteracies are intended to describe ‘two important arguments with emerging cultural, institutional and global order, and the construct proposes two distinct disputes. The primary argument connects with the pluralism of
communications media and channels; the subsequent argument connects with the progressing salience of linguistic and cultural diversity’ (Street 2003, p. 77). While the focus on linguistic and cultural diversity certainly agrees with the model of ‘literacy as social practice’, there is a distinct emphasis on multiple channels of communication, as the multiliteracies’ model centres on much broader modes of representation than simply language (Street 2003, p. 78).

There have been attempts to categorise multiliteracies into two broad areas: ‘tool literacies’ and ‘literacies of representation’ (Cope & Kalantzis 2009). Examples of tool literacies include computer literacy, network literacy and technological literacy. Literacies of representation refer to the analysis of information and to an understanding of how meaning is created. ‘This concept includes entities such as information literacy, visual literacy and media literacy’ (Paul & Wang 2006, p. 306). While Paul and Wang’s definition of multiliteracies is helpful, it is easy to be drawn to Anstey and Bull’s categorisation of multiliteracies, because it pays much closer attention to the social practices implicit within it. They suggest:

Multiliteracies means being cognitively and socially literate with paper, live, and electronic texts. It also means being strategic, that is, being able to recognise what is required in a given context, examine what is already known, and then, if necessary, modify that knowledge to develop a strategy that suits the context and situation. A multiliterate person must therefore be a problem solver and strategic thinker, that is, an active and informed citizen. (Anstey & Bull 2006, p. 23)

There is an extremely close correlation with this view of literacy and the world in which 21st century adolescents live and how they learn, but it is certainly at odds with the more traditional literacy practices that still permeate many Australian classrooms (Fogarty 1997).

Researchers who operate within models of ‘literacy as social practice’ tend to focus on practices that envelop print literacy, while researchers who operate...
within the multiliteracies theory stress what Tracey and Morrow (2006, p. 37) identify as multimodality, which is dealt with later in this Literature Review.

For many scholars, multiliteracies represent a paradigm shift, compared to notions of traditional literacy:

Multiliteracies imply that there are different literacy genres and a variety of literacy situations, which may be accompanied by a range of literacy practices. Furthermore, information can be presented in multimodal formats with the use of technology. (Paul & Wang 2006, p. 305)

In assessing the over-emphasis on written types making sense, and the disregard for other modes of representation, Tracey and Morrow (2006) call for a theory of semiosis that justifies the ‘engrossed action’ of socially positioned, historically and culturally formed individuals. ‘These individuals are identified as the transformers, re-shapers, and re-makers of the illustration resources accessible to them’ (Kress 2003, p. 157). Consequently, the multiliteracies’ model rejects literacy definitions that focus only on written texts and print, in favour of definitions that consider of several modes of spatial, gestural, visual, and other representation forms (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 87).

### 2.10.3 Critical literacy

As already stated, the amount of information that our adolescent learners are able to access is greater than at any other time in human history. Texts are being created and re-created at astounding speed. They are being published in a variety of modes, to audiences that are culturally diverse. All this has an impact on the adolescent learner. No longer can young people simply operate in a mass education mode. The information that adolescents of the 21st century can access makes that impossible. Adolescent learners in the 21st century must have sophisticated, critically literate skills that allow them to interpret and understand not only what they are reading but also why they are reading it, and the intention of the publisher. Anstey and Bull suggest that ‘because of the advances in technology and the many contexts in which we now operate, we
are often exposed to, or are required to access, large amounts of information from many and varied sources’ (2006, p. 231). We need to be aware that the texts we access have been consciously constructed to shape particular information in particular ways, shaping our attitudes, values and behaviours. Some information might be omitted and some might be overemphasised or presented in an attractive manner, manipulating sound, colour or layout to achieve certain effects. To be critically literate, adolescents need the ability to analyse texts, identify their origins and authenticity, and understand how they have been constructed, in order to perceive their gaps, silences and biases.

The challenge adolescent learners face is that 21st century literacy practices are complex. Adolescents need to be able to transition between traditional literacies, multimodal literacies, and in-school and out-of-school literacies.

The two perspectives described so far (literacy as a social practice and multiliteracies) both entail some deliberation on power relationships. Street (2003) stresses the ideological nature of literacy, while other researchers identify the methods through which practices of literacy can be moulded through power. Street’s research, and other research in the multiliteracies context that focuses primarily on print literacy, propose that this semiotic approach may be excessively privileged in Western nations (see for example Luke, C [2003]).

In delineating literacy as studying both world and word, Luke identifies that ‘literacy presents as beyond cognitive proficiency and that it covers power associations’ (2004, p. 331). The author also suggests that one must ‘comprehend literacy as the association of the world to learners’ (Luke 2004, p. 331). This means that:

To attain literacy is above mechanically or psychologically dominating writing and reading approaches. It is therefore, to control these approaches in relevance to consciousness: to comprehend what an
individual studies and to put down what one comprehends; it is to express oneself graphically. Attaining literacy does not entail memorising syllables, words, or sentences—lifeless objects unlinked to an existential world—but rather adopting an approach of formation and re-formation, a self-transformation generating an intervention stance in an individual’s context. (Luke 2004, p. 331)

Lankshear and Knobel describe literacy as a ‘consciousness process, which translates to holding the printed word, linking it to the universe, and then utilising it for empowerment purposes’ (2011, p. 39). Further, they suggest that ‘literacies are socially recognised ways in which people generate, communicate and negotiate meanings as members of Discourse through the medium of encoded texts’ (Lankshear & Knobel 2011, p. 46).

2.10.4 Digital literacy theory

‘The rapid and progressive expansion of digital technologies culminating in the current digital age, presents individuals within the growing information community circumstances that require them to utilise a variety of cognitive skills’ (Littlejohn, Beetham & McGill 2012, p. 547). These skills are necessary to carry out tasks and solve problems that arise in the contemporary digital environment. Collectively, these proficiencies are frequently described as ‘digital literacy’, which is characterised as a given form of mindset that allows individuals to function intuitively in digital backgrounds (Kress 2000a, p. 160). Digital literacy also facilitates effective and easy access to a broad range of knowledge rooted in these environments.

‘The digital literacy model is commonly described as a mixture of social, cognitive, and technical-procedural skills’ (Cothey 2002, p. 67). For example, applying a computer program is perceived as comprising procedural skills (e.g., editing visuals and handling files) and cognitive skills (e.g., the capability intuitively to read or decipher visual signals rooted in graphic user interfaces) (Eshet & Chaiut 2005, p. 15). Likewise, retrieval of data from the Internet is perceived as an amalgamation of cognitive skills (assessing data, sorting out
biased and false data, differentiating between irrelevant and relevant data) and procedural skills (operating with search engines) (Dator 2004, p. 2).

According to Cothey, ‘the efficient communication that occurs in chat rooms requires the use of particular emotional and social skills’ (2002, p. 67). With rising exposure to digital learning and working milieus, ‘digital literacy has been envisioned as a “survival expertise”; an answer that aids individuals to carry out complicated digital tasks efficiently’ (Eshet & Chaiut 2005, p. 16). This explanation is a synthesis of many recent conceptual advances. Recently, ‘extensive attempts have been made to conceptualise and describe the cognitive proficiencies that users utilise in digital environments’ (Dator 2004, p. 3). Regrettably, these endeavours are ‘commonly local, concentrated on chosen skills, and mainly restricted to the process of seeking information; hence, they do not offer absolute coverage of the digital literacy scope’ (Dator 2004, p. 5).

To enhance our understanding and to offer designers, educators and professionals operating with ICT, superior directions for education and design, and a refined structure for ‘digital literacy’ is needed; one that should be as parsimonious, coherent, and exhaustive as possible.

Eshet-Alkalai (2004) has created such a structure. Their conceptual framework, comprising a three-skill holistic theory of digital literacy, claims to embody the majority of the cognitive skills employed by scholars in digital milieus, and hence offers researchers, designers, and scholars a context for design guidelines. The three skills are described below.

2.10.4.1 Photo-visual literacy

Aviram and Comay note that the ‘evolution of the digital environment from syntactic and text-based environments to graphic-based, semantic milieus, makes it essential for contemporary scholars to use cognitive abilities in order to
develop photo-visual communication, particularly with their environment’ (Aviram & Comay 2001, p. 24). These abilities entail the use of vision in the thinking process. Photo-visual literacy aids users to freely and intuitively ‘read’ and comprehend messages and instructions. These elements are demonstrated in a visual-graphical structure.

2.10.4.2 Reproduction literacy
According to Aviram ‘contemporary digital technologies offer scholars fresh opportunities for creating academic and artwork through editing and reproducing audio pieces, visuals, and texts’ (2004, p. 3). ‘Besides philosophical and ethical questions concerning the criteria and limits for legitimate genuine application of digital reproduction, these technologies require contemporary scholars to master a distinct digital literacy form’ (Baron 1985, p. 5) and are referred to as reproduction literacy.

2.10.4.3 Branching literacy
According to Cothey, ‘the non-linear character of contemporary hypermedia technology has instigated the use of novel thinking dimensions by computer users, which is essential to make an educated application of this complicated technology’ (2002, p. 68). In the past, constrained, non-hypermedia-based computer milieus necessitated a linear approach to learning, which was ordered through the inflexible operating structures. Additionally, ‘people were accustomed to books, and anticipated operating with digital milieus in much the same manner as they studied books’ (Eshet-Alkalai 2004, p. 94). On the other hand, contemporary hypermedia backgrounds (for instance, digital databases and Internet multimedia environments) offer users a high degree of freedom and require a different skill set, known as branching literacy, to help them navigate effectively through knowledge fields.

2.10.5 Multimodal literacy theory
The breadth of literacy practices young people are expected to have and employ to be successful learners and citizens in their context is significant.
Brown and Tryon suggest ‘students must develop literacy skills that span the centuries. They must understand traditional communication even as they practice with new and different approaches’ (2010, p. 237). In other words, it is not uncommon to see adolescents hand writing a traditional essay, texting their parents to confirm what time they need to be picked up from school and chatting with a friend on an instant chat site—all at the same time.

Another key difference in the world of the 21st century adolescent is the audience they have access to:

The audience for students’ work in the 21st century is different than the audience of previous eras. Students have long been accustomed to displaying their work in the classroom. Students need to be aware that the classroom microcosm, with its limited number of viewers, may now become something completely different. The new mega aspect of audience availability cuts across school, grade level, occupation, socioeconomic status, age level, and purpose. Students must now be guided in reframing their thinking outside the private audiences housed within classroom walls. Web based avenues for display and sharing of student original work opens up the classroom to entirely new and larger audiences. These audiences are often cross-cultural; we must, therefore, help students to better understand not only other cultures but also how those other cultures might perceive their work. (Brown, A & Tryon 2010, p. 237)

*Multimodality*, or the modes in which adolescents can access, create and share their learning, is vastly different and vastly more powerful now than it was for previous generations, with positive or negative outcomes, depending on the skill of the publisher or the interpretation of the audience, which may not necessarily be the intended audience.

Because physical and geographical constraints are much less of a limitation than they once were, participation in activities outside of the local community becomes relatively easy. Students can participate almost seamlessly in activities in neighbourhoods, countries, or cultures far from their own. (Brown, A & Tryon 2010, p. 237)

The increase in the multimodal options adolescents have access to has also brought about a change in scale. No longer is a letter the only way most people
use for communicating at a distance. Indeed, even its electronic counterpart, email, is becoming a less common way of communicating. The scale of our communication has changed. We are now ‘texting’, ‘tweeting’, and ‘posting’ as legitimate forms of communication, using a literacy discourse that is vastly different to that of a formal letter.

For example, Twitter ‘tweets’ (individual messages sent using Twitter) are less than 140 characters, as are most text messages sent using cellular networks, as well as updates posted to one’s social network on Facebook. This creates a need to develop a micro literacy in terms of communicating sophisticated ideas with very few keystrokes. (Brown, A & Tryon 2010, p. 236)

This type of meaning making is a significant part of an adolescent’s life, and indeed they are often faster and more competent at it than most adults. However, literature about the dangers of such communication modes when their power is underestimated by the adolescent user, is starting to emerge (Treyvau 2012).

An examination of the necessary skills for meaningful participation with the modern, networked world has identified that much of the difference between 20th century and current literacy modality has to do with matters of scale (Bevan & Gitsham 2009). Time, size, distance, audience and available data must be approached differently than they once were. The Internet and other modern networks (e.g., cellular) impart their own scale to just about any endeavour. Consider, for example, a recent study that claimed that the average American teenager with a Facebook account had 600 ‘friends’ (Gere 2002). With one stroke of the keyboard, the teenager can ‘contact’ 600 people. This scale, in both size and speed of communication, would have been difficult to imagine even two decades ago. Consequently, adolescents in this century must understand these differences in scale and power if they are to successfully navigate their formal and informal learning environments.
‘Multimodal literacy is the process of making sense through reading, observing, understanding, replying to, generating, and interacting with digital and multimedia texts’ (FutureLab 2009, p. 44). It may consist of gestural and oral modes of dramatising, listening, and talking, as well as designing, producing, and writing such forms of texts. ‘The processing of modes, e.g., movement, sound, words, and images, within texts can take place concurrently and is frequently synchronous and cohesive. At times one mode may take over or replace another. For instance, when processing texts based on screen, the visual mode can be in control, while the sound mode may be dominant in podcasts’ (Cranmer 2006, p. 302).

Two crucial themes surface from the contemporary research focused on multimodal literacy, and these have implications for classroom practice (Council 2002). The initial theme explores the influence of technological transformations that are inherent in writing, reading, and generating ‘on screen’, matched with writing and reading print-based texts (Aviram 2004). The subsequent theme is associated with the transformations that are taking place in social literacy practices that have expanded and changed exponentially with Web 2.0 technology developments (Aviram, 2004). ‘The multimodal literacy theory considers the dissimilarities and benefits that arise from applying writing and reading on screen when matched with texts based on print’ (Eshet-Alkalai 2004, p. 106). While it is impossible to disconnect the processes of writing, interacting, viewing, and reading, this theory acts as the foundation for the debate that the concurrent processing of diverse modes of sound, image, gesture, and text in digital, media, or visual texts is a distinct function, compared to the sequential and linear reading of texts based on print (Gardner 2000).

Multimodality suggests that meaning can be made in a multitude of ways ‘in which written modes of linguistics are a vital element of spatial, audio, and visual patterns of meaning’ (Jacobson, Degener & Purcell-Gates 2003, p. 57).
2.10.6 **Literacy, identity, and the 21st century**

This Literature Review has attempted to traverse the key studies that report on the changing nature of literacy through a sociocultural lens. The overwhelming conclusion from the literature suggests that at the heart of a rapidly changing world in the early part of the 21st century is a literacy discourse that is changing to reflect the ‘new’ ways we live, learn and communicate.

However, there is another ‘phenomenon’ that is equally represented in the literature as evidence of a changing literacy landscape, and sits alongside the skills and dispositions literature. This can best be represented as identity work, specifically the changing nature of how identity is constructed, reconstructed and presented in the 21st century (Lankshear & Bigum, 1999). In the 21st century identities can be configured, molded and reconfigured to suit the context in which young people find themselves. As already mentioned and explored, contexts in the 21st century can be located in both virtual and real-world spaces. Young people in the 21st century often find themselves living between these two worlds in a seamless ways, however how they manage their identities is what this final section of the Literature Review seeks to explore.

There is evidence that young people are moving more to a world where their online and real-world contexts coexist (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Rowan & Bigum, 2012). Black & Steinhuehler (2009) describe how,

> With ever-increasing access to the Internet and World Wide Web, the form, nature, and venue of many adolescents’ leisure, work and academic activities have shifted to virtual or online spaces. According to a recent report by the Pew Internet and American Life Projects, technology has become a central force that fuels the rhythm of daily life for youth. Of the teens surveyed, 87% use the Internet, 81% play online games, 76% retrieve news, and 51% claim to go online on a daily basis... Online spaces have become the preferred sites for many adolescents from across the globe to meet, interact, play, and share their thoughts, perspectives and languages with one another (Black & Steinkuehler, 2009, p. 232).
The amount of time young people are spending online, coupled with the way they are interacting between contexts has implications for identity formation. Young people are engaging in literacy practices, which are profoundly human in nature, and located in a socially constructed version of literacy.

### 2.10.6.1 Defining identity

In order to discuss identity within a 21st century context, we first need to define identity. To do this, I will draw on James Gee’s definition of identity, as he has been a pioneer of locating understanding of identity within 21st century literacy constructions. Gee suggests that:

> In today’s fast changing and interconnected global world, researchers in a variety of areas have come to see identity as an important analytic tool for understanding schools and society. A focus on the contextually specific ways in which people act out and recognise identities allows a more dynamic approach than the sometimes overly general and static trio of ‘race, class and gender’...Being recognised as a certain ‘kind of person’ in a given context, is what I mean by identity. In this sense of the term, all people have multiple identities connected not to their internal status, but to their performance in society (2000-2001, p. 99).

Gee locates the idea of multiple identities within different contexts, which helps demonstrate the idea that young people in the 21st century will be required to construct, reconstruct and represent identities based on their context. For example, the identity presented in an online game might be different to the identity presented in the school classroom (Beavis & Charles, 2005). Each context requires different social practices (Gee, 2003). Literacy in and for the 21st century must locate itself within this construct if it is to enable young people to develop the skills and disposition to successfully navigate these many and varied contexts and identities.

### 2.10.6.2 Identity and literacy in and for the 21st century

If we accept the theoretical work around multiple identity constructions based on contexts, locating this theoretical work within an education system charged with preparing young people for the 21st century appears to raise concerns
within the literature. Luke and Carrington offer this introduction to the challenge raised:

What is the relationship between economic and cultural globalisation and everyday literacy practices for teachers and students in the most stolid of twentieth-century institutions, the state primary school? What happens when the very institution that was designed for the propagation of print literacy, for the transmission of encyclopedic knowledge, for the inculcation of industrial behaviours, for the development of the post-war citizen, for the domestication of diversity into monocultural identity – the technology of the modern state par excellence – faces the borderless flows and ‘scapes’ of information and image, bodies and capital (2002, p. 231)?

The question is rightly being asked about how schools, which were designed for a different purpose to what is required in the 21st century, should respond to a literacy landscape that is borderless and constructed and practiced in ways that were likely unimaginable a generation ago. Of course, educational institutions have responded in a variety of ways, but there is evidence to suggest some similarities to the varied responses (Luke, 2003). Schools on the whole have tried to ignore the studies of Gee and others which suggest that literacy is a social construct and practiced differently depending on context (Gee, 2000). Often schools have engaged in practices that have privileged traditional literacies above contemporary literacies (Gilster, 1997). Schools have developed assessment and reporting schedules which value narrow forms of literacy discourse, which is often in contradiction to the research (Buckingham, 2008). Luke and Carrington ask:

...what might happen if we engage in a momentary suspension of belief in the current policy-driven preoccupations with pedagogical methods, with decoding and basic skills – and ask a larger curriculum question: within the existing walls and wires, capillaries and conventions of the school, how might we construct a literacy education that addresses new economic and cultural formations (2002, p. 231)

Indeed this research study seeks to ask that larger curriculum question, but focusing only on skills and dispositions of literacy ignores one of the most
central shifts within the literacy landscape, namely the sociological nature of literacy.

2.10.6.3 Identity and the sociocultural nature of literacy in and for the 21st century

There are many studies to suggest that 21st century literacy requires a sociocultural lens for interpretation, see for example (Kress, 2003; Mills, 2008). However, the New Literacy theory (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007; Mills, 2008) offers the most compelling consideration of skills, dispositions, identities and contexts. It recognises the human nature of literacy, and the changing nature of how literacy is constructed and practiced. The New Literacy theory is influenced by James Gee’s ideas on Discourse, specifically:

Sociocultural definitions of literacy, have to make sense of reading, writing and meaning-making as integral elements of social practices. One such definition is provided by Gee (1996), who defines literacy in relations to Discourses. Discourses are socially recognised ways of using language (reading, writing, speaking, listening), gestures and other semiotics (images, sounds, graphics, signs, codes), as well as way of thinking, believing, feeling, valuing, acting/doing and interacting in relation to people and things, such that we can be identified and recognised as being a member of a socially meaningful group, or as playing a socially meaningful role (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 3)

What this means from a 21st century literacy perspective is the nature of literacy practices that young people will engage in will be significantly broader than generations previous. As the seamless traversing between contexts, both online and real-world, continue to increase, as the practices adopted by young people continue to evolve, and the expectations of identity representation become better understood, the nature of how schools consider and enact literacy teaching and learning needs to dramatically evolve too if young people are to be prepared and enabled for a 21st century world (Wan & Gut, 2011).
2.10.6.4  **Literacy in and for the 21st century – embracing identity and context through a sociological lens**

Marsh suggests that “…the notion of identity encompasses a practice of consumption and production” (2006, p. 35). This could suggest that literacy in and for the 21st century requires young people to be not only consumers of information but also producers of information (Rowan & Bigum, 2012). To do this requires a theoretical construction of learning which positions young people as active learners, with lived experience and capacity for contribution. There is suggestion that a constructivist view of learning enables a sociocultural view of literacy which values Discourse, identity and context, thus promoting a 21st century literacy disposition.

Tompkins offers the following as a definition of constructivism:

> Constructivist theories describe students as active and engaged learners who construct their own knowledge. Because it involves mental processes, learning is not just an observable practice. Learning occurs when students integrate new knowledge with their existing knowledge. Constructivists believe that learning is what the brain does naturally. Constructivists theories are therefore student centred (2015, p. 7).

Constructivist theories for learning, while embraced by proponents of 21st century literacy (Trilling & Fadel, 2009), only go so far. Constructivist principles need to be applied not just to content, but to contexts and to identity formation (Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003). Literacy in and for the 21st century is profoundly human in nature. It embraces the context in which young people live and learn. As we move further into the 21st century, systems, institutions and individuals will be required to embrace not just the effective teaching of literacy skills, but to understand, value and embrace the intersection of identity formation, with literacy practice within a variety of online and real-world contexts. Power and control will be located outside of the school walls, and while there is evidence to suggest schools are trying to cling onto dated notions of literacy through arbitrary measures (Swaffield & Macbeath, 2009), it would
seem the tide has swung too far for schools to ‘control’ anymore, and the only real solution seems to be located in understanding a world and a context that is radically different, with participants who are capable of making valuable contributions.

This section of the Literature Review has attempted to give an overview of the major socio-cultural theories of literacy and to locate them in a theoretical construct.

The following section begins to explore the term ‘21st century literacy’, and draws on some of the socio-cultural theories explored above, along with pedagogies described in the literature.

2.11 Exploring the term ‘21st century literacy’

2.11.1 A preliminary definition of 21st century literacy

At the heart of a rapidly changing world in the early part of the 21st century is a literacy discourse that is evolving to reflect the ‘new’ ways we live and communicate. While the illiterate of the 20th century were those who could not read or write, ‘the illiterate of the 21st century will be those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn’ (Toffler 1995, p. 2). Literacy for the 21st century embraces and demands skills in multimodality, digital citizenship, and information management, within a context of fluidity and change.

A stagnant definition of literacy is likely to work against the literacy skills required for 21st century participation. Therefore, a dynamic definition of literacy, arguably, is more appropriate. For example, Bull and Anstey suggest that ‘literacy is represented as having the skills to successfully take part in everyday life, including economic and social contributions’ (Bull & Anstey 2005, p. 14).
Jukes suggests that a broadened understanding of literacy should be embraced: ‘We need to move our thinking beyond our primary focus and fixation on factual recall’ (Crockett, Jukes & Churches 2011, p. 17).

The skills we learned in order to read, write and communicate have changed. ‘In the age of multimedia, hypertext, blogs, and wikis, reading is no longer just a passive, linear activity that deals only with text’ (Abbott & Farris 2000, p. 40). ‘Today, it’s essential that all of our students have a wide range of skills beyond those that were needed in the 20th century, a range that includes the skills needed to function within a rapidly changing society’ (Crockett, Jukes & Churches 2011, p. 17).

In this research project, the view is taken that the term 21st century literacy is not one definitive definition. It is a concept influenced by many theories of literacy, and located within specific social contexts. Within meaning-making, it includes elements of multimodality, creativity and criticality.

The following section takes some of the theoretical concepts listed above and explores some of the skills people need in order to participate in 21st century literacy practices.

2.11.2 Defining literacy skills in the 21st century

What are the literacy skills needed for 21st century participation, and how do we avoid ‘throwing the baby out with the bathwater’? As with the definition for 21st century literacy, there are multiple views on what constitutes 21st century literacy skills. For example the Education Testing Service (ETS) identifies 21st century literacy skills as the:

Capability to a) retrieve and/or collect information; b) manage and organise information; c) analyse the usefulness, relevance, and quality of information; and d) produce correct information; through the application of existing research and learning resources. (Paige 2009, p. 4)
While, the North Central Regional Education Laboratory (NCREL) recognises 21st century literacy skills as ‘attaining 21st century learning using high productivity, effective communication, and inventive thinking’ (NCREL & Group 2003, p. 6).

Alternatively, Richardson (2006) identifies six principle elements of 21st century skills, which when applied, foster and promote 21st century learning:

a) Accentuating core subjects; b) highlighting learning skills; c) applying 21st century instruments to build up learning skills; d) learning and teaching in a 21st century framework; e) learning and teaching 21st century substance; and f) employing 21st century evaluations that assess 21st century skills. (Richardson 2006, p. 5)

While most researchers appear to be offering slightly different versions of what they consider to be 21st century literacy skills, the themes are similar. They hinge around higher order critical and creative thinking, managing change, working collaboratively, and participating within a multimodal framework (Baker 2010). This aligns with Bransford’s observations, referred to earlier, that the ‘true test of the rigor is for students to be able to look at the material they’ve never seen before and have the skills to know what to do with it’ (2000, p. 18).

Importantly, definitions that consider the plurality of literacy constructs seem to be the most grounded within the literature’s understanding of 21st century literacy. It is possible to argue that similar skills were also important in the 20th century: however, the percentage of the population requiring such sophisticated literacy skills in the 21st century is vastly greater than ever before.

This section has attempted to describe some skills that illustrate the concept of 21st century literacy, which, I’ve argued, is influenced by many socio-cultural theories of literacy. The discussion was not meant to be an exhaustive list, but aimed to illustrate the multimodal nature and socially rich elements of 21st century literacy.
In the following section I attempt to locate 21st century literacy within an Australian context, and explore some of the literature around how Australian policy is interpreting 21st century literacy.

2.12 21st century literacy: An Australian context

Richardson identifies that ‘over time, and in reaction to societal stipulations, literacies or literacy as social practices have shifted to different emphases and focuses’ (2006, p. 12). ‘Given the growing importance of linguistic and cultural diversity, and novel ICT, we now need to deliberate precisely and carefully on a contemporary definition of literacy’ (Crockett, Jukes & Churches 2011, p. 18).

The challenge faced by schooling in Australia is to ‘build students’ literacies so as to reveal the diversity of the economic, linguistic, cultural, technological, and social contexts of which they are a component’ (Trilling & Fadel 2009, p. 13). Furthermore, recognition must be given to the ‘significance of accommodating, building upon, and providing for the diverse learning, cultural, and linguistic needs of individual students’ (Trilling & Fadel 2009, p. 14). This especially applies in relation to geographic isolation, race, socioeconomic disadvantage, disability, and gender.

2.12.1 Advances in literacy education in Australia

In Australia, literacy education has been impacted through several and varied literacy theories, and by the practices of literacy created in schools (Akers 2005, p. 8). Teachers, curriculum writers, and policy makers have categorised literacy practices as they relate to young students, in order to examine them more closely. In particular, Beetham categorises the various schools of thought regarding literacy education and literacy in Australia into four large broad classes:

1. Skills advances, highlighting the technical and perceptual procedures of encoding (for writing) and decoding (for reading).
2. Personal growth advances, stressing the private, individual, and personal methods by which people apply writing and reading, and mature through writing and reading (Buckingham, 2007).

3. Cultural heritage advances, stressing the transmission of cultural and historical perspectives and knowledge and the importance of writing and reading as providing access to the appreciated literacy of a culture heritage (Akers 2005, p. 8).

4. Critical-cultural advances, highlighting the inconsistency of daily practices of literacy among different cultures and settings, and the significance to daily social practice of critically evaluating literate communication, their political and cultural consequences, and underlying belief structures. (Beetham 2009, p. 11)

‘In Australia there is constant pressure exerted on teachers to become accustomed to their practices for diverse learner teams and to shifting community expectations and departmental positions’ (Akers 2005, p. 8).

There is evidence in the literature that Australian policy makers are embracing 21st century literacy practices, as described in this Literature Review. The National Curriculum (ACARA 2013) is heavily focused on social and cultural practices of meaning-making. Criticality and creativity also feature in policy documents (see for example ACARA [2014]).

In the following section I explore two pedagogical approaches that may help address the needs of 21st century literacy, namely the Three Literacy Dimensions and the Four Literacy Resources approaches.

2.13 **Pedagogical frameworks for the teaching of 21st century literacy**

‘To pre-empt a specific approach or theory, and hence privilege a given set of literacy teaching and learning and literacy practices, each must be rigorously
reviewed to inform contemporary practices’ (Bennett, S, Maton & Kervin 2008, p. 775), with the intention of conceptualising programs and frameworks that facilitate learning and teaching and take into account the students’ prospective needs (Buckingham 2007, p. 43).

In some respects the above quote further helps define 21st century literacy within the context of this research project. As mentioned earlier, given the various definitions of 21st century literacy already discussed, I have taken the view that 21st century literacy is a concept informed by many factors and a concept that is resistant to a fixed definition. However, a concept does need a framework on which to grow; a locus of teacher learning, sociocultural influences, student needs and contextual elements, interweaving to produce meaningful learning for young people. There are many possible examples of such frameworks, but I will explore two:

1. Three literacy dimensions
2. Four literacy resources

2.13.1 Three literacy dimensions
According to Crockett, to ‘forge intersections among classroom practice, curriculum, and literacy, it is essential to build some coherent comprehension of literacy; one that reveals the several stipulations of a literate society’ (2011, p. 22). ‘These stipulations necessitate an interconnected set of skills and knowledge that students use as they satisfy the needs of societal literacy’ (Crockett, Jukes & Churches 2011, p. 19). To build these interconnected abilities requires an ‘integrated standpoint of literacy in pedagogy and the curriculum’ (Breivik 2005, p. 12). To address this, researchers have developed a way of perceiving literacy holistically through three interlocking facets: operational, critical, and cultural (Durrant & Green 2000).

The operational facet is the advance of literacy based on the rationale that ‘it is through and in the language advance that the literacy practice occurs’
It entails a language system competency, with the emphasis being placed on how appropriately and adequately individuals are capable of speaking/signing, shaping, writing, listening, viewing, and reading in a variety of contexts (Littlejohn, Beetham & McGill 2012, p. 555).

The cultural facet encompasses the meaning of the literacy. In contrast to the operational facet, it entails competency with systems of meaning. According to Moje and Luke, we must then ‘understand that literacy events and acts are not merely specific to context, but also involve a specific content’ (2009, p. 417).

The critical facet is interested in the socially constructed character of all meaning systems and human practices. Littlejohn, Beetham and McGill add that to be ‘capable of taking part productively and effectively in any social activities, Australians should be socialised within that context beginning from a tender age’ (2012, p. 555).

The three facets function together to offer an integrated perspective of literacies as social practices. ‘As interactive, complementary, interdependent, and interrelated dimensions, they involve language learning’ (Moje & Luke 2009, p. 418).

2.13.2 Four literacy resources

‘The four literacy resources present as a group of specifications that were built in an effort to convey the types of resources that any literacy education theory and pedagogy should focus on, and what should be addressed by education’ (Anstey & Bull 2006, p. 2). This model was developed by Luke and Freebody (1999). ‘The specifications were created through an anthropological lens, in order to assess how the theories could be applied in practice’ (Alvermann 2002, p. 200). ‘The intention is that students need to build this repertoire of practices and resources for interrelating with texts, in order to grow to be effective and
participating members of a modern literate world’ (Bundy 2004, p. 12). In essence, they are a taxonomy of the forms of skills needed to be functionally and fully literate.

‘This practice repertoire facilitates students going further than encoding and decoding print to comprehend and apply texts on numerous levels and with several goals through a range of technology’ (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar 2003). For example, in the use of code-breaking resources, students are able to ask the question, ‘How do I crack this code?’ The answer is enlightening because the students are able to discover several digitally based ways to crack the codes. ‘This enables them to find meaning to these questions through text-participating resources intended for semantic practice’ (Cammack 2003, p. 23).

‘This taxonomy helps teachers to go further than cognitive and psycholinguistic translations of literacy development, as well as perceiving literacy as a communally constructed practice’ (Considine, Horton & Moorman 2009, p. 3). It also presents as a good example of 21st century literacy, in that it recognises plurality and embraces elements such as the multimodal and discursive practices that teachers negotiate within learning environments.

The two models that have been explored in this section are intended to offer a theoretical example of how teachers can use such pedagogical frameworks to enact the principal elements of 21st century literacy. There are, of course, other models and examples, but I would argue that the two discussed here incorporate the socio-cultural and multidimensional elements that are essential to any conceptual framework of 21st century literacy.

To this point in the Literature Review, I have attempted to identify some of the sociological characteristics of the 21st century, to position childhood within this, and then to explore theories of literacy to help inform a construct of 21st century
literacy. Attention has also been paid to how this construct of 21st century literacy could be enacted.

From my review of the literature, there appears to be two factors that influence literacy teaching in and for the 21st century. These two factors are teacher learning and the influence of school-based leadership. Given that I have already (in part) addressed teacher learning, in the next part of this Literature Review, I will pay greater attention to school-based leadership.

2.14 PART FOUR: Factors affecting 21st century literacy enactment in Australian schools

2.14.1 Teacher learning
A central factor that influences the enactment of 21st century literacy learning, is teacher learning. Vrasidas and McIsaac suggest that the ‘conception of teaching and learning is based on a constructivist epistemology. According to this epistemology, knowledge does not exist external to the learner but rather, individual learners construct their own meanings’ (2001, p. 6). Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) add that learning results from creating, cooperating, focusing, and discussing within the context in which learning is located. According to Jonassen, Peck and Wilson (1999), constructivist learning can be aided by computer technology and be applied in active learning activities.

Vrasidas and McIsaac also suggest that the learning process is highly interactive and requires a high level of cooperation and collaborative discussion to promote knowledge building. In this process, the integration of computer technology ‘provides a more decentralised environment where students take more control of the learning environment and become active constructors of knowledge while working on authentic tasks’ (2001, p. 6).
As already discussed, literacies change and evolve, as do societies and communities. More is being learnt about how young people learn, and the expectations they have for their learning. Consequently, teachers must be informed not only about literacies, but also about the sociological environment in which literacies exist. The two cannot be mutually exclusive, particularly in the 21st century, as the barriers between in-school and out-of-school literacy participation continue to blur.

2.14.2 School-based leadership

2.14.2.1 Leading literacy learning

There is a significant amount of literature to support the notion that school-based leadership is one of the key factors that influences the enactment of effective literacy learning in and for the 21st century.

Leadership matters in literacy learning. Duignan suggests that ‘school leadership is second only to classroom teaching in influencing what students learn at school’ (Duignan 2006, p. 165). Further, Bransford suggests that ‘results indicate that when principals actively promote and participate in learning and development they have a large impact on student achievement’ (Bransford 2000, p. 176).

However, MacGilchrist (2003) offers a sceptical yet interesting view:

In the world of the independent learner, where do teaching and leadership fit in? If we encourage children to take control of their own learning, if we persuade adults to manage their own professional development, surely there is little left for the role of direction and organisation, for strategy and vision? In this world, schools would be little more than a useful location for learning to take place … But here is the curious phenomenon: the more independent we become, the greater our need for outstanding leadership—not management, not organisation, not order, but rather inspiration. (p. 381)

There is much to agree with in MacGilchrist’s views. Leadership is necessary for learning in the 21st century, but the literature suggests that the style, type and
place of leadership are undergoing change and/or refurbishment at a frightening pace.

A viewpoint that is critical to this research is the notion that leadership and learning are complementary in the 21st century school, and indispensable to each other (Swaffield & Macbeath 2009). Therefore, the question of how the two can complement each other is worth investigating.

Based on a broad reading of the literature, and influenced by Swaffield and Macbeath’s conceptual understanding of ‘leadership for learning’, I will focus on two conceptual areas, namely, the leader as pedagogical expert, and the leader as a facilitator of learning. The leader as pedagogical expert ‘casts leaders as experts in fostering learning, proud of their hands-on expertise and deep pedagogical understanding’ (Swaffield & Macbeath 2009, p. 33), whereas the leader as a facilitator of learning ‘concentrates more on putting in place structures and support for colleagues so that heads of department and team leaders take the direct lead in teaching and learning, while the principal’s priority is to shield teachers from distractions, allowing them to focus on pupils’ learning’ (Swaffield & Macbeath 2009, p. 33). These two conceptual areas of leadership for learning are furnished by a range of themes that offer interpretations of what leadership for learning should be.

In order to be an expert of pedagogical knowledge, and to be able to facilitate learning, arguably leaders need to understand learning. This is supported by Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003), who suggest, ‘... it isn’t only teachers who need to understand the learning process. To promote learning and support others’ learning, leaders need to have a deep, current and critical understanding of the learning process’ (p. 104).

Further, in order to support and be active within learning, leaders need to have contextual knowledge. Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003) support this also, suggesting
that ‘successful leaders make connections by developing firm knowledge and understanding of their context. Within this view, context relates to the particular situation, background or environment in which something is happening’ (p. 106).

Finally, leaders need to have the capacity for critical thinking:

What differentiates effective leaders and ineffective leaders is the quality of their judgement: whether their decisions work for the pupils in the long term. The greatest challenge for educators, of course, is to determine whether their judgements are ‘wise’ because the results sometimes do not show up for years. Education is for a lifetime, even if policy makers want demonstrations of success in the short term. (Stoll, Fink & Earl 2003, p. 107)

Based on my review of the literature, and for the purposes of this research project, I will distinguish leadership for learning as having an awareness of pedagogical practice and the willingness to facilitate learning. This also entails the leader having an awareness of current learning theory, the ability to locate learning within the context of the school community, and having the bravery and strategic capacity to enact a philosophy of learning that may not produce results in the short term. This is a view of leadership for learning that encourages value-adding literacy learning in the 21st century, and differs substantially from 20th century notions of top-down, authoritarian leadership styles.

2.14.2.2 Distributed leadership

Distributed leadership (Firestone & Martinez 2009) is not a new concept: ‘The earliest written record of distributed leadership is the counsel to Moses: This is too heavy for thou cannot bear it alone’ (Macbeath 2009, p. 41). However, in school-based leadership, it is comparatively new. Historically, school leadership has located itself within a top-down model of leadership. Duignan suggests ‘many educational leaders leave themselves isolated and alone, taking primary responsibility for the leadership of their school. This constitutes a very narrow view of leadership and ignores the leadership talents of teachers,
students, and other community stakeholders’ (Duignan 2006, p. 105). Duignan suggests ‘schools need to think differently about the quality and depth of their leadership if they are to respond effectively to the types of challenges and tensions of the 21st century’ (Duignan 2006, p. 105). The idea of distributed leadership seems to address some of Duignan’s concerns.

Firestone and Martinez define distributed leadership as ‘…a quasi-synonym for democratic leadership and as part of an effort to either expand the administrative apparatus of schools or to give more authority to teachers’ (Firestone & Martinez 2009, p. 62) and as ‘an analytic perspective to understand how leadership work is spread among leaders, followers, and the situation’ (Firestone & Martinez 2009, p. 62).

I would suggest that distributed leadership, when implemented well, is a democratic way to recognise individual leadership and teaching talents and to enrich a school system by having a direct influence on teachers’ professional practice. Done poorly, it can be diluted to the point of simply distributing work tasks. I would agree with Firestone and Martinez’s view that educational leaders need to create sharing cultures in which others willingly participate, and are rewarded for the successful performance of their leadership responsibilities (Firestone & Martinez 2009).

2.15 Conclusion

This Literature Review began by exploring some of the sociological factors and trends that characterise the 21st century. This was followed by an exploration of the research around childhood sociology, with a focus on 21st century constructs of childhood. I then explored a range of socio-cultural literacy theories, followed by a review of a range of pedagogical approaches and frameworks that could facilitate literacy learning in and for the 21st century. Finally two major themes were explored that, the literature indicates, affect the teaching of literacy.
My review of the literature indicates that there is no one definition of 21st century literacy; rather, it is a concept that is influenced and informed by many elements. Further, teacher learning and school-based leadership influence culture, pedagogical practice and sociological awareness. The review suggests that in a world that is changing so rapidly, and with a globalised focus now the norm rather than the exception, effective literacy teaching will need to continue to evolve, to embed itself not just within literacy theories, but also in constructions of childhood and the sociological discourse that defines the 21st century. Arguably, evolution and sociological embedding have always been the foundation of good literacy teaching, but the challenge in the 21st century is to evolve faster and with a greater level of criticality.

### 2.16 Dear Diary—What have I really learned?

As I sit here reviewing my Literature Review, I’m struck by, and a little unsure of what’s happened. I have clarified in my own mind that in order to understand literacy pedagogy, I first need to understand social constructs, but I now realise that this is a piece that I’ve missed in my teaching. Often I have been so focused on specific skills that I’ve forgotten to ask the ‘why’ question. Why do this? What does this seek to achieve beyond the classroom?

Although my Literature Review pretty much followed the structure I planned, the final focus of it is what most surprises me. Once I was able to locate literacy theories within a context, they became much richer. Gaining an insight into what characterises the 21st century, understanding theories of childhood studies, and the nature of global trends, has allowed me to locate literacy theories in a paradigm of interpretation. I’m not suggesting that external factors should dictate or shape literacy theories, but I am suggesting these factors offer a lens through which they can be viewed.
I encountered many struggles as I wrote this Literature Review. My biggest challenge has been finding the balance between exploring the social world in which literacy resides, and literacy theories and pedagogies. I wanted to pay adequate attention to both, and consider whether literacy theory influences social contexts or whether social contexts influence literacy theories. However in the end I’m not sure I have an answer. I have also struggled with my own learning; with understanding how the different sections of my Literature Review fit together to connect my research to the literature I reviewed.

So, as I write this I am asking myself, have I reviewed the literature that I think has a bearing on my research questions? I think so, but it wasn’t the literature that I initially thought would be my focus. I have spent a lot of my time reviewing the literature outside the traditional spheres of education and schools, and in the sociological and futurist literature. In turns out that this has helped me to clarify the characteristics of 21st century literacy.

When I began this Literature Review, I was focused on a narrow set of authors; those who largely who agreed with my viewpoint. I found it really difficult to step away from them, because I felt they were saying exactly what I thought! Ironically it was only when I stepped away from writing to just reading, and to reading widely across a variety of different fields that my conceptual framework and understanding for this Literature Review, and indeed this study, began to grow. Instead of focusing just on literature that discussed 21st century literacy, I started focusing on literature that informed 21st century literacy.

So what have I learned?

1. Often we hear a great deal about the 21st century being full of change. I feel I have a much greater grasp of how and why the 21st century is changing. This review of the literature was essential in order to explore theories of literacy for the 21st century. Content without context seems to make little sense to me.
2. I didn’t expect to review the literature on childhood sociology. It most certainly was not in my initial plan. The review of the sociological literature is probably where I focused most, looking back for the historical background, and looking forward in order to understand the present. It allowed me to understand some of the characteristics of young people in the 21st century through a theoretical lens. Up to this point, most of my understanding had been through my own experience as a classroom teacher. The childhood sociology literature helped illuminate reasons and offered insight into how young people experience their work, the power relationships they have and expect, and the way they construct meaning.

3. Literacy in and for the 21st century is not an either/or approach … It’s much more complex than that. Literacy in and for the 21st century isn’t about a new model, or a new program … Again, it’s more complex. It’s the understanding of time, place, and context. It is the understanding of how people make and interpret meaning.

The writing of my Literature Review has been an opportunity to clarify, to struggle with ideas, but most importantly to step out of my own theoretical comfort zone, to understand other ideas, concepts and theoretical perspectives that can inform my own research questions and my own understanding of the subject area.

So what have I really learned? Much more than just a review of the literature, this process has begun to shape my thinking in new and more complex ways. I’ve started to think more like a researcher, and less like a practitioner. It’s been a journey of clashing ideas and emerging insights. Above all, it’s been a rewarding and enjoyable writing activity.
3 Methodology

3.1 Dear Diary—My methodological beginning

For me, narrative has always been powerful. My most vivid recollections of teacher education are episodes where narrative was used. Human story is powerful for me. Therefore as I sit here thinking about the methodological orientation for this project, it isn’t surprising that I am going to focus on lived experience and human story.

I’ve been a practising teacher for over ten years, and during that time I have seen the focus on data change, both in government and in independent schools. Quantitative data has such power in schools, while qualitative data is seen somehow as its poor cousin. It reminds me of a personal story:

A number of years ago, I sat in a curriculum review meeting with the Head of Learning, the Principal and other administrators. A series of graphs were shown that demonstrated a general decline in literacy results over a two-year period. The standardised data was presented as fact for nearly 25 minutes, when somebody in the group asked, ‘why are we seeing this I wonder’? The Principal replied, ‘It doesn’t matter, we just need to get the results up before NAPLAN’. To this day, I’ve never forgotten his words, his attitude or in fact the attitude of the Leadership group.

As it turned out, it did in fact matter, because when the qualitative work was done, it became clear that there were some significant issues going on within the school. All teachers reported feeling stressed. As many of the teaching staff were considered early career, this was significant. When we listened to the stories of the teachers it became clear that the work teachers were being asked to do was far beyond what was reasonable. Most of the teachers were on contract and, driven by fear of losing their jobs, they were working seven days a week and on occasions, late into the night.
The data in the teachers’ stories was rich and, while it could not be represented in graphs, it ended up helping drive significant changes within the school. It was the qualitative data that allowed a different set of conversations, and consequently practices, to emerge, that eventually ended up improving not only teacher welfare, but also student engagement and outcomes.

While this experience in isolation isn’t the reason behind my choosing to focus on lived experience, it is certainly influencing it. I believe teachers need to understand things that often are not obvious, to see what is hidden. I believe that lived experience as real and authentic data makes a difference in schools and makes a real contribution to education research.

So, how do I apply this approach to my research question, which asks how teachers are enacting literacy in and for the 21st century, and significantly, what factors are influencing their pedagogical practices? In my mind, the best way to understand these questions will be to understand the lived experiences of teachers. What influences their decision-making? Who influences their decision-making? What do teachers think is important and why? As I think about the range of methodologies I could use, narrative inquiry stands out as a way of letting me answer these types of questions.

However, I also want an element of my research to look at a group of people—in this case, teachers. Understanding a single experience is important, but asking questions about ‘similar’ experiences also matters. Hermeneutic phenomenology was suggested to me as a way of understanding the collective experience.

Therefore, I’ve decided to use both methodologies to enact and interpret my research questions. Narrative inquiry will allow me to collect the individual stories, and interpret individual experiences, while hermeneutic phenomenology will allow me to interpret the collective experience. Both methodologies are
true to the intent of the research: To understand the lived experiences of teachers, and to use a qualitative paradigm to interpret the insider’s view, the view that cannot be gleaned from a qualitative view—at least that’s my aim!

3.2 Introduction

This research project is located within a qualitative paradigm and uses a narrative inquiry method to collect stories about how Year 6 teachers consider literacy teaching and learning within a 21st century context. Hermeneutic phenomenology is used to analyse the stories, to help understand and interpret the lived experiences of Year 6 teachers as they relate their beliefs concerning literacy teaching and learning in the 21st century.

In this chapter, I seek to do four things.

1. To explore the paradigm of qualitative research, considering the advantages and limitations, particularly within educational research.
2. To outline my research approach, locating it within grounded theory.
3. To introduce narrative inquiry as a method and to discuss some of the features of narrative inquiry pertinent to this research project.
4. To introduce hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology and discuss how I will use it to interpret and analyse the narratives.

3.3 Adopting a research approach within a qualitative research paradigm

This research project is a qualitative study, specifically exploring the lived experiences of Year 6 teachers within literacy education as they consider and enact literacy teaching and learning, with a focus on what constitutes effective literacy teaching and learning within a 21st century context. It uses a narrative inquiry method to collect individual stories from participants and a hermeneutic phenomenological framework to analyse and interpret them.
In the next section, I look more closely at the characteristics of narrative inquiry and how they relate to my research aims.

3.4 Collecting and presenting the stories using narrative inquiry method

3.4.1 Defining narrative inquiry

To understand the perceptions of Year 6 teachers concerning literacy teaching and learning in the context of the 21st century, how they enact 21st century literacy teaching and learning, and the factors that influence this enactment, requires a methodology that enables the full social fabric to be considered and explored.

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research approach that seeks to interpret and understand the lived experiences of humans. Webster and Mertova define narrative inquiry as capturing ‘human stories of experiences …[that] provide researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories’ (Webster & Mertova 2007, p. 23). Marvasti adds that ‘narrative inquiry aims to fully understand how various experiences relate to one another under the demands of the setting in which they are articulated’ (Marvasti 2004, p. 101). In the context of this research project, narrative inquiry increases the richness and depth of the data, by considering not only what the participants do as part of their work, but the social discourse of which they are a part.

At the nucleus of this research project is my desire for Year 6 teachers to be able to share their story; to be able to construct and present their view of their reality as it relates to the teaching of literacy in the 21st century. Narrative inquiry offers the researcher the opportunity to consider why these views have been presented in particular ways. As Marvasti (2004) points out, researchers should be asking ‘how do people present themselves in their personal stories’ (Marvasti
Further, she suggests that ‘interview narratives could be treated as descriptive performances’ (Marvasti 2004, p. 101). Narrative inquiry allows for the exploration and consideration of, the social context in which the story is being told; the choices research participants make about the identity they are wishing to portray within their performance (the interview); and the complexity and interconnectedness of the decisions they make as a result.

### 3.4.2 The human centredness of narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry is human-centred. It begins from a place of lived experience. Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to begin with the story or the personal event, and theorise from that narrative platform. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest this is a point of tension within research methodology. They suggest that ‘one of the central tensions … is the place of theory in inquiry. Formalists begin in theory, whereas narrative inquirers tend to begin with experiences as expressed in lived and told stories’ (Clandinin & Connelly 2000b, p. 233). As I wanted to understand the lived experiences of Year 6 teachers as they influence literacy teaching and learning within a 21st century context, I needed to start with the experiences of those teachers. Using narrative inquiry allows me to capture, interpret and present the stories, before then using a theoretical framework (hermeneutic phenomenology) to analyse and interpret those lived experiences.

Beginning with the individual story allows what Schultz and Ravitch (2012) call the *grand narrative* to be challenged. Often the grand narrative is constructed by a social discourse that is disconnected from the people it influences most. Schultz and Ravitch (2012) suggest that narratives illuminate the particular experiences of individuals and that using small stories to counter the grand narrative allows an intimate insight into the phenomena being considered: ‘Small stories,’ they suggest, ‘often live in the shadow of the grand narrative’ (Schultz & Ravitch 2012, p. 3). This research project explores the lived experiences of Year 6 teachers as they navigate the path between ‘received
knowledge’ and ‘narratives of accountability’, and their own beliefs and experiences of what constitutes effective 21st century pedagogy. It gathers the insider’s view of the work of teachers as they navigate in and around the ‘grand narratives’ of schooling, literacy, and education generally. Drawing on my Literature Review, I interrogate the grand narratives of a changing world, evolving conceptions of childhood and evolving social practices within literacy discourse, through an insider’s view; in this case, the research participants’.

Narrative inquiry allows the ‘hidden’ stories to emerge, and from those hidden or small stories, offers a contribution to the theoretical literature and education discourse of literacy teaching and learning.

### 3.4.3 Integrity and truth within a narrative inquiry framework

While story and storytelling allow for a rich tapestry of perceptions and practices to be captured, the literature suggests that both forms can also suffer from a lack of integrity. ‘One criticism levelled at narrative inquiry is that of its subjectivity. Thus, questions about which stories should be incorporated and which should be disregarded pose one type of uncertainty’ (Webster & Mertova 2007, p. 185). This limitation can best be addressed by assuming that subjectivity is an element of narrative inquiry and part of creating the narrative.

Webster and Mertova claim that ‘a story is important if the participants feel it is important’ (Webster & Mertova 2007, p. 301). Part of narrative inquiry is about letting the stories develop fluidity, allowing the research participants to construct and present the identities that they feel capture their story best. It seeks, therefore, to embrace human elements, not to block them out.

Truth appears as a theme in the narrative inquiry literature (Webster & Mertova 2007; Wolcott 2001): ‘Narrative inquiry is not necessarily associated with truth, if truth is taken to mean an exact correspondence to reality’ (Webster & Mertova 2007, p. 42). Rather, narrative inquiry is a story that has been told and retold, with elements of subjectivity, value bias, and interpretation. It is more associated with an individual’s truth, and an individual’s construction of reality.
This promotes subjectivity and multiple ways of viewing a circumstance or event. It is this subjectivity that allows an interrogation of the grand narrative, thus encouraging a different construction to the dominant story.

### 3.4.4 Triangulation, validity and reliability within a narrative inquiry framework

**Triangulation** is an approach often embraced within qualitative research methods to establish the validity and reliability of results, although some researchers suggest that it is not necessarily suitable for narrative inquiry.

Triangulation is a tool that qualitative researchers use to satisfy the validity of their research. It is a common approach in qualitative research for claiming validity, and it involves using a variety of data sources, the outcome of which point to the same conclusion. However, it is not necessarily applicable to storytelling-based research (Webster & Mertova 2007, p. 143).

Notwithstanding Webster and Mertova’s comments, I have encouraged triangulation within this research project wherever I could, for example through the use of three data collection techniques, namely, journal entries, semi-structured interviews and my own observations.

As a consequence of the individuality of the stories, data *validity* needs to be addressed. ‘The concept of validity has largely been narrowed down by formal science as referring to tests or measuring instruments that aim to produce certainty’ (Webster & Mertova 2007, p. 17). This is not the aim of narrative inquiry, nor the aim of this research project. Narrative inquiry does not seek to produce outcomes of certainty. ‘In narrative inquiry research, validity is more concerned with the research being well grounded and supported by the data that has been collected’ (Wolcott 2001, p. 44). Polkinghorne also argues that ‘the validity of narrative inquiry is more closely associated with meaningful analysis than with consequences’ (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 116). Meaningful analysis means understanding, interpreting, theorising and reporting the data so that it addresses the research questions, and presents the narrative accounts
authentically and in the way the research participants intended. This is what makes data sets valid, within narrative inquiry.

*Reliability*, on the other hand, refers to the dependability of the data, which has implications for narrative inquiry research. Polkinghorne suggests that reliability in narrative research is ‘more associated with the “trustworthiness” of the data’ (1988, p. 272). That is, has the research design enabled a non-biased narrative to be collected? Have the interview questions been adequately designed as to be truly open-ended?

Along with others, including Polkinghorne (1988), I suggest that triangulation, validity and reliability are essential considerations within narrative inquiry research, but that these must be understood in association with individual truths and constructions that encourage contextual and in-depth insights into particular grand narratives. Polkinghorne suggests that ‘narrative inquiry and storytelling research seeks to elaborate and investigate individual interpretations of complex and human-centred events’ (1988, p. 75). Therefore, as Webster and Mertova (2007) suggest, validity within narrative inquiry research is very much associated with ‘access, honesty, verisimilitude, authenticity, familiarity and transferability’ (Webster & Mertova 2007, p. 82). While reliability is closely associated with the details of the research design, the quality of the field notes, and the analysis of the field texts, which leads to the publishing of the formal writing (Clandinin and Connelly 2002). It is worth noting that I don’t expect to be able to generalise the results from this study. Rather, they are context specific, and are intended to convey an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants in this study.

This research project uses a narrative inquiry method to access the ‘hidden’ or ‘insider’s perspective’ of Year 6 literacy teaching and learning, with a focus on a 21st century context. Once these stories are collected, theoretical analysis through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach helps to collate and
interpret a collective narrative, to produce some conclusions from the individual narratives.

### 3.4.5 What narrative inquirers do when collecting narratives: An insight from Clandinin and Connelly

Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly are pioneers in the field of narrative inquiry. They suggest that being a narrative inquirer is much more than ‘listening’ to stories; it is about understanding identities in their full social context. To encapsulate the social context, Clandinin and Connelly offer a three-dimensional framework that takes into account interactions, continuities, and situations:

Inquiries are personal and social (interaction); past, present and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation). This set of terms creates a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension and place along a third (Clandinin & Connelly 2000b, p. 50).

Further, they suggest four directions of inquiry:

Inward and outward, backward and forward. By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feeling, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to temporality—past, present and future (Clandinin & Connelly 2000b, p. 50).

Therefore, narrative inquirers are charged with a much greater task than simply collecting and representing the individual story at a point in time. Narrative inquiry is about understanding the research participant’s story at a point in time, within the social context, taking into account historical influences, and considering future paths.

I wanted to embrace the dimensions suggested by Clandinin and Connelly in order for the richest possible narratives to be captured and so my interview
questions were designed to consider the ‘inward, outward, backward and forward’ elements they suggest (Clandinin & Connelly 2000a).

3.4.6 Developing and negotiating relationships between narrative inquirers and research participants

A narrative inquirer must also create a research space where research participants feel safe and comfortable to tell their version of a story. A narrative inquirer needs to be as interested in how the research participant arrived at a particular event, as in the event itself. The richness of narrative inquiry data lies in the multidimensional directions of the inquiry discussed above. Doing this kind of work is complex. As a narrative inquirer, I come to the inquiry with my own lived experience as a classroom teacher and I shared that work with the participants as a way of building trust and mutual understanding. It was my hope that by positioning myself as both practitioner and researcher, I would be able to build trust and openness, in order to capture and respectfully interpret their stories.

Dahlberg captures this idea when she suggests that whenever an inquiry begins, both researcher and research participant are already living their respective narratives (Dahlberg 1995), be it the narrative of a classroom teacher or that of a researcher.

Consequently, one of the most important tasks for any narrative inquirer to tackle is how to negotiate relationships in order to capture the rich narrative data. Connelly and Clandinin suggest, ‘throughout an inquiry, in our experience of being in the field, the researcher-participant relationship is a tenuous one, always in the midst of being negotiated’ (Connelly & Clandinin 2006, p. 71). Quite often, this relationship is tenuous because the different parties are building different narratives, rather than a shared narrative. In other words, the researcher and the participant in the research often don’t pay enough attention to what each other needs, and the relationship fails. Clandinin and
Connelly put it this way: ‘in today’s popular language, relationships need to be worked at’ (p. 73).

One of the ways the relationship can be ‘worked at’ is to constantly negotiate and share the purpose of the research. Lyons and LaBoskey (2002) describe this as ‘explaining ourselves’, ‘finding many places to explain to others what we are doing. Encouraging response communities, ongoing places where we can give accounts of developing work over time. As the explaining takes place, clarification and shaping of purpose occurs’ (Lyons & LaBoskey 2002, p. 82).

This has significant implications for narrative inquiry research, and Clandinin and Connelly suggest that the purpose can change within narrative inquiries. ‘The purpose, and what one is exploring and finds puzzling, changes as the research progresses. This happens from day to day and week to week, and it happens over the long haul as narratives are retold, puzzles shift, and purposes change’ (Clandinin & Connelly 2000b, p. 73). This is significantly different from quantitative methodologies, in which a hypothesis is developed and tested to either prove or disprove it. Narrative inquiries are about negotiating realities and contexts through the lived experiences and views of people, and understanding the discourses that have causal effects on the narrative. This requires a fluid and constantly negotiated shared purpose if the research is to capture the full social fabric of the narrative.

3.4.7 **Negotiating relationship transitions within a narrative inquiry framework**

Within narrative inquiries, the quality of the relationship can make a difference to the quality of the data. Consequently, it is important for relationships between researcher and research participant to be established, to be respected and continually negotiated.
There are also bound to be many transition points in the relationship. These include the initial transition, when strangers meet to form a working relationship, the transition that comes with development and familiarity, and the eventual transition that occurs when the project ends. Narrative inquiries are highly personal, and such transitions are important to consider. It often takes time to build a relationship with a participant, and to build trust in order to hear and understand the full narrative. If this is done effectively, participants will share intimate thoughts and ideas that they would not have shared with anybody else. The researcher-practitioner relationship can be highly personal, but eventually the research project will end, and the transition to ending the researcher-practitioner relationship must be negotiated. Clandinin and Connelly offer this view: ‘Though highly variable from person to person and place-to-place, narrative inquiries do end, at least in a formal sense. Reports are written, dissertations written, people move, funding stops. Negotiating this final transition is also part of what a narrative inquirer does in the field relationship. It is critical to the trust and integrity of the work that researchers do not simply walk away when “their time has come”’ (Clandinin & Connelly 2000b, p. 73). What comes with the privilege of being in the field and building relationships that potentially give a richness to the data that could not be obtained in other ways, is the need to respect the relationships that are formed. Part of that respect entails negotiating the relationship after the research is completed.

3.4.8 Considering narrative inquiry as relational inquiry in a professional knowledge landscape

Many researchers in the narrative inquiry landscape have been exploring the concept of relational inquiry as an integral part of narrative inquiry (Dubose-Brunner 1994). Often it is suggested that to capture a person’s story, one must be a part of the story (Wells 2007). True narrative inquiry is about understanding a person’s story in its social context and consequently, the researcher is not immune to the influence of social context.
Additionally, Connelly and Clandinin suggest that narrative inquiry is often associated with research puzzles ‘that emerge in relation with our life experiences, of living, composing field texts and research texts in relation with participants’ (Connelly & Clandinin 2006, p. 81). Relational inquiry, as a part of narrative inquiry, assumes that the researcher forms a part of the inquiry. They are, as Connelly and Clandinin suggest, ‘in the midst with the research participants’ (p. 81) and as such, form a relationship with them.

Relational inquiry assumes that the researcher works alongside the research participants, each with their own individual and shared purposes. As Hendry suggests, ‘the epistemological roots of narrative are understood as the primary way in which humans make meaning’ (Hendry 2009, p 72). Put another way, meaning is created when humans interact or when the researcher is interested in understanding the full social fabric of the participants’ stories.

Specifically in the context of this research project, relational inquiry means developing an awareness and an understanding of the context, experiences, and expectations both of the researcher and the research participants. It is about the researcher coming alongside (Clandinin & Connelly 2000b) the research participants to see, hear and interact for a period of time within their working lives. It is an attempt to understand their working lives in a more holistic manner, and to form a better understanding of what impacts their pedagogical beliefs and practices.

3.4.9 The place of tension within narrative inquiry

Defining Tensions
This research project seeks to examine the perceptions of 21st century literacy pedagogy by Year 6 teachers, including their own knowledge sets and values, and how they enact them in a classroom setting. Clandinin and Connelly identify two different epistemological places—in-classroom and out-of-classroom (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000b) through which to explore this:
In-classroom places are described as safe places where teachers live out their personal practice, that is, their stories of who they are and who they are becoming as they interact with children. Out-of-classroom places are described as prescriptive, professional places shared with other teachers where teachers are expected to hold certain, expert knowledge shaped by policy, theories, and research, and given to them through dominant stories of school (Clandinin & Connelly 2000b, p. 14).

My interpretation of Clandinin and Connelly’s work in relation to this research project leads me to suggest that part of conducting a good narrative inquiry is understanding that the pedagogy Year 6 teachers value in classrooms may be different to the discourse they value outside the classroom. Clandinin and Connelly call this potential disconnect ‘tensions’ (1999). Tensions are often created as research participants attempt to create professional identities and enact professional practices as they cross the boundaries between their in-school and out-of-school practices.

**Competing and Conflicting Stories**

Connelly and Clandinin suggest that tensions occur when ‘the possibility of competing and conflicting stories emerges’ (Connelly & Clandinin 2006). Competing stories are those that ‘live in dynamic but positive tension with dominant stories of school whereas conflicting stories collide with dominant stories of school’ (Connelly & Clandinin 2006, p. 82).

I designed my research to directly interrogate the tensions between in-classroom and out-of-classroom practices, in order to learn how Year 6 teachers think literacy skills should be enacted against the discourse of education; and how they conceive and deal with the limitations and demands placed upon them by various stakeholders.

**Why tensions and competing and conflicting stories matter**

Dominant stories exist in every discourse. They can often be hard to infiltrate. Narrative inquiry seeks to explore the tensions that exist between the dominant stories and the hidden stories, as well as the tensions created between the
dominant stories and the lived experiences of the individuals who collectively help create them. Considering these tensions in a figurative manner may result in a formulation such as this:

Tensions could be seen as the cracks in what might, at first glance, be a smooth story. Beginning to attend to the cracks creates the possible spaces for inquiry. It is in the cracks where inquiry spaces are made possible, that is, where there is possibility for retelling lives (Clandinin and Connelly, 2010, p. 84).

Thus, to better understand the ‘cracks’ in dominant stories, then to present and theorise them, allows a more holistic picture to be considered and assessed. Valuing the stories of experience and practice, and considering the factors that impact and influence them, encourages a better understanding of the dominant story.

This section explained my rationale for adopting a narrative inquiry approach to collect and understand the lived experiences of Year 6 teachers as they influence literacy teaching and learning within a 21st century context. In the next section I will explain why I use hermeneutic phenomenology to analyse these stories.

3.5 Interpreting the narratives using hermeneutic phenomenology

3.5.1 Introducing phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of collective experience, particularly as it is lived and structured through consciousness (Henriksson & Friesen 2012, p. 1). This research project seeks to interpret the lived experiences of Year 6 teachers as they consider and influence literacy teaching and learning for students within the context of the 21st century. While narrative inquiry allows individual stories to be collected and interpreted, a methodological framework is required that allows the collective narrative to be interpreted; phenomenology does that.
3.5.2 Phenomenological approaches

Phenomenological research characteristically starts with concrete descriptions of lived situations, often first-person accounts set down in everyday language and avoiding abstract intellectual generalisations (Finlay 2012, p. 21). It aims to go beyond surface expressions or explicit meanings to read between the lines so as to ‘access implicit dimensions and intuitions’ (Heidegger 1992).

Phenomenology aims to describe, rather than explain. In an attempt to do this, two traditions of phenomenology have emerged. These are descriptive phenomenology and interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology. ‘Descriptive phenomenology aims to reveal essential general meaning structures of a phenomenon. They stay close to what is given to them in all its richness and complexity, and restrict themselves to making assertions, which are supported by appropriate intuitive validations’ (Finlay 2012, p. 22). By contrast, interpretive phenomenology has emerged from the work of the hermeneutic philosophers, including Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricouer, who argue ‘for our embeddedness in the world of interpretation and social relationships’ (Finlay 2012, p. 22). As it relates to this research project, rather than simply exploring the general meaning of the lived experiences of the research participants, hermeneutic phenomenology goes further to connect those experiences to, and understand the impact of, the world in which the participants live.

3.5.3 Hermeneutic phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of experiences, particularly as they are lived and structured through consciousness (Henriksson & Friesen 2012). Hermeneutics is the art and science of interpretation (Henriksson & Friesen 2012), and thus also of the meaning. Meaning in this context is not final and stable, but is continuously open to new insights and interpretations.

Consequently, hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of experience, together with its meanings (Henriksson & Friesen 2012, p. 1). Put another way,
according to Heidegger (2008), ‘phenomenology is not only descriptive but also
hermeneutical because there are many hidden aspects in phenomena which
need to be uncovered and interpreted’ (Heidegger 2008, p. xviii). The purpose
of hermeneutic phenomenology is to not only present what is within the data,
but to ‘elicit, evoke and uncover what lies hidden or buried in and around
whatever manifests itself openly in the world’ (Heidegger 2008, p. xviii): In
other words, the tensions that lie within the data.

The aim of hermeneutic phenomenology, according to van Manen (1990), is ‘to
transform lived experiences into textual expression of its essence in such a way
that the effect of the text is a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of
something meaningful’ (van Manen 1990, p. 36).

3.5.4 Features of hermeneutic phenomenology for this research project
This research project aims to collect individual narratives from Year 6 teachers
and explore and interpret the themes of their lived experiences of literacy
teaching and learning for their students. It seeks to present not just one
teacher’s story; rather, it seeks to collect stories from a number of teachers
working in varied settings. It also aims to look beyond what is being explicitly
said and uncover themes and patterns and to connect the experiences of
teachers to their lifeworlds. Hermeneutic phenomenology is ideally placed to
do just this and consequently, it offers a number of features that allow the aims
of this research to be fulfilled.

Many researchers agree that hermeneutic phenomenology aims for
understanding through description and explication of shared experiences, as
well as the interpretation of stories that involve themes and patterns. The data
from conversations, transcripts, work samples, and stories ‘form the basis of
interpretation leading to identification of themes. Common experiences can
then be named and understood’ (Lindsay 2006, pp. 40-41). Lindsay goes on to
explain that:
Although experiences are the palette into which the phenomenologist dips a brush, the picture we see is not of any one particular person temporally and spatially embedded in a social landscape with a narrative history. In phenomenology, the data are written texts based on people’s stories, the literature and researcher interpretation. The resultant themes and patterns of common practices are the next layer of data. In narrative inquiry the data arises from a particular person’s experience over time in specific places. The interpretations shed light on specific people’s lives in particular social situations. The person in the life that provides the ‘data’ also does the learning and chooses how to act in the world. (Lindsay 2006, p. 41)

Dahlberg also talks about shared and recurring themes, with contextual insight and analysis, forming the basis of ‘knowledge’ for hermeneutic phenomenologists (Dahlberg 1995, pp. 39-40), and Creswell describes a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis as ‘the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon’ (Creswell 2013, p. 76).

Temporality, as defined by Mattsson and Kemmis, refers to the location of time in which the text is being captured (Mattsson & Kemmis 2007). In contrast, ‘the stories being told in hermeneutic phenomenological research are in a data bank, ready for interpretive analysis—they are complete, whole, freed from time’ (Lindsay 2006, p. 36). This allows for a fuller social and pragmatic picture of the stories to be considered and understood and it allows the researcher to make a better contextualised interpretation of the data.

Education and literacy change constantly within a social context. Hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodological approach not only allows similar themes to be considered and presented, but also an interpretative narrative to be given to the shared experiences. As it relates to this research project, it takes the individual stories from Year 6 teachers, anchored in a particular time and place, interprets the resulting themes and situates these more broadly within a 21st century context, in order to illuminate attitudes, perceptions, views, and practices of literacy teaching and learning.
3.5.5 Interpreting the individual narratives to produce hermeneutic phenomenological texts

The process of taking individual narratives collected through a narrative inquiry method and developing them into a collective narrative, or text, is part of the phenomenological process (van Manen 2002). Smith, Flowers and Larkin offer a framework for this process, suggesting that researchers need to become familiar with the individual narratives, then to look for emergent themes, followed by identifying connections between them (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009). This becomes the basis on which to create a text that transforms a lived experience into a textual expression of its essence in such a way that the effect of the text is a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful from the individual narratives (van Manen 1990, p. 36).

Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, Smith, Flowers and Larkin offer four stages to creating a text that represents the individual narratives.

Reading the narratives

First, Smith, Flowers and Larkin suggest that the researcher must re-read the individual narratives. At this stage the researcher needs to be aware of their subjectivity (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009). Finlay suggests that ‘researchers need to bring a critical self-awareness of their own subjectivity, vested interests, predilections and assumptions and to be conscious of how these might impact the research’ (Finlay 2012, p. 25). Therefore, when the researcher re-reads the individual narratives, it is important to do so with an acknowledgement of the researcher’s bias, and to attempt to read them with an open mind.

Initial noting

This re-reading of the individual narratives should be accompanied by initial noting (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009). ‘The researcher maintains an open mind and notes anything of interest within the transcript. This process ensures a growing familiarity within the transcript, and moreover, it begins to identify specific ways by which the participants talk about, and think about an issue’
(Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 83). These initial notes may also be referred to as *field texts* (Connelly & Clandinin 2006).

**Developing emergent themes:**

Next, with field texts established to identify significant events, conversations, experiences, and practices, the researcher should look to identify emergent themes (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009). ‘In looking for emergent themes, the task of managing the data changes as the researcher simultaneously attempts to reduce the volume of detail (the transcript and the initial notes) whilst maintaining complexity, in terms of mapping the interrelationships, connections and patterns between exploratory notes’ (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 91). This is the step where phenomena are identified (Wolcott 2001).

**Searching for connections across emergent themes:**

With the themes identified, the final stage in producing hermeneutic phenomenological texts is to consider the connections between the themes. Carman (2008) considers this to be hermeneutical excavation, or ‘the act of drawing out, eliciting, evoking, and uncovering’ (Carman 2008). This involves the researcher charting, or mapping, how the themes fit together and why. As Jeong-Hee says, it is about understanding and exploring the ideologies, prejudices and assumptions, and analysing them (Jeong-Hee 2012).

This section reviewed the specifics of the particular methodologies I have employed in this research project and why I chose them. In the next section I consider the overall ontological orientation of my work.

**3.6 Ontological and epistemological orientations within this research project**

When considering the ontological orientation of this research, I was drawn to Sandra Harding’s paper on feminist thought in economics (Harding 1995), where she posed the following questions:
Is there only one basic structure of reality? Can anyone produce culture-free representations of reality? Is the partiality of our representations only a problem or inconvenience rather than an epistemic resource? (Harding 1995, p. 1)

The purpose of this research is to understand and value many structures of reality. I would suggest that its ontological orientation is one of many realities informed by various culturally laden values and factors. Tony Lawson, in his paper ‘Theorizing Ontology’ (Lawson 2003) suggests that ontology can make intelligible any, and all, patterns of social experience, assuming they are theorised within a social construct. This research project attempts to do just that, to understand the experience of the participants in their context.

As mentioned previously, I do not attempt to delineate one sole version of truth, but rather to embrace rather many truths, as informed by the socially constructed reality. In seeking a way to defend this pursuit of ‘many truths’, I was drawn to Steve Fuller’s article, where he playfully describes ‘truths’ at the expense of physics:

The rhetoric surrounding science ‘aiming for the truth’ is an atavism of a collective teleological (e.g. positivist and idealist) approach to knowledge, which while true to James Ferrier’s original nineteenth-century coinage of ‘epistemology’, applies much less today—at least as an assumption about the pursuit of knowledge. In its original nineteenth-century context, ‘aiming for the truth’ meant the ultimate systematic representation of reality, which now largely only physicists continue in their quest for a ‘Grand Unified Theory of Everything’. (Fuller 2012, p. 12)

While playful, Fuller’s point is accurate for this research project: Many truths are sought, to help investigate and understand more comprehensively the discourse in which Year 6 teachers live and work, as they attempt to create effective 21st century literacy pedagogy. Therefore, an epistemological orientation that is sympathetic to many truths is necessary.
To this point I have been focused on why the various approaches are well suited to the aims of this research project. It is also important to consider the limitations of these approaches and I do this in the next section.

3.7 Potential limitations of the methodologies

It is important to note that rather than seeking to present one truth, this research project presents many truths. Likewise the results do not seek to produce one answer; in fact, they do not seek to produce any answers per se. Instead, they seek to inform, to offer insights and to give context and understanding. While this may be seen as a limitation, I personally do not see it this way, but it is important to be clear what the methodologies within this study seek to achieve.

Tensions between the two methodologies have been considered. It is important to emphasise that the methodologies seek to give two interpretations of the data with neither being more valuable than the other. For example, if the phenomenological interpretation was constructed as being more valuable than the narrative interpretation because it considered the entire sample—that would certainly be seen as a limitation. The two methodologies need to be seen as equally important, as offering insight and understanding into the research questions, just through different lenses.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to present and discuss the two methodologies that underpin the design of this study. The methodologies, while standing alone, also seek to complement each other. Narrative inquiry seeks to collect and interpret individual stories, while hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to interpret and present collective experiences and give insight into collective phenomena.
In Chapter Four, which focuses on data collection, data analysis, and data presentation, I will outline and discuss in detail how I used aspects of these two methodologies.

3.9 Dear Diary—I’m learning to love methodological discussions

I wonder if anybody else has experienced this … when I started work on my PhD, I found methodologies were hard work; in fact I used to dread reading the methodological literature, mainly because it was often very abstract. Considering that when I began the PhD, my research questions were not very clear, and my understanding of the literature certainly was limited, adding the extra dimension of abstract methodological orientations, was, at times, almost enough to tip me over the edge!

However, as time passed and I became more familiar with the literature and started to evolve my research questions, something changed. Methodologies became my friend. They guided me. To experienced researchers I’m sure this is very obvious. And probably experienced researchers will be rolling their eyes at this comment. But for me it was significant. I went from resenting the heavy theoretical underpinnings of the methodologies I was using, to craving the methodology discussions, because they guided the research, and gave me a way of looking at, and understanding my data. I reached a point where I wanted to begin conversations with my supervisors with a methodological discussion. I went from not liking it, to loving it! Reflecting on how this happened is noteworthy.

My Principal Supervisor is wise. I came to the PhD journey with my ‘practitioner’ hat firmly in place. I wanted to do a PhD that understood practice, and I wanted to use practice as my ‘vehicle’ to create that understanding. My Supervisor could have said ‘well then a PhD isn’t for you’!
Instead she took a different tack. She let me explore, wonder, and read. She asked questions that, without my even realising, took me from being a dogmatic practitioner down a slightly different path, one where she gently encouraged me to look through a different lens. I’m grateful that she had the courage (and patience) to do this, because by gently easing me towards a different path, I’ve emerged as a different (and in my view better) thinker. I see the world differently. I’m still a practitioner, but I’m a better practitioner because I’m also a researcher. Methodologies helped me understand the world around me by giving me a context through which to view that world; they now help guide, rather than stunt my conversations.

This was certainly a journal entry I thought I would never write!
4 Method

4.1 Dear Diary—Getting ready to enact my research

As I sit here trying to incorporate all that I have learned so far in my review of the literature and especially my growing understanding and love of methodologies, I am struck by the fact that I now have to put all this into practice. I need to get enough research participants to satisfy the aims of the study and I need to be clear about exactly how I am going to go about doing this. I am anxious about people’s reactions, will they engage with this work, how will I handle people who may react negatively to my research questions? How will I make it around the countryside to get to all the interviews before the school holidays and will I get data that addresses my research questions? It is daunting because this is where ‘the rubber meets the road’, time to get out there and get on with it...

4.2 Introducing the research design and methods

This study, which focuses on Year 6 Victorian Government primary school teachers’ perceptions and enactments of literacy in and for the 21st century, is a qualitative study that seeks to interpret and understand teachers’ lived experiences. The preceding chapter outlined the theoretical reasoning behind the study design. In this chapter I describe how the methodologies were enacted. Specifically, I describe how the study was designed and how the data were collected, analysed and presented. I outline the data collection methods and how these methods link to the research questions and aims. The ethics process is outlined, and a discussion of the ethical considerations associated with this study is presented. I also outline how I recruited participants, and some of the issues and challenges I faced. Finally, I discuss how I interpreted, analysed and reported the data, including the limitations of the data interpretation methods.
This research project collected data from 15 participants who were teaching Year 6 in Victorian government primary schools. Data was collected through one-hour semi-structured interviews that took place in the participants’ classrooms. The data collection period was between July and September 2013.

4.3 Designing the study

4.3.1 Research questions

This research project sought to better understand three questions, namely:

1. What literacy skills and practices do teachers in Victorian primary schools perceive as necessary for Year 6 students to be able to participate successfully in their 21st century world?
2. How do teachers in Victorian primary schools define 21st century literacy, and how do they enable this learning for their Year 6 students?
3. Who or what influences teachers’ practices associated with the development and enactment of literacy learning for Year 6 students in and for the 21st century?

4.3.2 Ethics

In May 2013, the Deakin University Human Ethics Advisory Group approved my Low Risk Ethics Application. My application to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to Conduct Research in Victorian Government Schools was also approved at this time.

4.3.3 Recruitment

The recruitment of participants was in accordance with the research design, and was approved by Deakin University and The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria. The process involved generating a list of Victorian government Schools that I was able to travel to and emailing a Plain Language Statement to the Principals and asking them to forward this to their Year 6 classroom teachers. Teachers who received this document were invited to review it and if they were interested in participating in the study, to contact me via email to register their interest. I then contacted the teacher volunteers by phone to discuss the study further, answer any questions they had about their
participation in the study, confirm whether they were interested in participating in the study, and confirm a convenient interview time.

Reflecting on this process, it was not particularly successful. I contacted 153 schools, and received 22 replies, of which only 16 participants finally agreed to be a part of the study.

4.3.4 Data collection method

Data for this study was collected through one-hour semi-structured interviews conducted during Term 3, 2013. All interviews were conducted after the school day had finished, and all interviews were conducted in the participant’s classroom. All participants were given a copy of the semi-structured interview questions prior to the interview, and were invited to bring along any materials, such as work samples or planning documents, that might help guide the interview.

The semi-structured interview questions included:

- What literacy skills do Year 6 students need in order to be successful participants in their current school environment?
- Do Year 6 students require different literacy skills to participate in out-of-school literacy practices?
- Could you predict some of the literacy skills students currently in Year 6 may require in order to be successful when they leave school?
- How would you define 21st century literacy skills?
- Can you reflect on the literacy skills you identified and suggest which of those skills you would consider to be 21st century literacy skills?
- What professional skills do teachers need to enable Year 6 students to learn 21st-century literacy skills? What role do you play in developing these skills?
• What professional behaviours do teachers need to enable Year 6 students to learn 21st century literacy skills? What role do you play in fostering these behaviours?
• What factors within schools enable teachers to promote the development of 21st century literacy skills for their Year 6 students?
• What factors within schools inhibit teachers from promoting the development of 21st century literacy skills for their Year 6 students?

The interviews were audio recorded, in accordance with the study design and ethics approval. At the conclusion of each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed. All audio recordings and documents associated with data collection were kept in a locked cupboard in my home office.

4.4 Ethical considerations

A number of ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure appropriate protection for the participants in this study, as follows.

4.4.1 Protecting anonymity

All participants were given pseudonyms and their workplace was not named. All participants were given a copy of their interview transcript and invited to review it, and add or delete anything they wished. Of the fifteen participants who completed the research process, thirteen made additions and one made a deletion.

4.4.2 Withdrawal from the research

In accordance with the ethics guidelines, participants could withdraw from the study at any time, up to the point of publication. One participant made the decision to withdraw her data from the study as she felt the research questions were poorly written and presented. She felt that I was trying to present an unfair agenda and that she would be presented in a negative light. As a result, her data was withdrawn from the study.
4.5 Analysing the data

The study seeks to analyse the individual and collective experiences of Year 6 teachers in Victorian classrooms. Therefore, two methodologies, narrative inquiry and hermeneutic phenomenology, were employed to interpret, analyse and present the findings. This section outlines how I used these two methodologies to, in the first instance, interpret individual stories and, in the second instance, interpret the collective experience.

4.6 Narrative inquiry analysis

As already mentioned, narrative inquiry is a qualitative research approach that seeks to interpret and understand lived experiences. In this study, narrative inquiry was used to interpret the individual experiences and perceptions of Year 6 classroom teachers in relation to how they understand and enact 21st century literacy, and the factors that seem to have influenced their literacy teaching practice. The following outlines the aspects of narrative inquiry that were employed and how they were used.

4.6.1 Meeting the participants and conducting the interviews

All semi-structured interviews were completed at the participant’s place of work—specifically, their classroom. After engaging in the initial introductory conversations, I took time to observe the classroom, and take some brief notes. These, in my view, correspond to what Clandinin and Connelly (2000b) refer to as Field Notes: that is, my jottings and observations of what I observed. The purpose of these notes was to help me contextualise what the participants were sharing with me.

After a brief walk around the classroom, I sat with each participant at a classroom table. I always sat beside the participant, in the hope that this would make the interview feel more like a conversation than an interview. All interviews were recorded digitally. As the interviews were semi-structured, at
times I let the interview flow to matters that the participant wanted to address. This gave me some data that was not related to this study, but I felt it was important for the interview to have flow, to help avoid the participant feeling as though I wanted one ‘specific answer’.

It is important to note the impact that relationships have at the interview stage. Polkinghorne (1988), along with other authors who write in the narrative inquiry area, makes mention of the importance of relationships within the process of collecting data. This was true for this study as well. By the time I reached the stage of conducting the semi-structured interviews, I had had frequent communication with all the participants. In most cases the participants either knew me, or knew of me, as I had worked in the region as a classroom teacher, consultant and academic for some years. I decided that investing time in the relationship with each participant was important, because it enriched the data, and from the participants’ view, gave the (correct) impression that I was interested in their work and views. I did not walk into any semi-structured interview without a significant amount of preparation. I had talked with each participant at length, knew a little of their background, attempted to find out what they were working on in their classroom, and understand their school culture and background. This allowed me to weave context into the semi-structured interview, which meant that I was able to ‘walk with’ (Polkinghorne 1988) the participant in their interview and embrace their school circumstances. In turn, this gave a richness to the data that otherwise may have been missing.

4.6.2 Transcription of the data
At the conclusion of the interviews, I transcribed each interview from the recording. I did this immediately, as it gave me an opportunity to reflect on my experience of the interview. Once the data was transcribed, I went through the document and included my own observations from the classroom. I used two different colours to differentiate the interview transcript and my observations. The transcript, including my observations, was then sent to the participant for
his/her approval, which was received in all cases, with only minor grammatical changes. The resulting documents were what Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000b) call Field Texts.

4.6.3 Analysing the data using a narrative inquiry framework

A central purpose of this study is to interpret and understand the lived experiences of Year 6 teachers as they seek to enact literacy in and for the 21st century at an individual level, and to uncover themes at a collective level, in order to answer my research questions. As outlined in Chapter 3, to analyse the individual experiences I drew on aspects of the narrative inquiry approach, and completed the following steps:

1. I began by taking three different coloured highlighters. Each colour represented one of my three overarching research questions. I read each field text and coded the data against the research questions.

2. I was aware that as a narrative inquirer, my task in the analysis stage was not to simply code the data, but to code the data with the goal of trying to understand the participant’s story at a particular point in time, within a social context, taking into account historical influences and considering future paths.

This meant that I had to begin to feel comfortable with a degree of subjectivity within the analysis (Connelly & Clandinin 2006). I then took each piece of coded data and overlaid my own observations about the history of the school, demographic information, and incidental conversations that I had had with the participant, either prior to or after the semi-structured interview, thus giving context to the analysis.

3. Next, it was important to write the narratives. When doing so, I tried to tell the story not only of what each participant thought or did, but why
they thought or did what they did. I wanted to give richness to the narrative by interweaving context within the coded data. The result is what I called participant narratives.

4. When I had finished, I sent each participant their narrative, asking them to review it and consider the following three questions:

   a. Does this narrative accurately represent you as a Year 6 literacy teacher?
   b. Does this narrative accurately represent your views and perceptions?
   c. Is there anything you wish to delete, add or adapt to ensure this narrative accurately represents your identity as a Year 6 literacy teacher?

5. In all cases I followed up with a phone call to see if I had understood their story and their context correctly. This phone call gave me further field notes to work with. Once I had the documents back, I reviewed my coding, my contextual notes, and the additions and deletions made by the participants, and added information from the field notes gleaned from the follow up phone calls.

6. With this analysis work completed, I looked for themes inside the individual narratives. I knew that I had the data coded and contextualised under each of the research questions, but as I really wanted to ‘tell the story’ of the individual, I wanted the narrative to feel ‘individual’, not just a report against a research question. So I took the research question, the coded data, and the contextual notes, and developed themes based on the participants’ interpretations of the research question. These themes form the sub-headings, shown in quotation marks, in the individual narratives (provided in Chapter 5).
7. I then wrote the final narratives, which told the story of the participants within the context of their lived experiences. I offered my own analysis within the narrative to try to give additional context or insight into the lived experience of each participant.

8. The final stage was to send each participant their final narrative, to ensure they were satisfied with how I had told their story. It is worth noting that all participants in this study were satisfied with their narrative at this point, and no changes were requested.

9. Chapter 5 of this study, titled ‘Narratives from the Field’ presents the narratives for this study. Each narrative begins with an introduction to the participant and briefly outlines their background, before sharing their story.

10. Each narrative within Chapter 5 ends with a reflective paragraph from me which reflects on my experience of the interview and reports on some of the observations I made within the interview.

4.7 A hermeneutic phenomenological analysis

This study was about understanding both individual and collective experiences. While narrative inquiry was used to analyse and interpret individual experiences, hermeneutic phenomenology was used to analyse and interpret the collective experiences of the participants in this study.

Phenomenology allows for the study of the collective experience (Henriksson & Friesen 2012). To gain insight into the collective experience in this study, I used the same semi-structured interview data, but analysed the fifteen transcripts as one data set, using aspects of phenomenology.
4.7.1 The initial hermeneutic phenomenological analysis

In order to conduct this analysis, I put all the transcripts together in their raw form and read them as one document, rather than fifteen separate documents. I then read through the document again, this time noting key words and phrases that were emerging out of the data. I listed 74 key phrases. Next, I looked for similarities, which led to grouping the phrases under themes, using the language that the participants had presented to me. The resulted was the following 24 key themes:

1. Defining 21st century literacy.
2. Defining 21st century technology within the literacy domain.
3. Limited professional development in 21st century literacy.
4. The challenge of creating change in a literacy classroom.
5. The impact of the Australian Curriculum.
6. The challenge of testing and assessing non-traditional literacies.
7. Parental support for 21st century literacy.
8. 21st century literacy defined as the effective use of technology.
9. Privileging traditional literacy basics.
10. The impact of socioeconomic and cultural background.
11. The influence and impact of school leadership.
12. The role parents play in teacher decision-making.
14. Does society wants to teach literacy for now or for the future?
15. What happens when the next fad comes along?
16. The challenge of schools being too busy to focus on 21st century literacy.
17. Students already know this stuff.
18. Parents really should be teaching their children about 21st century technology.
19. Literacy isn’t all about computers or technology.
20. My students cannot be trusted with technology. It has to be supervised very closely.
21. We don’t have access to 21st century tools.
22. 21st century literacy is very expensive and our Curriculum Coordinator does not allocate enough funding.
23. It’s not a focus for our school.
24. We don’t focus too much on it because we are concerned about cyber bullying.

4.7.2 Coding the data against key phrases
With such a large number of key phrases identified, it was not practical to colour code the data and so I used 24 large pieces of cardboard, and pasted the data onto the cardboard. This gave me a very visual representation of where participants were focusing within each of the themes. This part of my analysis was informed by the method work of Blake (2004).

4.7.3 Critically analysing the coded themes
What became clear was that over half of the themes identified received very little attention from most participants. On the basis of five or fewer mentions, I discarded 12 of the themes. I kept track of the discarded themes and saved the data for investigation in future research.

The remaining 12 themes each had more than 12 data points. I then mapped the themes against my research questions. What became clear was that three of the themes, although interesting, were not related to the research questions at all. These too were discarded, although they may also provide scope for future research.

This left me with nine coded themes:
1. Defining 21st century literacy.
2. Creating change in my literacy classroom.
3. 21st century literacy and the use of technology.
4. Traditional literacy ‘basics’ versus more contemporary literacy practices.
5. The impact of socioeconomic and cultural background.
6. The influence and impact of school leadership.
7. The role parents play in teacher decision-making.
9. Does society wants to teach literacy for now or for the future?

While I would have preferred to deal with all nine themes, I knew that there was not the room for that many in this study. Ultimately, I decided to include six themes. The criteria for inclusion were that all participants had made mention of the theme, and the theme was linked clearly to one of my three research questions.

As a result, I ended up with the following themes:

1. Understandings and perceptions of 21st century literacy (linked to the first part of research question 2, namely, how do teachers in Victorian primary schools define 21st century literacy?)
2. The challenge of understanding and enacting 21st century literary pedagogy (linked to the second part of research question 2, namely, how do teachers enable 21st century literacy learning for Year 6 students?)
3. Using 21st century technologies to engage in 20th century literacy practices (linked to research question 1, namely, what literacy skills do teachers in Victorian primary schools perceive as necessary for Year 6 students to be able to participate successfully in their 21st century world?)
4. (Mis)conceptions of student literacy ‘needs’ in the 21st century (again linked to research question 1)
5. Perceptions of the influence that student backgrounds and lived experience have on literacy pedagogy (linked to research question 3, namely, who or what influences teachers’ practices associated with the
development and enactment of literacy learning in and for the 21st century?

6. Perceptions of the influence of school leadership on 21st century literacy pedagogy (again linked to the research question 3).

With the themes decided, I could code the data with specific focus questions in mind, confident that they related to the research questions and aims of this study, and knowing that there was strong supporting data within the transcripts.

4.7.4 The final themes
In order to keep the phenomenological analysis as pure as possible, I returned to an original copy of the transcripts. I re-read the document in its entirety, and checked that the themes I had identified were prominently located in the data. I coded the data using six different coloured highlighters, one for each theme. I then grouped the information according to its thematic colour, affording insights into the themes.

4.7.5 Interpreting each theme
With the now coded data, I began to look at how each participant saw the theme. Were there common experiences (Henriksson & Friesen 2012)? What were the similarities, and what were the differences? I then coded the themed data around the similarities and differences that I had identified. I realised that while there were similar themes, participants were experiencing those themes very differently.

4.7.6 Deciding how to frame each theme
When I reviewed my thematic texts it became apparent that there was a common language within each of the individual themes. I used this common language to frame the theme and give it a title. While I was interested in hearing the individual voices of the participants, I had to look for language that was common between them for the collective analysis.
4.7.7 Writing the final hermeneutic phenomenological text

Chapter 6, ‘Exploring a Gallery of Themes’, presents these shared experiences and explores some of the key phenomena from this study. The data analysis suggests that participants experience common themes in different ways. I embraced this, and undertook to highlight these differences. In order to offer a balanced view of the themes, I wrote the final text including the participants’ voices, my own understanding and insights into their story and their context, and voices from the literature.

4.8 Can my voice be a part of the research?—Explaining the use of my narrative as part of the research process

Throughout my doctoral studies I have kept a detailed journal. It’s handwritten and very personal. It contains my thoughts, fears, wonderings, frustrations, … the lot really. It’s my ‘research training download’.

In the final stage of my PhD, one of my Associate Supervisors challenged me to consider using this journal as an authentic piece of data to capture my lived experience. His point (and I agree) was that my methodological orientation was built on understanding peoples’ stories—their lived experiences. The obvious question was why wasn’t my story a part of it. Narrative is about a socially constructed paradigm between people, and removing my voice from the study would actually take away a piece of the story.

I took his advice and have used my diary entries as pieces of data, but I did so in a very systematic manner.

I began by reviewing my diary entries. I coded them into stages and against my PhD themes. Next I wrote a more ‘polished’ version of the entry capturing the
essence of the initial diary jottings. These revised entries form reflections at the beginning and ending of each chapter of this thesis.

I wanted my narrative to represent me in the research. However, I felt that a diary entry alone was not enough and, from a methodological point of view, I needed to analyse these entries. So I re-read my journal entries, looking for themes in my own learning. The following themes emerged:

- The beginning of the doctoral journey
- The emerging researcher
- The love of research
- The power of wondering
- The changing of identity
- Me—as a researcher

These themes are explored, discussed and critiqued in the final chapter, entitled ‘My Journey as a Doctoral Student’, in which I provide my own insights into my research training, specifically focusing on my role as a narrative inquirer and a phenomenologist.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the research design including how the research was conducted and the associated ethical considerations. It also describes how I collected, interpreted, analysed and presented the data, using the two approaches identified in the methodology chapter. I also explain why and how I have incorporated, analysed and reported my narrative.

The following two chapters present the interpreted data from this study. Chapter 5, ‘Narratives from the Field’, presents the individual narratives, while Chapter 6, ‘Exploring a Gallery of Themes’, presents the collective experiences.
4.10 Dear Diary—I’m feeling like a researcher

I did it! I had a clear approach, I got the participants I needed and their stories have given me great insights into my research questions. I thought that this was where this research project would ‘get real’ and it did. While coding and re-coding the data was painstaking and slow, it was wonderful to watch the themes emerge. It was the start of it all coming together.
5 Narratives from the Field

5.1 Dear Diary—Nerves as I become a narrative inquirer

I’m feeling very vulnerable as a research student. It is the week before I start my first round of interviews, and for some reason it feels ‘high stakes’. What happens if I don’t get the data I need to interpret my research questions? What happens if I can’t encourage participants to open up? This research is built on trying to get the ‘insider view’—maybe I won’t have the skills?

Talking with other research students who are at a similar stage to me, I’m even more anxious. They all seem so excited and ‘ready’, while I feel nervous and unsure. I’ve decided to trust my reading and my belief in the research and, confident that I will be respectful, I hope that my research participants are willing to expose their views and experiences.

5.2 Introduction

This study seeks to present the individual and collective experiences of Year 6 teachers; their perceptions and practices of literacy teaching in and for the 21st century. This chapter presents the individual narratives. The aim of this chapter is to introduce the study participants, to tell their stories of how they teach literacy, and to explore some of the factors that influence their literacy teaching.

Fifteen narratives are presented, from a range of Year 6 teachers. Victorian regional and Melbourne metropolitan teachers are represented in the study, with experience ranging from graduate to leading teacher. A balance of male and female teachers is also represented.

Each narrative begins by introducing the participant and identifying their context. The narratives are crafted using the methodological process theorised
in the Methodology chapter and outlined in the Method chapter. Each subheading represents one of the research questions, but is tailored and individualised, using quotes from the participant.

5.3 Shaun’s Story

Shaun is an early career teacher, who currently works in a regional government primary school in Victoria, Australia. He has taught Year 6 for four years, and has also taught in the United Kingdom.

5.3.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘It’s all about technology’

For Shaun, literacy in the 21st century is all about the effective use of technology. He is passionate about the resources his school is allocating to this area, and especially about the way he uses devices.

I just started reading Matilda on the iPads with a group of kids. They’ve enjoyed it so far. It’s the first time I’ve done guided reading with iBooks, but it’s been good because I’ll watch them read and double tap to define a word. When we got to the last word on the bottom of the first page that we read, I got them to highlight it, insert a note, and make a summary of what the page was about. Then I got them to highlight what they thought was the most important sentence on the page and make a note as to why. And then on the next page, I got them to highlight an interesting word and make a note as to why. Those notes are visual and they stay there so we can go back and see what things they found interesting.

When Shaun was specifically questioned about how he would define 21st century literacy, he talked about the importance of being multiliterate:

[It’s about] being able to read and respond to different kinds of texts. I use as much real-life stuff as I can, e.g., things like ‘Behind the News’, that’s relevant and up to date. The Herald-Sun is quite good at having specials at different times of year that I take advantage of, because they’re topical and they’re things that you can discuss that the kids have a background knowledge about, and
therefore they can bring stuff to the table. For example, earlier in the year they had a special on Australian history, so we got the newspapers because there were lift-outs that related to a specific sort of area of Australian history. And it’s also about stuff they know a little bit about already, so they can build on that knowledge and take it a bit further.

Shaun was not prepared to elaborate further on what he understood literacy in the 21st century to mean, and while he talked about being literate with both paper and electronic texts, he didn’t extend this definition to the need to be strategic in terms of what is required in any given context. He strongly believes that children need to be competent and capable users of technology, but considers that often this learning is located outside the classroom. By contrast, Shaun sees his own role in enacting literacy as using devices in the classroom to engage students in learning.

5.3.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘It’s not just about cutting and pasting’.
Shaun presents as a caring and committed teacher who is passionate about literacy and student engagement. He is of the view that the literacy skills that Year 6 students require include an element of digital literacy—namely, understanding how to use technology effectively. In particular, he feels that the critical literacy skills associated with how to read and summarise from a website are important skills for Year 6 students to learn, although he doesn’t appear to take it to the point of considering the reliability of the information, or the intent of the publisher. For example:

They certainly need to be able to understand and put something in their own words. I think this is something all Grade 5 and 6 teachers should focus on—not just being able to cut and paste something, but to be able to interpret something. For example, we’re doing information reports at the moment, and they’ve chosen to write a report about elephants. You can tell that it’s just being copied and pasted, rather than written for themselves. And I think that’s a big thing because there’s so much information out there that they can just
copy and paste. If you don’t teach them how to understand something and put it in a sentence for themselves, they just copy and paste. The problem is that they don’t necessarily want to take the effort or time to write something for themselves.

Along with being able to interpret and summarise information from the Internet, Shaun also pays particular attention to communication, feeling that children need to be taught appropriate ways to communicate in different contexts, both online and in real-world settings.

Kids need to be able to communicate effectively in different settings and understand that the language that you use with your friends face-to-face is different from the way that you talk to each other on Facebook, and that has to be different from the way that you talk to your family and your boss if you’ve got a part-time job.

Indirectly, Shaun also referenced multimodality when he outlined another literacy practice that he felt was more closely associated with 21st century literacy:

We do Reflective Writing weekly on their class blog. We never know if anyone outside the school is reading them, but for some of them, it is just about the fact that they could be. There have been some extra pieces of writing on their class blog partly because they know it’s going to be published for the world to see, and that makes spelling and grammar and punctuation a big thing, something they often forget. When they publish a piece of writing on a good piece of paper and it’s beautifully handwritten, their commas and full stops are all in the right places. And then when they type it into the computer, all sense of grammar and spelling disappears. And it’s a good learning thing to be able to put something up on the screen and say: right, what’s wrong with this. You’ve written something just for me, the teacher, and it’s perfect and beautiful. Now you’ve written something for the whole world to see—what needs to change? And I’ve found that is a good strategy for them.
Shaun has a philosophical commitment to exposing young people to technology and he is of the view that to be literate in the 21st century, people need to be expert users of digital technologies, both for meaning making and for communication.

**5.3.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘I know this isn’t right—but it’s what you have to do’**

Shaun’s story takes a troubling turn from this point. It is clear that he is very committed to digital literacy practices. He was attempting to articulate relevant skills that children need in order to be literate in the 21st century world, and is passionate about the technological devices that he is using (and in which his school was investing). However, when Shaun shared what he was currently doing with his Year 6 class, it became evident that much of what he had spoken about was not his actual practice. The following is Shaun’s recap of his reading block:

> At the moment we’re reading a serial together and the main focus is working on the difference between summarising and retelling, mainly because a lot of the kids don’t understand how to summarise, they just want to regurgitate something. It is clear that they can read something back, but not necessarily understand what they are reading. So we’re reading a chapter book together. Three years ago we received a set of books written about a football player who is being drafted. Basically we read the chapter together and then the kids have to summarise the chapter we’ve read.

> Then we do elements of the daily five—we do two rotations. They read-to-self for 15-20 minutes every morning, and then they do read-to-someone. And during that time I’ll have a guided group with me. I try and tailor the books to their interests.
When I questioned Shaun as to why there was such a discrepancy between his views on 21st century literacy and his actual enactment of his reading block, he felt uncomfortable and acknowledged the discrepancy. He is teaching his reading block this way because he feels that this type of teaching is what is expected of him. Furthermore, he feels pressure from colleagues and parents to enact this type of learning for his students.

Shaun’s story illustrates a current dilemma: On the one hand, a philosophical commitment to enacting literacy learning that is representative of 21st century literacy practices. On the other, teachers feel that they are expected to utilise traditional literacy learning practices for their students.

5.3.4 Reflecting on Shaun’s interview
Shaun presented as a very casual character. His classroom was neat and tidy, but there was little evidence of work displayed. Shaun remarked that he chose to be a part of the study because it was something he was interested in, but hadn’t really thought much about. He was hoping that I would be able to offer some professional development in the area. Shaun’s interview did not have a smooth feel to it. It was disjointed, and at times frustrating as Shaun often changed the subject to discuss something completely irrelevant, such as football. Nonetheless, I walked away feeling that Shaun was interested in the topic, but that he thought rather than me asking questions, he would be getting a professional development session.

5.4 Mary’s Story
Mary’s undergraduate training was at Australian Catholic University, and her pre-teacher service literacy training focused on the Catholic Education Sector’s Children’s Literacy Success Strategy. This is significant because Mary referenced this program throughout her interview, was passionate about it, and felt that, for her, it represented what good literacy pedagogy should be.
Mary is an experienced teacher with over ten years’ experience in both Catholic and government schools, with the majority of her experience teaching Years 5 and 6 in Catholic schools. Mary has spent just over two years teaching Years 5 and 6 at a government school located in Melbourne’s Eastern suburbs.

5.4.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘Kids are getting lazier’

Mary’s story begins from a platform of understanding that in her view, literacy at school is about the formal conventions of the English language. Her priority for literacy learning is teaching an understanding of genres, and the textual features of genres.

Well I suppose there’s a lot of writing that’s done now in the real world that’s very informal. And for that reason I worry that there’s an assumption that good quality and formal writing don’t matter anymore—I guess it’s seen as old hat. And I don’t necessarily think that it is.

Mary expressed a concern that many of the literacy practices that people engage with are not in keeping with the traditional conventions of English, and therefore that schools are the place where these conventions need to be embraced and explicitly taught.

And so that makes our writing and our literacy programs at school more important, because if they’re not getting it here, then they’re not getting it out there in the real world. And so I think it has to come from school. And a lot of parents absolutely back us up at home. But largely I think, and I predict, that kids are sort of getting lazier and there’s this ‘that’ll do’ approach to literacy.

When pressed on what literacy in the 21st century means, Mary took the view that while traditional English conventions are the foundation for her literacy pedagogical beliefs, she feels that part of being literate in the 21st century is about knowing how to solve problems, and this may mean literacy problems. For example:
There’s stuff in our curriculum about using what you know and applying it to other things. So when you come across something that you don’t know how to do—let’s use what you know. So, tell me what you know, and tell me what you don’t know and let’s use that. If you can’t spell ‘twice’, let’s think, okay, what’s a rhyming word? Nice … So as far as what a good quality literacy classroom looks like for the 21st century, it’s all about problem solving, using that skill set, when we have no idea what’s coming at us.

Mary’s definition of 21st century literacy does not embrace the concepts of multiliteracies, multimodality or digital literacy, and does not go so far as to encompass the notion of students needing to be able to interpret and make judgements about what they are reading and the source of their information. In fact, during our conversation Mary made no positive reference to technology at all. Her comments about technology centred on protecting children from it or ensuring that school gave them an option other than technology.

5.4.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘Questioning is a big skill’

Mary was committed to her view that children in the 21st century need exposure and experience with the formal conventions of the English language. She has a strong view that children need to be able to write formally and with the correct spelling and grammar. However, Mary made the point that children also need to be able to ask questions in order to make sense of their world:

I think questioning is a big skill. Good students question things they don’t understand. Something a good reader does is challenge the text. I don’t want a child just sitting there. But I guess when they’re in a literacy group where they’re basically on the same level, they feel safe. So, yes questioning is important, and then I suppose being able to clearly articulate their thinking and draw conclusions, which I think ultimately is summarising, and [put together] that’s comprehension as a whole.
It is clear that Mary is trying to stay true to what she believes in, and I inferred from our interview that she recognises that while traditional models of literacy have some relevance, it is not the relevance in which Mary believes:

*You know it’s give an inch and there’s a mile gone. When I think about my own education, I think I was part of the process writing movement.*

*Grammatically there’s a lot of stuff that I didn’t explicitly do, but which I do with the kids. For example, a child saying to me, are you figuratively or literally going to do it? And then saying is that a synonym, or is that a metaphor? When you hear that, I think that’s real ownership of the language too, and that’s where there’s a real sense of achievement. Understanding conventions really does matter. They are skills children need.*

Mary believes that literacy skills for the 21st century are no different to the skills needed in previous eras. Her strong view is that if children can understand formal conventions, then they can transfer these and interact with the different literacy practices associated with the digital culture or the multimodal environment, without being explicitly taught how to do so.

**5.4.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘It’s all about listening, speaking and writing well’**

Mary’s philosophical views of literacy were consistent with her practices in her Year 6 classroom. Mary feels that speaking and listening are very important. She made mention of the THRASS program, which is a phonics program designed to make the conventions of the English language more explicit, which has influenced her enactment of literacy practices:

*We run the THRASS program that is all about listening. And I know that in the new curriculum it’s important … I think when kids can verbalise and say it out loud, that’s when you’ve got absolute clarity.*
However, it was clear that even more important to Mary is the need for explicit teaching in the formalities of writing:

*In my classroom I often talk with the kids about how writing has changed and perhaps how the formality of writing has fallen off. We were studying metaphorical language and the kids have really jumped onto it. I was being silly and saying to one of them the other day that if you don’t put your punctuation in there I might pick you up and throw you out the window. And the kids were saying: literally or figuratively?*

*We plan, draft, then revise and edit. I think that step of revision is not just looking for mistakes, but also improving. And I’ve got it colour coded so our green step is generally positive and that’s where your piece of writing goes from something good to something great. And it might be that you go in and alter your sentence structure or it might be that you add in commas or maybe you’re pulling out a word that really doesn’t need to be there, but I think that it is in writing where the good stuff happens.*

*I love our writing program and I think our kids like it. We do two genres a term and we do them over five weeks. Leading into that writing period, we are doing lots of shared reading, focusing on the text structure.*

Mary has a strong view that literacy in the 21st century is about ensuring that children have the skills and knowledge to engage in traditional notions of literacy and indeed, she was very committed not to mention digital literacy. In fact, when pressed on the subject of digital literacy and its place in 21st century literacy, she responded that too much attention was being paid to literacy practices that were not ‘pure’, and that this was confusing for the children and causing standards to drop.

### 5.4.4 A postscript to Mary’s story

About six weeks after my interview with Mary, she emailed me:
Dear Damien

I have thought a lot about my interview with you and am aware that I sounded like a Luddite. I am not anti-technology or anti-21st century literacy practices—I know they are here and becoming more important every day. The challenge for me is that I really don’t understand what this means for teaching or where we even begin to start with how to embrace this ‘new world’. For me, your interview has encouraged me to go and think more about what this actually means—and for that I thank you.

Regards,

Mary.

This was a very powerful email to receive as it highlights the challenge that Mary and other very established and respected teachers face; the awareness that literacy is changing and that schools need to reflect this change, accompanied by the fear of not knowing what this change might mean for them.

5.4.5 Reflecting on Mary’s interview

Mary was a very dedicated teacher who worked very long hours. Mary arrived at the interview with a number of articles and books that she had read in preparation for her interview with me. She has taken notes on each of the questions I had sent. What I didn’t realise as we began the interview was the papers and books Mary had read were actually to contradict 21st century literacy. Mary was fierce in her defence of traditional teaching, particularly in the area of literacy. Of course, it is most interesting that Mary followed up her interview with an email. I certainly did not expect this as the interview concluded. While I was surprised by many of Mary’s responses throughout the interview, it was clear that she was an extremely dedicated teacher who cared deeply for her students. This was most evident by the thank you cards from her students that surrounded her desk.
5.5 Kate’s story

Kate is a mid-career teacher who has teaching experience right through the primary school grades. Next year she will be leaving the classroom to pursue management opportunities. Kate currently works at a small regional primary school in Victoria, Australia. Her school is located within a public housing area. A methadone program was being run within her local community and a significant percentage of her class had parents who were on the methadone program.

5.5.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘My class is 1:1 technology’

Kate is very passionate about technology and the power of technology. She is of the firm view that children must be competent users of technology and she encourages her students at all stages to use technology where it is appropriate.

Kate believes that 21st century literacy sits in a dichotomy of traditional and technological literacies and she feels her challenge is to ‘balance’ the two.

Well, obviously it’s about the basics of reading, writing, speaking and listening, that’s your core business within literacy. But in this day and age there’s also a huge push technology-wise. So our job is to balance traditional literacy with technology and social media and all the other aspects that are in the children’s lives, and bring these together to create an engaging curriculum for them. They still need the skills of being able to read, being able to write, being able to communicate, but I think now it’s more important that they know how to do that digitally.

My class is 1 to 1 technology, so the grade sixers all have laptops. With the grade fives, we’ve gone with iPads, so a lot of our writing and reading activities are done on devices, perhaps more so than using traditional books, although we do use those as well. I guess your avenues open up with technology.
One of the reasons behind the direction that we’ve chosen to go with the iPads is that it’s become harder and harder to engage students in learning to read in the traditional methods. They all have iPads and iPhones and everything at home, so I guess we’re looking at other ways to engage them in the process of learning to read, as well as valuing reading as an important skill.

Technology plays a key part in Kate’s view of literacy in the 21st century. This is driven by a desire to engage students through using devices that are relevant to their world. That said, she locates her use of technology within more traditional literacy pedagogy, being of the view that learning to read and write forms the basis of a literacy curriculum. She did not, however, offer any detail into the kinds of literacy practices that such a curriculum may entail.

5.5.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘It’s part of their social being’

Interestingly, Kate’s focus on literacy skills is as much about the sociology of childhood as it is about skills to be literate in the 21st century. She is of the firm view that we need to understand the world of children if we are to create meaningful teaching and learning opportunities.

I mean you can say that they’re not important skills to us and to some adults, but to these children they are important skills. It’s a part of their social being and social acceptance.

Kate acknowledged that traditional notions of reading and writing are still valuable and very important, but also acknowledged that children need exposure to social networking, multimodal forms of communication, and explicit teaching in their safe and effective use.

I guess you’re not going to be terribly successful at anything if you can’t read and write. We do a lot of blogging and things like that, which are skills that are going to become more and more important in life. A lot of people are going down that path and have their personal blog, Facebook, MySpace and Twitter
accounts exposed and public. We need to teach children how to use these effectively and safely. It’s just as important as teaching them how to spell or write a narrative … probably more important.

Kate views literacy as a social production. Her views centre firmly on the idea that the 21st century is a world of multimodality, supported by ever-changing modes and styles of communication. She believes that children need specific skills to operate in this world if they are to be effective participants in 21st century life.

5.5.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘Technology enhances engagement’

Kate’s teaching is matched to her strong views on multimodal environments.

So in our 5-6 classroom at the moment, if you walked in at ten to nine, every student would be doing reading to self. A majority of them would have an iBook open on their iPad. Some would still have a book. It’s their choice. In guided reading we use the same thing, a lot of iBooks, so in guided reading sessions, they just would be loaded on all of their iPads. We have audio books for listening post type activities for comprehension. We’ve got gazillions of apps and things that we can use in our reading sessions. So the options are endless in terms of apps and programs and things like that.

[For example] the class made an app last year with their published writing in it. They then all downloaded it onto their iPads. It was shared with parents and the wider community. There was just so much engagement.

Kate is passionate about the meaningful use of technology. She is aware of trying not to use devices to replicate traditional models of literacy; rather, she wants to try to use devices to equip her students with the literacy skills and practices that are current and ‘in-use’ in the everyday environment. She acknowledged that this is her passion, and she has done a great deal of professional development on the topic. However, she has also encountered a
huge amount of opposition from her Principal, other teachers, and Department of Education consultants, all of whom have warned her about going too far down the ‘technology road’. This highlights another dilemma that many teachers are facing today and which is influencing literacy pedagogy; a lack of understanding, and the lack of a consistent approach amongst key stakeholders in the education sector in respect of the place of digital literacy in a 21st century literacy context.

5.5.4 Reflecting on Kate’s interview
Kate’s interview was very challenging for me. Kate appeared to be struggling within her school context and appeared quite disengaged with education. Kate struggled to respond to questions specifically related to the 21st century. Often Kate would say, “I don’t know”. It was difficult to understand why Kate was so enthusiastic about technology, but was struggling to connect literacy and the 21st century within that enthusiasm.

5.6 Georgie’s story
Georgie is a teacher with many years of experience. She currently works at a school in regional Victoria, Australia, and in addition to her Year 6 teaching responsibilities, she coordinates the whole school literacy program.

5.6.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘It’s about building comprehension’
Georgie’s views on 21st century literacy are cemented in the professional development she has done in the area of comprehension. She considers comprehension to be a central skill that is applicable to all literacy domains in the 21st century:

*If you can’t understand it, it doesn’t matter what mode it’s presented in …*

Much of Georgie’s work for Year 6 students is about building comprehension:
So, a lot of what we’ve done is really to build comprehension skills, actually getting the kids to think about what they’re reading; so that’s also metacognition as well. We use sticky notes and we get them to jot down their thoughts while they read. And I guess we’ve started to teach a lot more explicitly than we ever have in the past, so really looking at things like inferring and visualising and those really explicit parts of reading that we believe helps with writing too. So that’s been a really big change at school and for me that is what 21\textsuperscript{st} century literacy is all about.

We’ve introduced learning intentions and success criteria and we’ve looked at really planning quality or challenging tasks that the kids will be engaged in and that are more at their instructional level ... Then we’ve looked a lot at feedback and giving kids feedback. Not so much just ‘it’s good’ or ‘it’s whatever’ but really explicit feedback that then drives their learning further. For me, this is what 21\textsuperscript{st} century literacy is all about … it’s what 21\textsuperscript{st} century teaching and learning is all about.

Georgie embraces the concept of critical literacy, explaining that literacy in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century is about ensuring children have the skills to interpret information. One of the ways she believes children learn these skills is through specific and individual feedback on learning tasks that are often open ended, yet situated at the student’s point of need.

5.6.2 21\textsuperscript{st} century literacy skills: ‘Kids have to be able to solve problems’

Georgie is passionate about the skills children need in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. She acknowledged that she had been referring to ‘micro literacy skills’, but that her real passion is what she refers to as ‘macro literacy skills’, although she understands that the two go hand in hand. In the literature, this is known as multiliteracies: being familiar with multiple forms of texts but also being strategic and a problem solver. In addition, Georgie feels that in order for children to be able to solve their own literacy problems, they need to be explicitly taught how to reflect.
Kids need the capacity to solve their own problems. This is a macro skill. We must start with the macro skills and then work out the micro skills that go along with them. For example, if kids are to solve literacy problems (and this might be spelling or grammar for example), then they need skills to use a dictionary or a thesaurus. If we just focus on the micro without the macro, we lose our way.

Metacognition is the big one I’ve taken on board. Kids have their literacy learning goals, which always have an element of problem solving within them. We’re trying to actually generate curiosity and the questioning we use to engage them needs to encourage them to think about what they want to know, how they might find it out, how they might report it. This is all about being a reflective thinker.

For Georgie, the skills needed for the 21st century literacy environment are not embedded in technology; they are associated with thinking dispositions. 21st century literacy for Georgie involves children knowing how to find out the things that they need to know, and create meaning in ways that are considered socially appropriate.

5.6.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘We just get too wound up with technology’

Georgie is a passionate teacher who believes that technology is having a disproportionate influence on 21st century literacy practices:

I think sometimes we can just get too wound up with technology and just use it for the sake of using it. 21st century literacy has to move beyond that.

That does not mean that technology is not a part of her literacy learning environment. However, for Georgie the priority is getting her students reading books, as many of her children do not have access to technology in their homes.
In Year 6 we use netbooks a lot. iPads are used in the juniors. There are certain apps that we use, but there’s a limited amount, and again it’s a money issue. Our families are quite poor, and the school doesn’t have a lot of money … You know there’s that low socioeconomic problem … Although you know, kids are borrowing more books than they ever have before because they’ve got their own individual book boxes. But certainly we have other priorities. We believe that our children need to be exposed to the basics of literacy, and for us that means reading and writing.

Georgie was proud of the fact that her students were borrowing books from the library and were reading traditional texts, for both pleasure and information gathering.

Georgie has a strong understanding of some of the skills required to be literate in a 21st century context and believes that children needed to be taught to think both critically and creatively. She is also supportive of the notion of needing to be digitally literate, and while she is not anti-technology, she is against the notion of using technology for technology’s sake. It was unfortunate that we didn’t have time during the interview to allow her to elaborate further on her teaching practices in order to truly understand how she was actually doing this. I offered to phone her back, but she declined, as it was a busy time of the year.

5.6.4 Reflecting on Georgie’s interview

Georgie’s interview was an uplifting experience for me! Walking into her classroom it was clear that she was a very organised person. Georgie’s room was full of student work that was based around higher order thinking, and she had a bookshelf full of professional books. Georgie was upbeat and warm, offered me lollies, and invited me back to see her students at work. It was clear to me that Georgie was enjoying her work as a teacher and was proud of her students and the work they were producing.
5.7 Angela’s story

Angela is an extremely experienced Year 6 teacher, with over 25 years of teaching experience. She has coordinated literacy at her school for a number of years, and has worked as a literacy specialist within her school’s region.

5.7.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘It’s about a love of literature’

Angela is passionate about literacy and specifically about the notion of thinking within literacy. She has expertly used Bloom’s taxonomy to create literacy learning for her students, and has shared many of her resources within her local community.

Angela is a lover of literature, and sees many benefits for students in developing a love of literature. She believes that 21st century literacy is about developing a love of literature:

> 21st century literacy is about student engagement and being involved in the love of language. And it’s all about speaking, writing and reading. Whatever model you want to use, the main thing really is that you love language; you just have to love language more than anything. Whether they’re reading a Kindle or they’re reading a novel, it’s just that, the love of language. I don’t know if I’ve answered [your question], it’s too difficult.

Angela was not dismissing other aspects of 21st century literacy, but her strong view was that if children did not have a love of literature, it did not matter what other elements were present in their literacy world, a fundamental principle would be missing.

5.7.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘You need oral language to get a job’

Angela has a particularly interesting view on the skills that Year 6 students need in the 21st century. She believes that an understanding and good command of oral language is terribly important for young people.
In the 21st century, in order to get a job and communicate, you need to have good oral language skills. We do a lot of role playing and interviewing. We do debates and plays, mini plays. I do a lot of research. I get a lot of material.

Supporting the views of a number of researchers, and underscoring the phrase ‘highly educated useless people’ coined by Lee Crockett (2011), Angela went further, to emphasise that literacy in the 21st century should have a much stronger emphasis on preparing children for a future adult world:

There is now an expectation that children leave school with very sophisticated literacy skills. That puts a huge amount of pressure on teachers. Children are expected to be expert users of technology, have excellent critical and creative literacy skills, and be excellent communicators and writers. It’s hard to know where to start with such expectations.

Angela is not overwhelmed by the expectations, but is of the view that the skills Year 6 children now require are extremely sophisticated and that teachers need very sound pedagogical knowledge to be able to enact them in a literacy environment:

Teachers have to be extremely capable to be able to create a truly 21st century literacy curriculum. More skilled than at any other time in history I would think. I worry for young teachers; they have no real training and then are just expected to do so much with so little.

5.7.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘Kids just copy and paste’
At the time of the interview Angela was teaching a unit on Asia. The way that she describes it demonstrates her breadth of understanding of 21st century literacy practices, especially in the area of critical literacy:

We’re doing Asia and I got the library to bring out an amazing range of books on Cambodia, Laos, etc. So we spend about three weeks in the library. If they’ve chosen Vietnam, they get a book on Vietnam, etc. And they have to say
what the culture is, the history and the geography [of their chosen country]. But then they have to write it down in their own words, and write down the name of the book, and do the bibliography. I tell them that they read [to get] that information and write about it, and put the book in the bibliography. And I say that this will get you ready for Year 12. So I say, when you go on the Internet and you go into a site, you don’t know whether it’s authentic. Plus, they don’t read the information on the screen. They just copy it, paste it into a word document and then change it around and reconfigure the words. But now [with this approach] they’re actually reading, writing and then typing it up again.

In addition, Angela alludes to the different ways she exposes children to literature. On the one hand she outlines a more traditional mode (the library exposure to books), and on the other hand, the exposure is multimodal and digital. Angela suggests both modes have advantages and disadvantages:

I think books encourage kids to think more. They have to use higher levels of processing. The Internet is good, but you have to teach them the skills to use the Internet. That is something that I think is lacking, and this is why kids just copy and paste. I know I should teach these skills more, but honestly, I’m not even sure how I would do it well. I have a lifetime of experience teaching literacy using library books … The Internet world is new to me.

However, Angela’s unit on Asia also highlights a significant issue within the teaching of literacy. It was clear that she is more comfortable and experienced using print based materials and this influences her teaching of literacy. For her, using the Internet, while more current and representative of the 21st century, requires a different skill set; one that Angela doesn’t feel as comfortable with.

5.7.4 Reflecting on Angela’s interview
Unfortunately I was late to Angela’s interview! While Angela was very understanding, it nonetheless was embarrassing for me. Angela presented as a very busy teacher. During our interview she was interrupted four times by
different members of staff, including the principal, for information. Angela was warm and very charismatic. I recalled her perfect dress. I walked out of her classroom reflecting on how professional she spoke, dressed and interacted. I felt as though she had high expectations of herself, her students... and colleagues!

5.8 Brenda’s story

Brenda is a graduate teacher who completed her undergraduate training as a mature age student. Her career before teaching was in marketing. Brenda had always wanted to be a teacher and, after a distinguished career in marketing, she made the decision to complete her teacher training; she is now in her second year of teaching as a Year 6 teacher.

5.8.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘It’s about meaning and purpose’

In Brenda’s view, literacy in the 21st century is about meaning and purpose:

Without literacy being linked to the students’ real-world needs it is always going to miss the mark.

As a consequence, Brenda spends a great deal of time thinking about how to achieve this, especially in the face of competing agendas.

So it’s one thing to say it needs to be meaningful, it’s another thing to achieve it.

Trying to make it meaningful and purposeful. I’ve looked at the curriculum saying that we need to have digital literacy and all these things, and then I’ve come in and seen that you’ve got to also have skills for NAPLAN and all these other things that maybe aren’t so high level, but which need to be addressed in some way because that is what is assessed. But there seems to be a real disconnect between what the curriculum asks us to teach and what it assesses. Crazy really.

Brenda thinks that 21st century literacy should be defined in the following way:
Literacy in the 21st century should give kids the opportunity to be able to go about their lives, complete the tasks, and engage with the modes, that they need to. That’s pretty broad I know. You need to know many more different ways of making meaning than you did before. You need to be digitally literate. I’m not sure how we actually do this.

Brenda is frustrated that she has neither the knowledge nor the skills to enact a 21st century literacy curriculum. Despite having an idea of what literacy skills and practices children need, she does not have the pedagogical knowledge to enact this:

I’m a new teacher. I really don’t think university prepared me for any of this. It’s all a bit daunting.

5.8.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘I guess they need to be able to write, speak and listen’

Brenda is a committed and enthusiastic graduate teacher. In her own words she has excellent literacy and technology skills, and understands the big picture of what being literate in the 21st century means, yet she is unsure of what literacy skills her Year 6 students need:

I guess they need to be able to read, write, speak, listen, all those areas [and that could be in the context of] a book or online or looking at a picture (especially television and advertising). That’s something I really push, [but] what’s behind all that? Are they skills? I guess they are. But it’s hard to teach those sorts of skills when you have standardised tests that you need to do, which ask for almost the opposite of this.

5.8.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘It’s all about independent goal setting’

Brenda’s literacy teaching is focused on independent goal setting, in particular ensuring that her students have a literacy goal that is appropriate for their level:
So, they’ve all got reading goals of their own, they’ve all got writing goals, and they’ve all got speaking and listening goals. Within a week they would have worked on those at least once, maybe more. We are working on a café menu, so a reading goal might be fluency, or it might be a vocabulary goal where they’re looking for interesting words. So when they’re doing their read-to-self they make a list of interesting words and then go and look them up if they don’t know what they are.

We do a daily four. Every day they choose an activity where they can: read to self, read to someone, work on writing, or do word work. They get round that two or three times a week, and they’ve got a different choice of activities around that. I always try to add a lot of choice to make it more engaging.

Then, on top of that we have writing. So we’re focusing on narratives at the moment. I have a unit (however long that needs to go for) and I start with a pre-test. I try and make it engaging, to do real life things, not just written work. Okay, so what did we do for our pre-test for narratives? I got the kids to get into their own groups and come up with a definition of their own, and then they went off in groups and wrote it on post-it notes and posted it into a little box. Then, we got them out of the box and read them and they voted on which one they thought was the best. So, pre-test done. Then I do a learning intention. Then we try to come up with some joint success criteria. That’s not always easy. Sometimes I’m sort of getting my own head around that as well. And then we’ll go into the components and break it down. For example, on structure we’re looking at narrative structure. And we are looking at songs and so we’ll do YouTube clips. With comics, I’m getting them to write a comic. Then they’ll make their own little movie. So, looking at the structure, I’ve used graphic organisers to set in character, problem resolution. Then they’ll make those comics and have a movie at the end of it that they’ve made.

‘But, time, that’s the big one. An example of that is like the electronic whiteboard. I’m confident in using most things, but I have not, in two years, had time to get on and actually make it interactive. I use it all the time, so that’s
just an example. And knowledge and skills, teaching knowledge skills. And confidence, not so much for me I suppose, but if I was going to implement something, like the other board, the videoconferencing one. I’m trying to get something happening with that.

Brenda is caught in a dilemma; she believes that she has a solid understanding of 21st century literacy, locating her definition in relation to ‘real-world’ contexts and applications, however, she doesn’t have the pedagogical underpinnings to translate that into her daily classroom practices. This is doubly concerning as she is a recent graduate and a new entrant into the teaching profession; her enactment of literacy learning is being influenced directly by what she learned during her teaching degree.

5.8.4 Reflecting on Brenda’s interview
Brenda infused a great deal of humour into her interview. She was a very happy and upbeat teacher. Brenda’s classroom was very colourful and it was clear she spent a lot of time on her presentations and displays. Brenda commented that she was excited about the interview, as it was the first research project she was able to a part of. She was thinking about starting postgraduate study herself and she commented that it was nice to meet another teacher who had managed full-time work and study.

5.9 Liane’s Story
Liane is classified as a mid-career teacher. She has over 15 years teaching experience, and has taught in government and independent schools during this time. Her passion is Middle Years learning, and she has completed postgraduate study in the area of Middle Years engagement.

5.9.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘It’s about skills, not content’
Liane described her school as very enthusiastic towards pedagogies associated with 21st century literature. She has a Principal whom she describes as enthusiastic towards exploring new ways of learning that are ‘current’, without
being ‘fads’. Liane views the 21st century as a place where skills are more valuable than content, and this is a focus of her school’s literacy program:

Skills matter, and have become more important than even a couple of years ago. No part of the way I taught two years ago is the way I’m teaching now. I focus much more on skills than content … I don’t think I’ve ever seen such a shift in expectations for the way we teach.

Liane describes herself as coming from the ‘old school’ era of phonics. She suggests that the Whole Language paradigm had been a revelation, but nothing compared to what the 21st century now expects:

Teachers are under fire! On the one hand we have a Government standardised testing regime that is testing traditional literacies. On the other hand we have students engaged in a world that is anything but standardised. We have a National Curriculum that is talking about multimodality and equipping students with 21st century skills, but the professional development that we receive still focuses a lot of the time on phonics! It’s crazy out there; no wonder teachers and parents are confused!

Liane feels there is a consistent view across all the stakeholders that literacy in the 21st century is about the ability to ‘change and adapt’: in other words, to interpret new ways of making meaning and to embed them in everyday life. This is a view that is highly consistent with the literature. She feels that children are becoming expert at it, and see it as normal, while teachers see it as threatening and often combat that threat with more severe forms of traditional literacy practices. Liane described it this way:

Teaching literacy today is much more about understanding how the world is changing and how students are doing literacy. They are so skilled at change. In fact they expect change. Often, as teachers, we don’t really understand this and we often think that we are doing students a favour by shielding them from
change. We are not good at embracing it. By saying ‘you can’t do that because it’s not good literacy practice’ is really saying ‘we don’t understand it—and are afraid of it—so you are not going to do it’. We need skills for the future, and I think we are missing that very much.

5.9.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘Texts are not the same as what they once were’

Liane described herself as a ‘teacher in transition’, from a teacher who understood genre theory and phonics, to a teacher who needs to understand more about the social practices young people use to make meaning. Just teaching students to read a narrative and talk about the plot, characters and setting, is no longer enough in a 21st century Year 6 classroom:

There’s been a huge turnaround in the way we that we present texts to students. So much of what they’re doing is about looking at the skills of interpreting text, because you’re not just presenting text to them and saying, alright, here’s your text, this is what you’re reading, pick those things out. So much of what we do now is about whether it’s a worthwhile text, and if I go on the Internet is that a valuable website? So we do so much more on actual evaluation of what people are trying to say and how they’re trying to say it. For example the author’s purpose; we do a lot of focus on that, which would not be something we would have touched on two years ago. What is the author saying to me? It isn’t about just reading and writing now; it’s about having the skills to interpret, analyse and critique. And the difference is ALL students need these skill—these are the ‘basic’ skills of the 21st century.

The literacy practices Liane’s students engage in are both complex and contextually relevant to the 21st century. Liane makes the following suggestion:

Before my students come into the classroom most of them have engaged with some sort of technology. Maybe they have checked their Facebook page, or looked at a website. Even these two very basic ‘practices’ that we don’t even
think twice about, require really complex literacy practices and skills; skills that we just didn’t think about in the past. As a result our teaching must reflect this.

Liane was emphatic that literacy for her Year 6 class is not focused on literacy practices rooted in genre theory; something that she argues is still strong among her colleagues.

5.9.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘We use Twitter because we feel it facilitates learning’

Liane was very excited about the use of social media as part of her literacy environment. It was clear that she embraces technology, and she offered the following insight into her literacy classroom:

In the mornings, in a perfect world, from 9 o’clock, we’ll do literacy. So the students will come in at 9 o’clock and they’ll have their own text—we call them ‘just right books’—and they’ll have a goal that they’ll be working on themselves. And we’ll confer with 3-4 students a morning and talk to them about that. And in terms of 21st century [literacy], all books are targeted to them. There will be students who may be reading text on iPads, but it is not just reading text on iPads, because really that’s just replacing a book. They’ll be using iBooks to highlight and make notes. They could be using Twitter and actually tracking their thoughts as they go on, so the students will be tweeting as they go. And we can see that feed. We will start with one student up there and the other ones will see the Twitter feed going at the same time. We’ve got class Kindle libraries set up. We’ve got three in here so that students have access to texts. While parents are often willing to buy iPads, they’re not willing to put books on iPads, which is a bit of a deficit to us. So what we’ve done is we’ve set up where you can register six iPads to an account so the kids have access from that. They can tweet straight from that. In other words they can actually highlight text in their Kindle, and send it straight to Twitter with a picture of the text including the highlighted text. The kids are much better at that now. Initially we had to work with them very closely on this. I know when we started it last year, the tweets were pretty shallow, but now the things that we’re
Although Liane comes from the ‘old school’, she is embracing and making the transition to contemporary literacy pedagogy. Her literacy teaching and learning philosophies are about taking the literacy practices her students use and trying to build critical awareness and practice through class discussion and the meaningful use of devices.

In many respects, Liane is embracing literacy as a social practice, and she is aware of the social practices her students are using beyond school, but she is also aware of the practices they need to be successful within the school environment.

There are a number of factors influencing Liane’s literacy practices: her recent post graduate study and a supportive school environment. She is fortunate to be in a school where leadership is supporting her approach. However she is frustrated with her view that while the National Curriculum is driving in the right direction, current student assessment approaches and teacher professional development haven’t caught up, both of which have a negative impact on the enactment of literacy learning.

5.9.4 **Reflecting on Liane’s interview**

Liane was very enthusiastic towards the interview and research. Throughout the interview she showed me books she was reading around the 21st century, as well as projects she was working on with her students. Her classroom was very messy. There were student books scattered around the classroom, papers that appeared not to be in any real order and many chairs that were not pushed in. This didn’t have any impact on the interview, but it was something that I observed. Liane did remark throughout the interview that she was not known for her tidiness!
5.10 Clare’s Story

Clare is a Year 6 teacher in a regional government school in Victoria. She has been teaching for seven years and is currently completing a Master’s degree in Literacy Education.

5.10.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘It’s not about standardised testing’

At the time of the interview, Clare was involved with NAPLAN testing. She was frustrated because, despite her strong philosophical views that this kind of standardised testing is counterproductive in encouraging 21st century literacy skills, the school, her class, and even herself as a teacher, would be assessed against this test. She also commented about how stressed her colleagues were and about how much indirect pressure her Principal was putting on her:

I hate this time of the year. NAPLAN comes out, and it’s in the media, and everybody gets edgy. We are judged on this one test now … our Principal is wonderful, and a real literacy expert, but even she gets stressed.

Clare was firmly of the view that this kind of testing regimen impacts literacy learning and isn’t beneficial to her students. Taking the longer-term view, she made the following comment:

NAPLAN doesn’t encourage 21st century literacy; it does the exact opposite. For me 21st century literacy is about digital texts, collaboration, online learning, real-world tasks with real-world learning tools … NAPLAN encourages everything that 21st century literacy isn’t. And because so much emphasis is placed on NAPLAN we have to teach like we are back in the 1800s.

In 20 years’ time when my students come back to me, they’re not going to remember what dots they got on their NAPLAN test. They’re going to know whether they are able to take part in society and whether they are feeling like they’re contributing. Are they happy individuals? And you know … to achieve
When pressed on exactly what literacy in the 21st century was, Clare offered the following explanation:

Well it is about multimodality, it’s about being able to communicate with many different tools, but importantly it’s about knowing the right tool for the right purpose. But literacy in the 21st century is also about traditional literacy. Students still need to know how to read and write and spell … They need English conventions. That’s important … but I think the conventions are being adapted, and we need to know and understand how they are being adapted and ensure that our children understand that.

5.10.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘It’s about lots of tools for lots of purposes’

Clare was enthusiastic about technology. She arrived at the interview with a smart phone, iPad and laptop and proudly explained that this is her toolkit for teaching. Clare believes that her students need skills in being able to navigate in real and meaningful ways using these tools.

This is what kids use now (as she points to her devices). I’m not saying that they don’t need to know how to read and write in traditional forms too, but more and more of these are the ‘basics’ and we need to make sure they can use them properly.

For Clare the skills students need in her Year 6 classroom are associated with technology. Asked about whether she could identify the literacy skills associated with the effective use of these devices, she offered the following explanation:

My students need to be able to critically analyse what they are reading, and have the skills to be able to search and find what they are looking for. In terms of writing they need to be able to write using the different conventions of each
genre … Yes, I’m talking about a text message too … it’s a genre … it has
textual features … and this is important for students to understand. There’s no
point ‘banning’ it from school … they need to know the difference between a
narrative and a text message.

While Clare was very much of the view that her Year 6 students need exposure
to devices such as phones, iPads and laptops, she is also very aware of the
power of them and was cautious about this:

There is huge power with their devices. They can do so many things with them.
And you know we’ve had a lot more willing to buy the iPads.

For Clare, 21st century literacy is not about one device or one literacy practice;
it is about emerging literacies, integrated literacies and contextual literacy
practices. She offered this explanation:

For me the defining difference is this: 20th century literacy was about one way
of doing things … one way to write whatever … but the 21st century is about
multiple ways of doing the same task … We have had an explosion of literacies
… and many of them blur the boundaries of what literacy is. We need to have
these conversations with our Year 6 students, show them how different tools
can achieve different outcomes. Above all, we need to ensure that we expand
rather than limit our students’ literacy practices.

Clare is an enthusiastic supporter of digital tools, and it was clear that her views
about the skills that her Year 6 students need are closely linked to the
meaningful use of these tools. I think it is worth mentioning at this point, the
focus on ‘technology as tool’. This was language that a number of the
participants were using; they were describing technologies and devices as tools.
As the researcher, I am aware of the limitations of describing technologies and
devices as tools (Gee 2003). What may explain this language use was a
professional development program that was running within the Department, in which the term ‘tool’ was often applied.

We have all been to Designing Digitally, and they use the term ‘tool’ to describe applications. They describe it as our tool bag within our devices.

5.10.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘My parents just don’t get it’
Clare is an early career teacher whose literacy practices are negatively influenced by a lack of support from the parents of her students. She recounted this story as part of her interview.

Last term I went to a professional development day on using social media in my classroom. I got some great ideas. I worked these ideas into my work program, cleared them with the Literacy Coordinator and slowly set about teaching them. It wasn’t radical. It was using Twitter for reflective writing, and asking students to keep a blog. Anyway, it lasted about a week. Parents hated it. They said they wanted their children to learn how to read and write ‘the normal way’ … and by this they meant like they did. It was very difficult because my Principal sided with the parents and told me to just hold back for a while because the school was very traditional …

Worse, Clare then explained that once parents thought she was doing something out of the ordinary, they became even more critical of other things that she was doing within the literacy curriculum. For example:

I have been using Evernote all year, but when parents thought I was not teaching the way they thought I should be, even that became an issue. Last week we were doing summarising so we gave them nonfiction articles and they were putting them in their Evernote so we could see them afterwards. Anyway, a small group of parents found out about that, and now that’s gone too … Can you believe it? I’m back to using a chalkboard in 2013!
Clare’s story from the field is a powerful one. It illustrates the influence parents and school leadership can have on pedagogical practice, and the resulting frustration felt, particularly by early career teachers.

5.10.4 Reflecting on Clare’s interview

Clare’s interview was quite enjoyable. Clare was warm and friendly and she went out of her way to make me feel welcome. Clare showed me around her school, introduced me to her principal and offered me a cup of coffee. Clare’s classroom was full of student work that was neatly displayed. Her desk had a mixture of classroom related work and study materials as she was completing a Master’s degree. I wasn’t sure if the study materials were put there for my benefit. Clare’s interview went for much longer than 1 hour. We talked about her practice, but also the way she was thinking about her study as part of her classroom practice.

5.11 Michael’s Story

Michael is a mid-career teacher in a Victorian regional Government school. He has taught mainly in the upper primary years, as well as spending some time as a Physical Education teacher.

Previously Michael held numerous leadership responsibilities, including Curriculum Coordinator and Literacy Coordinator. However, for family reasons at the time of our interview, he did not hold any leadership responsibilities.

5.11.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘We need to do things differently—it’s not about content anymore … it’s about learning’

Michael is a firm believer that literacy in the 21st century is not about doing the same things that he did when he was a student; teaching literacy in the 21st century is a different activity, requires different skills to what it did in previous eras, and positions teachers differently as well. He put it this way:
Too many of us are teaching the same way as when we went to school … the world is a different place, and schools are not exempt from this.

It’s never been easier to learn. That’s what I think. And students can learn at any time so I think we should always be teaching them how to use things to learn anywhere, anytime.

Teachers are no longer the experts of content … In fact we are not even close. But we do need to be the experts of learning … teaching students how to learn with all the different options they have.

Michael makes an interesting point, suggesting that the role of teachers up until the 20th century was about being an expert in content … so they could ‘pass on’ that content to their students. By contrast, in the 21st century teachers need to be experts in teaching students how to learn content. This is a distinct difference and one that Michael was eager to explain.

If we continue to see ourselves as just experts of content and that’s our job, then we may as well pack up and go home. The scary part is that so many meetings I sit in on are about content, not about learning or pedagogy. I just don’t get it!

5.11.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘It’s about understanding the world beyond school’

Michael is very focused on how students learn, and has a very strong belief that how students learn today is very different to how he learned when he went to school fifteen years ago:

The skills I learned at school are obsolete now really. I mean I learned how to spell and how to read and how to write. But if that’s all I had, I wouldn’t last a day in my work. I’ve learned new skills. And that’s the point. Year 6 students need to understand how to learn, so they can continue to learn, because nothing is going to stay the same.
That said, Michael was not of the view that traditional literacy no longer mattered; in fact, his views were quite the opposite:

> My students still need to know how to read and write and spell; the basics you might say. But put simply, that’s not enough. And that’s the difference in the 21st century. Students need so many more skills, and they need to know how to apply those skills into different situations.

When asked for an example, Michael offered the following:

> So we had a big conversation when we started about Facebook and about how we would approach the use of that within the school. There’s lots of conversation now about how 13 years olds aren’t supposed to have it, but they’re going to have it anyway, even though they’re going to tell you they don’t have it when you ask them if they have it. So we had a conversation around … well, we’re not going to encourage it, but we’re going to accept that people have it. We’re going to teach people how they should use it … And if something goes wrong it’s always a great teaching opportunity: how could we have handled this better?

This is an interesting example, as it demonstrates that Michael is thinking about a social media platform that his Year 6 students are not legally allowed to have. He takes the view that many of them are using Facebook, and he feels an obligation to teach them critical literacy skills, in order to show them how to be safe:

> I guess it makes me a bit of a maverick. But I think my students need skills that relate to their worlds. I know I’m not meant to be teaching them about Facebook, but how can we not? I’m not advocating it, but I am showing them the skills of how to be safe on it. There is a huge amount of literacy in this. Digital literacy, text literacy, multimodal literacy … But there is also critical literacy. I know Facebook is often deemed inappropriate, but if we are talking
about literacy skills for the 21st century, you can just about teach all the skills you need with just one resource … Facebook!

Michael’s views of the skills students need to be literate in the 21st century are consistent with other commentators in the literature; these skills are multimodal in nature, but also need to have a practical focus, an application that is real to his students in their worlds.

5.11.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘I’m the maverick’

Michael gleefully described himself as a maverick; somebody who does not always follow the rules, but does try to do the right thing by his students. Michael was very proud to share how he was teaching literacy within a 21st century focus:

Many people don’t agree with what I’m doing, but I have the support of my Principal, which makes the world of difference. In my class we are totally non-paper. We are a ‘paperless classroom’. Everything is done on tablets, or computers. We are using a lot of cloud computing technology so my Year 6 students can work from home too.

Right now we are working on expositions, but rather than writing them we are presenting them, recording them, and then critiquing them. We have sent a range of performances off to professional people too, who are giving us written feedback on our arguments. It’s amazing; my students are so engaged.

When asked why this made him a maverick, Michael offered the following explanation:

This sort of stuff just doesn’t happen in this school. The literacy coordinator is completely against it because she can’t map it or colour code it. It’s a new way of thinking about literacy, and this is scary for everybody. I’ve had to battle with parents, even the School Council, but I really believe this is the right thing to do for my students. I know there are a huge number of people who think I’m
doing the wrong thing and should be teaching so that my students perform well on NAPLAN or other XXXX tests.

There are so many schools that turn a blind eye to technology and say, no, that’s out of school, that’s not my responsibility, etc. and I say, that’s just a cop out. I think it’s important that we recognise it’s a school thing as well. It’s a moral obligation. Traditional literacy is important, but so are other literacy forms, and we need to start paying much more attention to that.

It was clear that the school in which Michael worked was quite traditional in its attitudes towards literacy teaching and this was evident in their classroom displays and work samples. Michael’s classroom was clearly an outlier within the school. In contrast to the other Year 6 classroom located next door, he had very few handwritten work samples on display. Michael’s ‘maverick’ approach was also evident in his programming and planning documents. Two Year 6 Work Programs were shown to me. Both had a focus on visual literacy; the first using iPods, flip cameras and iPads, and the second using picture storybooks. There was evidence of ideological clashes between Michael and his Year 6 colleague; when asked how he navigated this, he commented that people each do their own thing.

It is clear that there are many factors that are influencing Michael’s decisions related to literacy learning and that there is a contradiction between what he believes is right and relevant to a 21st century context and what other colleagues at the school value. He is lucky to have the support of his Principal and his self-confessed ‘maverick’ style allows him to stay true to what he believes is best for his students.

5.11.4 Reflecting on Michael’s interview

Michael began his interview by telling me that he is a ‘jock’ and isn’t use to academic conversation, but wanted to be a part of it because he thought it was an important topic for his own children. Even though Michael wanted to
present himself as a ‘lad’ he was insightful and thoughtful in his questions. He was very well prepared and keen to demonstrate his knowledge and insights. At times Michael became tongue tied. He dismissed this as nerves. Michael’s interview started off very slowly, however as he began to talk more about his lived experiences rather than the theoretical knowledge, it improved in flow and pace.

5.12 Christine’s Story

Christine is an experienced teacher, with almost twenty years of teaching experience in a range of regional and metropolitan Victorian government primary schools. Christine is a Year 6 teacher and both the Curriculum Coordinator and the Literacy Coordinator.

5.12.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘It’s about equipping our kids within a digital literacy environment’

Christine began her interview by reflecting on the fact that while she values 21st century literacy, she often feels compelled to enact and coach other teachers towards a dated literacy pedagogy. She put it this way:

It’s hard in schools at the moment … we know we need to change. As teachers we know that … but we don’t really know what we are meant to be changing to. So we tend to do the same literacy activities, just using technology—and we think that’s it! But deep down I know it’s not. I know the world is changing … I know we are becoming more globalised, more connected, more interconnected … but what does that mean for literacy in Year 6? We just haven’t worked that out yet.

Christine’s views on 21st century literacy have been informed by her professional development activities. For example, she commented that in her Master’s degree she focused on literacy for the 21st century:
When I did the unit on 21st century literacy as part of my study, it was odd … because even the lecturers didn’t really seem to know how to define it. We would talk at length about technology, multiliteracies, multimodality … but it’s more than that … well I think so anyway. It’s almost like we haven’t quite got our heads around what it is … and what we really are engaged in at the moment is a discussion … trying to better understand it.

And so what is Christine’s definition?

I would say that we desperately need to equip our kids within a digital literacy environment where we’ve got enough capacity to have technology that’s keeping up with what society’s putting forward, and equipping our kids with the life skills to keep up with something that we’re not necessarily knowing what it’s going to look like.

Christine was very troubled by this definition, and therefore went on to elaborate, after which she explained what it meant for her teaching:

But it’s not even really that … Literacy in the 21st century is about life, and equipping kids with the skills to participate in life! I look at my students and I’m well aware that we are preparing children for work that doesn’t exist yet, and technologies that we can’t even imagine. That’s different to what it was fifty years ago. Teachers had a pretty good idea of what the world was going to look like, and what skills children were going to need. We have absolutely no idea.

Right now we are doing everything, trying to be all things to all people … traditional literacy, digital literacy, you name it, we are trying to do it … but nobody is really asking the question of why … and nobody is really asking the question of what do we need to stop doing? Terrifyingly, the things we probably need to stop doing in literacy, if we are focused on 21st century literacy, are the things that standardised testing seems to be imposing.
This reference to standardised testing moved the conversation towards assessment, and Christine is of the view that while we are trying to move our assessment practices to embrace aspects of 21st century literacy, we haven’t got there yet:

*I’ve seen shifts in testing, particularly in regards to the interactive sites that address standards, with global questions and global thinking and creative thinking, but not directly aligning with standards as such. I think that’s probably the next thing that’s going to come out, and probably computer programming to keep up with that shift of learning.*

Christine also acknowledged that this testing reflects more of a 20th century rather than a 21st century paradigm. This caused her a great deal of angst. She is a teacher who is trying to think beyond what she feels the curriculum is requiring of her, but feels disempowered to enact a literacy pedagogy appropriate to a 21st century context.

*I feel stuck between a rock and a hard place, because our agenda is to improve student learning outcomes in line with the standards that we’re told to assess against. I am completely frustrated because we’ve mandated certain processes and agendas. These obviously come down from Government, and are set in line with our specific plan. It all flows downhill. The shift needs to come from Government. Right now I feel that the Government wants us to teach within a dated framework.*

I pressed Christine on whether she felt enabled to break away from imposed structures and engage her professional knowledge and skills to enact a literacy pedagogy that she felt was appropriate to time and place. She made the following comment:

*We can, but nobody wants to be the first. I understand the talk, because as I said, at the internship I was farmed out to a lot of different schools. But no one,*
and I include myself in that, knows how to go about constructing a truly 21st century literacy curriculum … I just don’t know enough and there is no professional development. So, to be the first to step out and do that? Show me and tell me, and I’m there! But nobody’s going to make that shift because everyone’s very firmly in their comfort zone, and until there’s enough research and understanding of ‘this is what’s better,’ and ‘this is what 21st century literacy learning is,’ then we will just keep doing what we do …

I think it’s that we live in a system where we have to tick boxes. Those decisions aren’t necessarily in the best interests of the students. You know, we get our data. Everything comes on our school portal and we’re told to improve; trend analysis, NAPLAN data, that’s what we’re gauging our success on at the minute. And you go … that’s proof that our programs are working, so then how do you then supplement that measure of success with something else? And that’s not a parent-teacher decision. That’s a global decision that needs to shift. We can push back and say we want more than NAPLAN. We want more than teacher judgement data, online data. We want more than that. But, fundamentally we need to be compared in a like state. Teaching in the 21st century doesn’t ask questions of pedagogy … the success criteria is imposed, and we teach to that criteria … it’s wrong … but there you go.

Christine was a particularly concerned participant, because she is a teacher who has a good grasp of the nature of 21st century literacy and is trying to think about the curriculum, to ask deep and philosophical questions about practice and content, yet feels isolated and disempowered. Furthermore, she feels part of a system that doesn’t want to confront a different way of thinking about literacy, because it is either too hard to assess or too hard to measure. During the interview, Christine indicated that these frustrations have caused her to think about leaving the profession, but then made the following final comment:

I came into teaching because I believe in young people and wanted to be a part of their development. I guess I just need to accept bureaucracy for what it is, and focus on the young people in my care.
5.12.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘It’s not about skills—it’s about attitudes’

In many respects Christine is an outlier amongst the participants interviewed, in regard to the skills that she feels her Year 6 students need. She made the following point:

I don’t think it’s about skills … skills imply one dimensional ‘things’ you do … I think it’s about attitudes or dispositions. The kids think about literacy … to me, that’s the ‘skill’ kids need to be successful in the 21st century.

This was an interesting view, and I asked Christine if she was able to give an example of what she meant. Christine understood the point of the question, but chose to interpret it in a different way:

I want my students to be able to understand how to live, learn and earn in their world. They need to be able to make contributions … meaningful contributions to their world. So sure, they need skills … but they can be learned easily. Dispositions or attitudes are more difficult. They are grown and cultivated. And that’s our job. We want our students to be excited about the future … about their future … about our future. I want them to be able to investigate, learn, understand … and actually create and contribute to ways we live … and that’s literacy; to make meaning, to interpret. So we can call them skills if you like … but I think [it’s about] the attitudes that underpin that … and without the right attitude, the skills will never be applied well.

I’m not saying my students don’t need literacy skills … of course they do … I just think there is something more fundamental to 21st century literacy … and for me it’s attitudes. But in saying that, I think they need skills associated with the effective use of digital tools, being able to know the different literacy genres, particularly associated with online genres. I think they need to be able to move between text messages, formal emails, narratives, reports … and know the different textual features. They need to be able to read for enjoyment, and for information … they need to be critical readers, critical consumers … but also critical creators too.
Christine is also aware that there are skills her students need, to be able to participate successfully in school life:

Of course, we are still part of a system … and at the end of the day our students, despite the world beyond school, are going to be sat in a large hall and told to write something, probably traditionally, and [the outcome of] that will largely impact their future … So they need skills to engage in 20th century literacy practices as well, and at the moment those skills far outweigh the digital.

5.12.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘Sometimes you just have to take a risk’

In addition to her Year 6 teaching duties, Christine also holds numerous leadership positions within her school, and as such has both responsibilities and power. This often creates conflict for her within her professional identity. Christine put it this way:

I sometimes wish I did not hold positions of responsibility within my school. I wish I could fly under the radar, and do some interesting things within my literacy environment, which would be innovative, stuff that I think is 21st century. But my job is also to lead and ensure that the objectives and goals that our school has, particularly in the area of literacy, are met. And often this means I have to be more conservative than I would like to be.

I asked Christine if she could give me an example, and she offered the following:

Last week we were doing Reports as our genre. We often use First Steps, which I know is old, but it is still probably the best resource we can find. Anyway, I thought it would be really interesting to make them multimodal; ask students to write a report on something of their choice, but to include text and video. I thought about this for a little while, and it actually just became too difficult. How would we assess it? We have a rubric that we use, and that we are
required to report against, that doesn’t account for multimodality in report writing. This would then require me to develop a new rubric, get it approved, then develop a different set of lesson plans and get them approved. All the while working against a school culture that actually aspires to more traditional writing; things that we can put in their Portfolios and send home. I know it’s wrong, but the bureaucracy of curriculum is now so strong that more often than not it stops us doing interesting things. We’ve created a noose for our own necks.

As part of the interview, Christine then showed me some of her students’ finished reports.

[As] you can see, the structure is excellent; the content is generally good … they even have illustrated them well … And it fits really nicely into our assessment program. It’s measurable; teachers know how to do this. But I know this is 20th century stuff. This is the sort of writing I was doing when I was at school decades ago. I really don’t know how we move on.

Christine finds herself in a bind, influenced by multiple factors and caught in a contradiction between her own views of 21st century literacy and those of stakeholders around her.

Firstly she understands what 21st century literacy is and the skills required to navigate in a 21st century world (and indeed her particular definition applied a layer beyond the ‘skill’ level, which has added real depth to this research project) but she was trying to present a balanced view of the skills she feels her students need. She is aware that there is a set of skills that is located in the technological world (largely associated with communication) that need to be taught, but she clearly understands that her students also need more traditional skills to help them complete their more formal schooling.
Secondly she feels constrained by a system that is oriented towards a dated literacy pedagogy. Her post-graduate studies have influenced her definition of 21st century literacy and yet in her leadership role, she feels that she can’t coach other teachers towards this view, because of mandated processes and agendas and needing to teaching to set criteria.

5.12.4 Reflecting on Christine’s interview
Christine had to reschedule her interview with me four times for various reasons. I was not sure if she actually wanted to complete the interview or if she was extremely busy. The interview took place on a Friday afternoon before school holidays started. It was clear that Christine was very tired by the time the interview began. I felt a degree of sympathy for her. She was dealing with a number of parent issues, and a number of difficult students. This was all taking a toll on her. She generally came across as deflated and disengaged, but on the other hand was trying to engage professionally. I was certainly hoping that a break would help Christine.

5.13 Ann’s Story
Ann is an early-career teacher in a regional Victorian government primary school. She has been teaching for three years, two of which were in Year 6. Ann presented as a very disgruntled teacher, who is frustrated with her students and with school leadership.

5.13.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘Kids from my school don’t want to go to university’
Ann teaches in a low socio-economic area. Ann’s school is located in a council housing area in a regional town where a large-scale methadone program is being hosted. There is high unemployment in the local community and a significant percentage of their parent population take part in the methadone program. Many of Ann’s students are quite transient, as their parents are required to vacate their council house once the program is complete. Ann
spoke of situations where parents were violent towards the Principal, and of the police regularly attending the school.

The social challenges at Ann’s school appear to have impacted her attitudes towards her students’ literacy learning. Ann made the following comment:

*Well, I guess, with the kids at our school and some of their backgrounds and stuff, they are never going to go to university. They don’t even think about that. That’s not achievable for them. And they don’t enjoy reading and writing. So they just say ‘no’.*

*I’ve got a lot of parents in my grade who have either been to jail or are about to go to jail for drug offences. It’s crazy to house an entire population together who are meant to be on the Methadone Program … I worry about what my kids see at home. And then we are meant to be teaching them about multiliteracies … yeah … that’s just not how it works in the real world.*

Ann has a strong view that her job as a teacher of literacy to Year 6 students in her community is to offer them what she describes as ‘the basics’:

*At my school, we just need to teach our kids the basics; to be able to pick up a book and read it. We’ve had a major push on that, and so they’ve all got their book and we do things like going to the local library. Most kids don’t have books at home, and we can’t send books home with them because they don’t get returned.*

*These kids have a tough home life. Many of their parents are illiterate, and a lot of the time school is seen as a babysitting place. They have nothing at home, and so you can only do so much in the classroom if it’s not followed through at home.*

I was curious as to how Ann defined literacy and if there were any aspects of 21st century literacy in her definition. She offered the following explanation:
I know what you’re asking: I just don’t think it exists in my world. I went to university, and heard all about multiliteracies, and stuff like that, but in my world we have no technology because it either gets stolen or broken, and we have kids who often don’t even know their 100 high frequency words. 21st century literacy is fine, but if you can’t recognise basic words, no amount of technology is going to help.

It was clear that Ann was deflated by the lived experiences of many of her students. It was also evident that as an early-career teacher she was feeling disengaged from her profession. Ann appeared to care about her students and was worried for them. Much of that worry was centred on her students’ welfare and wellbeing. Often their literacy learning, and learning more generally, was a secondary consideration. Ann puts it much more succinctly:

*The priorities of my day for my students are making sure they are fed and safe. The rest comes second.*

This is a very sobering comment. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Martin & Joomis 2007) comes to mind. Ann was focused on the physiological needs and the safety and security needs of her students. As a teacher I admired this in her, although it certainly made me sad that school may be the place where such needs are met.

5.13.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘We try to make it open ended’
Ann explained that in her current Year 6 class she has students who range from those who can barely write their own name, to students who are at the level expected for a Year 6 student. She explained that this causes her a lot of concern, as she is unsure of how to plan her literacy lessons to cope with such a wide gap. She also stated that she was not able to access funding for extra support. Her solution to this dilemma is to make things as open-ended as she can. She offered the following example:
At my school there’s been a real push to make things open-ended. But you still have those kids who don’t care, and you’re always trying to peek and things like that. But, it’s still always a constant battle. And I’ve still got kids who don’t care. And I can’t turn to their parents because they don’t care either. I think I’ve had maybe three or four kids’ parents come and talk to me. So, instantly, I was like, oh my God. You can see it. It’s their parents. If their parents care, they care.

It is clear that Ann has many challenges associated with engagement and how learning is valued within her school community. Of note was Ann’s determination to keep trying:

It’s tough here. But if we don’t try with these kids … who will? So, I try to plan my lessons so they are open-ended. I model my literacy skills to them, and then I try to scaffold them so they can complete a task at their level.

[For example] right now we are writing narratives, getting ready for our testing. So I say to my class, they can write on whatever they want, but they need to have the following parts in their narrative. They need to have an introduction, body and conclusion. They also need to have a complication in their plot, and they need to have at least two characters. So my more able students can add as many characters as they like, and write as many words as they like … while my lower kids can write what they can. I find this is the best way to get them writing something.

Ann was not able to articulate specific skills that she used or thought were important for her students. Nor did she offer a definition of literacy or her interpretation of 21st century literacy.
5.13.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘I know this isn’t right—but it’s what you have to do’

Ann was very enthusiastic about offering stories of her literacy classes. While some of the stories presented do not relate to literacy, I think they are important to include because they offer insight into what is influencing her decision-making in terms of constructing effective literacy learning environments.

Ann suggested that her students are always doing new things with the devices they have. Ann told the following story:

> My kids get new phones all the time. They are entitled to them as part of their parents’ program. And they’re always inventing and doing new things with them. A lot of the time I don’t know what they are doing. They are not meant to bring them to school, but they do. We tried to use iPads with our students, but it was hopeless. We’ve got iPads, but we’ve only got six between three classrooms. So, to properly use them in ways they can be used doesn’t happen. This means that kids have these phones that they are using out-of-class time, but we can’t teach them how to use them safely because we don’t have the technology. And we are not allowed to let them use their phones in class because we can’t control the content on them.

> We tried to use Netbooks, but it was hopeless. We get Netbooks for them in Year 6 and we use them for 12 months, but then when they go to secondary school, they don’t use them. So all the skills we’ve taught them on the Netbooks are wasted.

I inferred that Ann was interpreting 21st century literacy as mainly involving using technology. If this is accurate, the point that she was making is that the use of technology needs to have a sequence to it, and to transition from one year to the next. Further, Ann was of the view that there needs to be enough hardware so that the technology actually can be used meaningfully within the class setting.
I think Ann makes a worthwhile point: if we are wanting to teach literacy skills for the 21st century, we need to ensure we have the resources to do this. Her point can be best illustrated through this comment:

*What’s the point in having three iPads among 28 students? I sit there and ask them to watch what I do with it, and then they each get to push a button … it’s not the way the device was intended to be used, and it’s certainly not how kids learn in the 21st century.*

Ann was certainly in a bind. Her views and understanding of 21st century literacy were in conflict with her reality. Ann had a view that 21st century literacy had a component of technology attached to it, and often this was about one-on-one technology, yet the classroom and school environment did not allow for this. In many ways this illuminates a common problem that is influencing the way in which teachers enact 21st century literacy learning: teachers have views and ideas, yet limitations around them mean they cannot enact the kinds of pedagogical practices they would like to.

### 5.13.4 Reflecting on Ann’s interview

Ann’s interview was very challenging for me. Ann was very unhappy about her school, and her leadership team. She felt as though she was not supported and the school was not disciplining a lot of her students well enough. Ann wanted to dominate the interview with stories of what her principal was not doing rather than focusing on her practices and perceptions. At one point I had to remind Ann what the interview was about, and offered her the opportunity to end the interview. She elected not to. It was hard to assess accurately, but it felt as if Ann was quite alone in the school. I observed teachers politely interact with her, but there was no observable warmth. I wondered what the political landscape was, and how Ann was interacting within that landscape. Ann was very negative towards her students, colleagues and education system that she was a part of.
5.14 Todd’s Story

Todd is an early-career teacher in a large regional Victorian government school. The school population was 528 at the time of the interview. Todd was one of four Year 6 teachers at the school. He has taught Year 6 for each of his four years of teaching.

Todd described his school as a predominantly low socio-economic school, with a large percentage of his students’ parents unemployed. In fact, some of the families in his Year 6 class are into their third generation of unemployment.

5.14.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘We live in the digital age’

Todd began by suggesting that literacy in the 21st century was associated with digital life:

“We live in a digital age. Things are communicated from the Internet via mobiles and emails, and you could really say [people] talk that way; there’s no writing. I think you could even say it’s a technology environment. And the kids are constantly using these mediums. They’re constantly getting iPads and iPhones. And they’re using apps. Some of them I’ve never heard of.”

I asked Todd if he thought 21st century literacy was just about living in the digital age, and if this was the primary difference from 20th century literacy.

“To a certain degree I think, it’s entirely about technology. In the 20th century we wrote with pens, we used encyclopaedias. Knowledge was hard to get. But the 21st century is different. We have tools and devices that give us (and our students) more information than we know what to do with … we no longer struggle finding information … we struggle with too much information. This was the point of a recent PD [professional development] session I went to. In the literacy sense, I think the teachers still sort of have the upper hand. But definitely in the technology sense it’s sort of like, what’s new? What can we get
to? Even kids in my town, which is a small city, have access to all sorts of people and information.

So what is Todd’s definition of 21st century literacy?

21st century literacy is about reading and having access to a huge amount of information and ways of communicating. I suppose most of what I’m teaching my kids is about comprehension … how to understand and navigate all of this information. I work with a literacy coach, and we’ve introduced a writer’s notebook, where kids have the choice to write and do what interests them and things like that.

Todd is a keen user of technology, and was eager to present 21st century literacy as influenced heavily by technology, with the role of the teacher being to help students navigate and interpret the information that the students have access to.

5.14.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘We need to teach our students how to understand what they are reading’

Although he is focused mostly on digital literacy, Todd also believes that critical literacy is important, and that the skills Year 6 students need in the 21st century literacy environment are concerned primarily with comprehension, particularly of digital texts:

In my Year 6 class I spend most of my time telling my students they cannot cut and copy straight from the Internet, which is what they do. Often they have access to so much information, but they don’t have the skills to interpret it. We have a real problem with comprehension simply because our kids just have access to too much information.

Todd firmly believes that the skills his Year 6 students need are different from the 20th century:
The 20th century environment has passed. It’s no longer with us. We live in an entirely new and different world. And education has to come to terms with that. We cannot teach the way we taught in the 20th century. If we do that, we will have a whole lot of kids who will be unemployable.

We live in a world, and our Year 6 students live in a world, where the pace of change and the amount of information is almost unimaginable to generations that lived 50 years ago. Schools are still trying to live in a world that has passed, but we cannot let this happen. We need to equip our students with the knowledge around how to use technology safely and effectively, but we also need to make sure that they have the skills to continue to learn, to embrace the new technology, but also be critical of it. Technology has changed the way we communicate … how we write … how we read. Think about how we read a newspaper online. It’s completely different to the way we read it in hardcopy. Our students need the skills to move between the online and offline worlds … but the reality is we need to be putting more focus into the online world because this is where we are heading. But right now the problem is that we are still more focused in the offline world.

Todd was passionate about technology and it was clear that when he considered literacy strategies for the 21st century, he was locating it within a technology paradigm. There was little evidence that Todd considered 21st century literacy skills beyond the effective and meaningful use of technology to encompass the broader literacy skills that children require today; those of creativity, problem solving and collaboration, to name a few.

5.14.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘I use devices to engage my students’

Todd is a keen user of technology, and explained that he also has many students whom he feels are more engaged when they are using technology. He offered the following insight:
I’ve got lots of sporty kids this year, compared to last year, when I didn’t, so I had to find another way in, for example with technology and games on the iPads, and reward the kids with things on the iPads. So, this year, it’s sport, so we’re trying to mix in sport and literacy. If they play sport on the weekend, we’ll do a recap on the iPad and include their emotions in it and things like that, to give it a bit of life and engage them.

Todd also feels that the students in his class are disadvantaged because of their socio-economic status. He offered the following explanation to justify this:

In my school we have a lot of kids from disadvantaged backgrounds. Often education isn’t a priority in the home, and many of my parents are only semi-literate. This does affect the way I teach literacy. These kids need the basics. They are probably not going to go to university, and we need to make sure they have functional literacy skills. I do this through the use of technology, because most of them will have a phone or something like that. And with 21st century literacy, it’s definitely got something to do with the demographics of where we live. We live a long way from a university and it just costs too much. When we are talking about literacy in the 21st century, I think one of the things is to do with the gap between the literate and illiterate … I think the gap is growing wider. The illiterate will be the ones who can’t use technology well … I see this in my class already.

[For example] in my class it’s obvious the kids who have access to technology outside of school; the kids who have iPads or computers at home. They are able to comprehend and use technology so much more effectively. The kids who don’t, often struggle to keep up. They can do the basics, but that is about it. It’s a worry. Part of it has to do with cost … in my class, 60 to 70% would only have one parent, or maybe a parent with a boyfriend or a partner, and often they are struggling. So just to get enough food is their challenge. Technology isn’t even on the table. So we have two groups emerging in our school. The kids who are digitally literate and the kids who aren’t.
Todd’s insight into his classroom and the home lives of his students is enlightening and clearly is impacting his literacy teaching. Given that he believes so strongly that being literate in the 21st century is about being able to use technology effectively to gain and create meaning, he is of the view that we have an emerging societal problem. Using his community as an example, there is a widening gap between the children who have access to technology outside of school, and thus have a chance of being literate in the 21st century, and those who don’t and who are at risk of being ‘illiterate’ in a 21st century context.

5.14.4 Reflecting on Todd’s interview

Todd presented as a very enthusiastic teacher. Within the first few minutes of the interview he told me that he loved his job, and wanted to become a principal in time. Todd was socially aware, and felt passionately about making a contribution to his local community. He was a part of a football club and coached children on both Friday night and Sunday morning. Todd’s classroom was bright and full of sport memorabilia. It was clear he supported the Collingwood football club, as there were three posters around his classroom. Todd was very warm and invited me back to observe his students working.

5.15 Leo’s Story

Leo is one of three Year 6 teachers in a government primary school in Melbourne. He has been teaching Year 6 for eight years and prior to that was a Physical Education teacher for three years.

Leo’s school is a very multicultural school, with 34 different nationalities represented in the student population.

5.15.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘It’s about context surely’

Leo began by defining 21st century literacy as:

*Being able to read and write and communicate in a range of different ways, but appropriate to the context.*
For Leo, literacy was about making meaning, and he offered a very interesting insight into cultural difference in his school, pointing out that:

*In my school children communicate in all different languages … the language doesn’t matter … however, what’s interesting is the tools they use to communicate are the same … So I can have a Chinese boy talking to his mum in his native language while he is texting a friend in English, and taking a handwritten note from me … Context matters. Often we get so hung up on English conversations in Australia that we forget that literacy is about making meaning globally.*

*I would say 80% of my class has English as a second language. What I have found is that most children, particularly Vietnamese or from Asian backgrounds, don’t make certain sounds, so literacy in the 21st century isn’t about trying to make everybody speak fluent English, it’s about having greater cultural awareness and seeing how other people communicate and that requires a huge amount of skill.*

Leo offered a different context from that of other participants. He is of the view that literacy in the 21st century is about understanding how children make meaning beyond school, and the background and culture of that meaning making.

### 5.15.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘It’s about lots of languages all working together’

Leo was teaching a unit on narrative writing in his Year 6 class at the time of the interview. He explained that the narratives were being written in their first language and were being illustrated. As a class they interpreted the different narratives as a way of developing their visual literacy skills:

*The kids find it really interesting. They have written their narratives, but because a lot of the kids can’t read another language, they have to be really...*
specific with their illustrations if they want to get their meaning across ... This is 21st century literacy. It’s not just about computers or iPhones ... it’s about diversity and the recognition that Australia, in particular, is undergoing a rapid cultural change and this impacts the way we make meaning. As teachers we need to be careful not to prejudice children because they come from a different background.

5.15.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘It’s a mad house of computers and cultures ... all working together’

At the time of our interview, Leo’s Year 6 students were using devices to create reports about their culture:

My students have a flip camera and laptop. Their task is to create a report about one aspect of their home life, and turn it into a PowerPoint presentation. In groups, students view each other’s PowerPoint presentations and they have to write a response to the student, in English, either asking questions or making an informed comment. It’s a way to get students sharing their different cultural practices, hopefully using some 21st century literacies.

Leo offered to supply some of the finished reports at the conclusion of the unit. Unfortunately, his Principal was not willing for them to be a part of this study.

It was refreshing to see a classroom that was thinking about 21st century literacy beyond just the use of technology. Leo was not assuming that 21st century literacy didn’t involve the use of technology or that the way we create meaning isn’t influenced by technology, but he also saw that literacy is being influenced by cultural interconnectedness, and that part of being able to create meaning and interpret meaning in the 21st century is about having cultural awareness.

5.15.4 Reflecting on Leo’s interview

Leo arrived at the interview with chocolate cake from the staffroom. He offered me a piece as well as a cup of coffee. Leo was bright and bubbly, and it was clear he wanted me to feel very welcome. His classroom represented his
personality. There were many slogans and mantras that he used with his students focusing on positive actions and behaviours. His desk was full of papers and a work program. I really enjoyed the interview with Leo as he was very focused on 21st century literacy and wanted to demonstrate his knowledge and work that he was doing in the area.

5.16 Tanya’s Story

Tanya is a Year 6 teacher with eleven years of experience teaching in a range of Victorian government schools. She has also been a Literacy Coach and has served in various leadership roles within schools.

5.16.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘It’s about problem solving’

Tanya holds the view that literacy in the 21st century is about problem solving. She recognises that the world today is more complex, and one of the key things people need to be able to do is solve problems. Therefore she feels that a critical part of her Year 6 literacy classroom is teaching her students how to solve problems. She offered the following insight:

*Year 6 students need to be proficient readers, problem solvers and spellers.
Problem solving within reading is critical. If they can’t work out what they are reading, then we are in all sorts of trouble. Within reading, they have to be very proficient at reading and spelling. I don’t see that they have to be really good at writing because all the technologies these days seem to do it for them. I just think if they can read, and if they can spell, then that is very important.*

What is interesting is that Tanya’s view is anchored in both the 20th and 21st centuries and she appears to be suggesting that being able to spell correctly is a part of the problem-solving paradigm she refers to. Tanya moved on to suggest that the 20th century practice of reading for pleasure was still firmly a part of being literate in the 21st century:
Reading for pleasure is totally a 21st century literacy skill; being able to pick books that are appropriate, and not books that they won’t be interested in, and being able to differentiate between the two. Obviously [reading for pleasure is also about] comprehension and being able to infer meaning from the text, and not just take the text literally. Literal is great but they need to be inferential and evaluative readers, and probably reading for meaning; reading for pleasure but reading for meaning as well.

Tanya’s use of terms shifted considerably, and it was not clear exactly how she was defining the nature of ‘reading for pleasure’. There was evidence within the transcript that Tanya felt that Year 6 students needed to be competent problem solvers within texts of various types. Further, Tanya seemed to suggest that there are different purposes for reading, and that one of the purposes is reading for pleasure. She appears to feel that it is important that children are exposed to texts that they can read for pleasure.

5.16.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘I just can’t keep up’
Tanya describes herself as a 20th century literacy teacher. She made the following statement:

It’s impossible to keep up with all the technology that is going on. So I tend to teach my students the basics of reading, writing and spelling. If they have the basics (which is what I’m good at) they can pick up the rest.

Rather than dwelling on the skills needed to teach literacy in the 21st century, I asked Tanya if she observed any differences in her students when it came to literacy learning, and how she deals with them. She made the following statement:

I’ve noticed over the years children are nowhere near as persistent as they once were. They often don’t keep going, they keep coming back to me and they don’t read for a purpose.
You have to do what you can. You have to be positive and try to get the students to understand that if they don’t have the basics, then they won’t be able to use the technology that they want to. The basics allow them to use all the things like mobile phones and computers.

Not everyone’s got a mobile phone and seeing as they’re not allowed to have Facebook, supposedly, we shouldn’t really be saying: look at this Facebook text. But, having said that, in an ideal classroom you would be using emails I suppose. They’ve all got email accounts. But, I’m still old school. I think you should not use such things, and—the ‘n’ symbol for and, and all that sort of stuff. No, I don’t.

Tanya was making the point that she feels that ‘SMS language’ should not be part of her literacy classroom, and she is not prepared to engage with it. Her value proposition is in teaching formal English: that is what she is passing on, and what she expects from her students.

Intrigued, I questioned Tanya about her own use of technology:

I don’t know what iPods are, so if kids bring in an iPod and say, can I do such and such on an iPod, I say no. I don’t know what they are, so I have to either find out or something … and I simply don’t have time. I know the world is moving towards computers and kids use them all of the time. But I just feel in my classroom, no matter if it is the 20th century, the 21st century or even the 22nd century, children need to know the basic English conventions. Parents expect it, society expects it and therefore I expect it. I just think we spend too much time worrying about all this digital stuff.

Of all the participants in this research project, Tanya’s view of literacy was the most surprising. In her classroom, Tanya’s Work Program was handwritten in beautiful cursive writing. Her displays were hand-made and of a very high quality. A number focused on very localised issues, such as the history of the
local town. The general handwriting on display from students was exceptionally neat. My observation was of a classroom that was warm and caring, and full of creativity, but in which, features of 21st century literacy, such as examples of multiliteracies, digital literacy, and multimodality, were entirely missing.

5.16.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘An insight into spelling’

Tanya was very proud of her spelling program, and we spent much of the interview discussing her spelling program. Tanya introduced it this way:

*Spelling is so important … In fact I can’t think of anything more important in literacy than spelling. I think spelling has come up because all our parents, and us (our generation in other words) learned how to spell and we think it is important. And it kind of got put to the side in the Middle Years. The focus was just on reading, and writing and spelling sort of got pushed down. And now it’s come back up and there is a huge focus on spelling because our children simply cannot spell unless they are using a spellcheck. Of course if you can’t spell, you can’t write … So in my classroom spelling is a focus. Everything we do in literacy revolves around spelling.*

I asked Tanya if she could give an overview of how her spelling program works, and this is what she offered:

*It’s a painful question, isn’t it? It’s not sexy like all of the technology stuff. But I would make a few comments first. I don’t think it has to just be Year 6. I think it has to be a whole school focus. If it’s not a whole school focus, then you get the kids that come to you in Year 6 and they still can’t do it. But, I think spelling has to be, dare I say it, rote learned. Rote learning; that’s how we learned times tables. That’s how we learned how to count. And that’s how we learn to spell. I just think it has to be a lot of rote learning, and I’m quite sure all the older people would agree with me, and parents would agree with me. That’s how they learned at school, and they can do it. So, I just think we’re missing something. You look at their handwriting obviously and their writing,*
and you help them from that. You’ve got your dictionary. You’ve got their goal books. I like to play Hangman with my kids and make it a little bit more fun, but I really do think it’s a lot of rote, a lot of spelling tests, but where do you fit it all in?

Tanya’s views on this, and on 21st century literacy more broadly, are clearly outliers within the data. However, they demonstrate the diversity of views that exists within the Year 6 teacher population, and illustrate one teacher’s very strong view of literacy learning. What is interesting is that at the school in which Tanya works, she has the highest number of requests from parents to be their child’s teacher. It is likely that this strong support is as much about her warm and engaging personality as it is about parents who identify with and find comfort in a more traditional approach to education. This underscores the influence of parents in schools, and perhaps underscores the need for this stakeholder group to be ‘educated’ about the skills children need to be literate in the 21st century. In many ways this highlights the importance of considering literacy as a social practice within time and place.

5.16.4 Reflecting on Tanya’s interview

Tanya’s interview was very dry. Tanya wanted to work through the interview questions and tended to answer them like a job interview. I found it difficult to connect with Tanya, and I think she found it difficult to deviate off the responses she had prepared. We did manage to discuss some student work, which helped demonstrate the points she was discussing with me.

5.17 Dale’s Story

Dale is a Year 6 teacher in a large regional Victorian city. He has worked at his current school for the past twenty-two years and plans to retire at the end of 2013. Dale has been teaching Year 6 for the past fourteen years.
5.17.1 Defining 21st century literacy: ‘It’s about English but using technology’

Dale’s view of literacy in the 21st century centres on using technology to teach English conventions. He offered the following example:

In my class I think formal English is very important. English has rules and it’s important that the Year 6 students understand the rules. However, we can use technology to teach the rules. For example we can use an app to teach students the difference between a noun and a verb … or we can use a computer or the Internet to learn how to write a narrative or another genre of writing. So yeah, I think the 21st century is about still learning English, but we can learn it not just with a chalkboard and paper.

Dale did not elaborate further on his views of 21st century literacy.

5.17.2 21st century literacy skills: ‘The times have changed’

Dale explained that he has been teaching Year 6 for many years and has seen many changes; some he feels are positive, others are negative. He feels that technology is something that has changed the way a teacher works, but not necessarily improved student learning. Dale offered the following explanation:

I’ve seen a lot of change in Year 6. When I started teaching all we had was a chalkboard and a few bits of paper. Even the kids had to write on chalkboards. But then came computers, and that was pretty good … but now we just have to assess so much, and it’s become so political and there is so much paperwork. A lot of the time all we are doing in literacy is making sure the kids can perform like monkeys on a test. We are not really preparing them for anything other than a test. It’s a shame really. And we wonder why they are disengaging. About time we asked the people in Spring Street that one.

Dale was not necessarily negative about literacy teaching in the 21st century; rather he felt that it had become too political. He offered a further explanation:
When something is in the best interests of the Year 6 student, I’m all for it. But when we have to do six weeks of testing so they perform on a test that needs to be sent to Region, I really wonder what we are doing. Teaching has changed … the world might have changed too, but teaching has become a political game. And literacy is just a part of it. We could be doing really exciting things in literacy, but we have a leadership group who have been forced to adopt and conform, and the people who most lose out are the kids.

When I pressed Dale to consider the kinds of literacy practices he felt were important for Year 6 students in the 21st century, he offered the following:

Well exactly what I’m talking about. I will often tell my students when they have to do yet another test for somebody sitting behind a desk, that this isn’t about their learning; it’s about being able to tick a box. Students need to learn how to find out the purpose for what they are writing or what they are reading. We live in a world where there is so much information so easily available, and we think that more information equals a better outcome, which I think is wrong. But our students need to know the purpose of what they are doing, and I think that’s critical for a Year 6 teacher.

Dale is disgruntled with the system, and was not willing to contribute much to the interview beyond outlining the challenges from bureaucracy that he faces as part of his literacy teaching, although one can infer from his comments that he understands the world of multiliteracies and the need for critical thinking skills to enable the children to be able to interpret what they are reading and to evaluate its validity.

5.17.3 Influences on teachers’ literacy practices: ‘It’s about keeping them happy’

Dale is of the view that literacy teaching in the 21st century was about satisfying imposed expectations from Government bureaucrats. He offered the following insight:
Normally on a Monday morning there is some test in my pigeonhole that I have to administer for the week. So we spend Monday talking about it, Tuesday up-skilling, Wednesday completing it and Thursday marking it. Friday is when we get to do some decent literacy teaching.

I asked Dale if this was really the case, and he made the following point:

Well it’s not like that every week, but you are collecting research on literacy teaching in the 21st century, so you may as well know what really goes on. Don’t be fooled by pretty government documents or language that sounds impressive. It’s hard in the trenches. What is being espoused is not what really goes on.

I pressed Dale to see if he could come up with a literacy lesson that he has enacted that he feels is associated with contemporary literacy practices and that he felt happy with. He was not able to come up with an example. I asked him to share with me what he has been doing with his Year 6 students as part of their literacy studies, and he shared the following:

Right now we are writing narratives. Our literacy coordinator will not allow the use of computers because they have to write a narrative as part of their entrance exam to the local secondary school, so we are making sure they are as polished as they can be so we can look impressive.

At this point I ended the interview. I had come to the view that Dale had chosen to participate in this study as a way of sharing his disgruntlement and frustration. While I have acknowledged these themes in this brief narrative, I think his experience is an exception to teaching in Victoria, rather than the norm. I expressed this to Dale and offered that he could either withdraw or add to his transcript. He elected to do neither.
5.17.4 Reflecting on Dale’s interview

Dale’s interview was an absolute joy to be a part of! Dale was very theatrical, and often ‘acted out’ many of the points he was trying to make. Dale had worked at the same school for many years, and often referred to himself as a dinosaur. Dale had a walking stick in his classroom, which he ‘pretends’ to use with his students to demonstrate his old age! Dale was warm and inviting, but had also taken the time to prepare for the interview. It was clear that staff admired him, as there were three occasions where other staff members interrupted the interview to say goodbye for the day.

5.18 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to introduce the research participants, to give an insight into how they define 21st century literacy and how they think literacy in the 21st century should be taught, as well as offering insight into their experience of how they go about teaching literacy. It has also attempted to identify influences that impact literacy teaching for Year 6 teachers, and to give a first-hand account of these factors.

What this chapter has highlighted is the variation in how teachers define and enact literacy in the 21st century. It has also shone a light on some of the challenges and barriers that exist within Victorian schools. Most common among these are the varying definitions and understandings of 21st century literacy, the level of resourcing required, the time it takes, and the influence of key stakeholders. In the next chapter, I explore the collective experiences, using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach.

5.19 Dear Diary—Me as a narrative inquirer

The interviews are done and the information has been coded and analysed, it is a significant milestone. But as I write this entry I am struck by the fact that being a narrative inquirer is much more demanding than I initially expected. As I’ve often reflected upon, I find narrative powerful, and I’m very committed to it as a
research methodology. What I was not expecting was the degree of difficulty that I encountered, and I want to capture some of the difficulties I faced.

**Building relationships:**
I have always valued relationships. However, what I found really difficult was walking into research participants’ classrooms, where often the only conversations I had were via phone, and asking them to reveal very deep and personal insights into their teaching values and practices. I know if I was the research participant I would have been very sceptical of any researcher coming in and asking the kinds of questions I did.

In a number of interviews, I could almost feel the tension that existed between the participant and me. I was the ‘academic’, almost trying to ‘catch the teacher out’—or at least, that’s how it felt. I addressed this in a number of ways. Often I told my story—my own narrative. Talking like a teacher in some ways gave me currency. I was viewed as being less ‘suspicious’. I also talked about practices that I wasn’t proud of, both as a teacher and administrator. This provided relief for the participant. It made me ‘one of them’. Indeed, I was walking beside them. I was acutely aware that this was relationship building, but it was also an interesting insight; teachers sometimes feel threatened when their views and teaching practices are questioned. I can’t help but wonder if there isn’t further research work needed here.

**Research participation:**
During the recruitment stage I was very disheartened about how difficult it was to find research participants. I suspect part of what made it difficult was what I have alluded to above; however, I think it was something more. Teachers, in Australia at least, still see themselves as separate to the research community. Research in schools often is not valued, and certainly is often treated with a degree of suspicion. Again, I wonder if part of this is to do with relationships. In my own research, I’m acutely aware that once I had my data, I disappeared out
of my research participants’ lives. I’m not proud of this, and I think it is partly why teachers often feel frustrated by research. I suspect as a future researcher, one of my goals with my research will be to work with a small number of schools/teachers but over a longer period of time. This will allow me to work hard at building relationships of mutual learning and trust.

**Me—as a narrative inquirer**

I loved being a narrative inquirer. Coming alongside the research participants and really understanding their lived experiences was for me a privilege. The richness of their stories not only tells me how they experienced a particular phenomenon, but often why they experienced it in a particular way. It was a privilege to be a narrative inquirer; it felt as though I’d been granted access to an off limits area. I look forward to developing my skills further, and expect that much of my future research will rest upon this methodology.
6 Exploring a Gallery of Themes

6.1 Dear Diary—Working with data

As I sit here thinking about the next stage of this research project, I am daunted by the task of taking so much data and distilling the themes, and not just getting at the themes but thinking how these will link to and inform my research questions. At the end of this section, what will it all look like?

But I am also excited. Having spent so much time understanding methodologies, I trust the hermeneutic phenomenological approach and I am sure it will get me to where I need to be. I have loved creating and telling the individual narratives, but I am really looking forward to understanding what they all mean in a 21st century context.

6.2 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the individual literacy teaching experiences of Year 6 teachers. This chapter identifies and explores some of the collective themes emerging from the data. A phenomenological analysis, as described in the Method chapter and theorised in the Methodology chapter, was undertaken and six themes emerged:

1. Understandings and perceptions of 21st century literacy.
2. The challenge of understanding and enacting 21st century literacy pedagogy.
4. (Mis)conceptions of student literacy ‘needs’ in the 21st century.
5. Perceptions of the influence that student backgrounds and lived experiences have on literacy pedagogy.
6. Perceptions of the influence of school leadership on 21st century literacy pedagogy.

Themes 1, 2 and 3 are focused on the diversity of understanding around what 21st century literacy is and how to enact it. Themes 4 and 5 explore perceptions of what participants feel Year 6 students require, in terms of literacy skills and dispositions in the 21st century and factors impacting this. Theme 6 explores the impact that school leadership has on the teaching of literacy in and for the 21st century.

In presenting this chapter I present not only the experiences of the 15 participants, but offer some analysis drawing on the literature, to help inform and theorise the themes. I also offer my own reflections based on my work with the participants, again drawing on the literature. Finally, I make some recommendations, based on the analysis.

6.3 THEME 1: ‘So what exactly do you mean by 21st century literacy?’ Understandings and perceptions of 21st century literacy

6.3.1 Introduction

From the beginning of early history, the ‘literacy’ concept meant possessing the necessary skill to construct ‘scribbles’ on a section of paper, which when letters were put together, created words that expressed meaning. Teaching the youthful generation to put together words in order to comprehend (and consequently convey) ever more complicated notions, became education’s objective as it developed over the years. (Archer 2004, p. 55).

Today, information regarding the world that surrounds us is conveyed not just through words on paper, but more and more through the use of multimodal practices. Archer (2004) points out that for years, schooling was planned to
guarantee that students would learn actualities about the world in which they reside. However, when the most up-to-date facts are accessible at the press of a button this approach is no longer applicable. As identified within the Literature Review, what students in the current education system need, is to learn ways of identifying what they require to learn (Gurney 2007, p. 89), and they also need to possess the higher order thinking skills to evaluate and analyse whether the information that they have gleaned is useful and applicable.

In short, the information explosion has brought about a major problem for schools, and specifically, as it relates to this study, for the Victorian education system.

To complicate matters further, in the education sector many aspects of literacy theory need to be incorporated into a comprehensive understanding of 21st century literacy, and no one definition seems to encapsulate it. A working ‘definition’ that most of the research would seem to support is that 21st century skills largely theme around critical and creative higher-order thinking, problem solving, collaboration and multimodal communication and participation.

This study certainly has supported this notion. Many of the teachers interviewed had views on what defines 21st century literacy, although there was no consensus amongst the participants. Most often their definitions were narrow, focusing on only one part of a very complex picture. Few were able to articulate a conceptual framework of what literacy in the 21st century actually is, and how it should be taught, as the following discussion illustrates.

6.3.2 Discussion of the theme

6.3.2.1 ‘It’s about technology … isn’t it?’

For the majority of participants, 21st century literacy revolves mainly around the use of technology and social media. Kate’s example makes this point:
Well, obviously it’s about the basics of reading, writing, speaking and listening, that’s your core business within literacy. But in this day and age there’s also a huge push technology-wise. So our job, I guess, is to balance traditional literacy with technology and social media and all the other aspects that are in the children’s lives, and bring these together to create an engaging curriculum for them. They still need the skills of being able to read, being able to write, being able to communicate, but I think now it’s more important that they know how to do that digitally; [that] they know the right forum or the right audience to be using those skills in. And I think there’s a much wider range or a much broader area of how you can teach those skills and how you can learn those skills, for example, talking in terms of the Internet and apps and devices that you can use and video conferencing and Skyping and all those sorts of things. (Kate)

Other comments echoed this opinion:

...21st century literacy skills are mainly about the use of technology. With all the cyber bullying, we need kids who can really understand how to use technology, if nothing else to stay safe. (Kate)

21st century literacy is really about understanding how technology influences us. With all the online advertising it’s clear that children need ways to understand and interpret this. (Dale)

What is most evident in this study is that participants cited technology as being the primary difference between 20th century and 21st century literacy.

6.3.2.2 ‘It’s about communication ... isn’t it?’

While some participants were focusing their definition on digital literacy, others were more concerned with communication.

According to the majority of responses, communication is one of the core elements of 21st century literacy. This does not mean that communication skills were insignificant in the 19th or 20th centuries; rather, the nature of
communication required in the 21st century literacy sphere has changed. It is multimodal and much more diverse. In fact, the social practices and discourses associated with communication in the 21st century are a defining difference when compared to communication in previous eras. Learning outcomes associated with 21st century literacy skills involve being able to clearly and correctly communicate in written and verbal forms, using a range of communication mediums. The following views from Todd, Leo and Michael underscore this point:

21st century literacy is about communication. Kids need to be able to communicate effectively in different settings and understand that the language that you use with your friends face-to-face is different from the way that you talk to each other on Facebook, and that has to be different from the way that you talk to your family and your boss if you’ve got a part-time job. They need to be able to tell the difference between [someone sharing information with you and] someone advertising something to you. They have to be able to think for themselves a lot; to be able to work out if something is valid, for example, we bag Wikipedia a lot because it’s got lots of factual problems. They have to be able to work out that just because an idea is written down, it doesn’t mean that it’s factually true. (Todd)

The way we communicate in the 21st century is completely different, and we need to teach children how to use the tools safely and effectively to communicate. (Leo)

I’m just blown away by how my kids communicate. Often they are doing three things at once. They will be messaging, emailing and talking … this is completely different to how I communicated when I was at school. The 21st century is a different world. (Michael)

6.3.2.3 ‘It’s about thinking, problem solving and questioning …isn’t it?’

Yet another group of participants in this study appeared to suggest that problem solving is a key component of 21st century learning, a definition closer to the
notion of critical literacy. These participants view literacy in the 21st century as requiring young people to be able to engage with and critically evaluate the information and ideas presented. At the same time, they should be able to respond effectively to questions and to make interpretations from the texts they read. Both Mary and Clare pointed this out:

21st century literacy; it’s all about problem solving, using that skill set, when we have no idea what’s coming at us. (Mary)

I think being able to evaluate—that’s a skill. It doesn’t matter what happens in the world, they need to know how to evaluate literacy in whatever form that it may come at them. That is going to be a skill that’s going to be required. In other words, being able to think critically, being able to infer meaning; these are things from a literacy perspective that are needed and that’s not going to change. (Clare)

Many of the respondents agreed that problem-solving skills are paramount in the acquisition of 21st century literacy skills. However, some went further offering an insight as to why these skills are essential. They believe that because information is so readily available and often uncensored, students need skills to be able to interpret the information and make critical judgements about it. Liane made the following remark:

… the 21st century world is no longer linear, and people need to be able to move forward, backwards, sideways, up and down, side to side, in and out, in order to make sense of their world. (Liane)

There was some agreement that the 21st century world is a complex place that requires certain dispositions to be able to understand and interpret it, which in turn requires criticality, creativity, and complex thinking.
6.3.2.4 ‘It’s about information management … isn’t it?’

Technology has been outlined as a dynamic tool for facilitating 21st century literacy learning. Historically, technology has been seen as an effective way to gain access to vast amounts of information. However, as we venture further into the 21st century, the nature of information has changed. We are now battling an information tsunami, where the focus is often not on gathering enough information, but on knowing how to deal with vast amounts of it.

They do need that ability to discern between what’s real and what’s not; they certainly need to be able to understand and put something in their own words. I think that this is something all Grade 5 and 6 teachers should focus on—not just being able to cut and paste something, but to be able to interpret something. For example, we’re doing information reports at the moment, and they’ve chosen to write a report about elephants. You can tell that it’s just being copied and pasted, rather than written for themselves. And I think that’s a big thing because there’s so much information out there that they can just copy and paste. If you don’t teach them how to understand something and put it in a sentence for themselves, they just copy and paste. The problem is that they don’t necessarily want to take the effort or time to write something for themselves. (Shaun)

Shaun also referenced the vastness of the information available in the following comment:

We no longer struggle with finding information; rather, we struggle with too much information. (Shaun)

He and others talked about the fact that children, even in a small town, have access to all sorts of information and that the challenge is how to navigate amounts of information that would have been ‘unimaginable’ to previous generations.
Finally, Dale made the following suggestion:

_We live in a world where there is so much information so easily available, and we think that more information equals a better outcome, which I think is wrong ... our students need to know the purpose of what they are doing._ (Dale)

This theme of information management as an element of 21st literacy suggests that children and young people need to be much more discerning; they need to do more than just gather information, they need to engage with it and interpret and evaluate its authenticity and its usefulness, rather than simply ‘copying and pasting’ without applying any critical thinking.

6.3.2.5 ‘It’s about trying to make literacy meaningful and purposeful and preparing them ‘for life’ ...isn’t it?’

Literacy is a social practice, and therefore needs to reflect society in time and place. Brenda is of the view that literacy in the 21st century needs to embrace the characteristics of the world in which we live and learn. Therefore, it needs to be meaningful and purposeful:

_So it’s one thing to say that [literacy] needs to be meaningful and purposeful, it’s another thing to achieve it. And that’s something I’ve grappled with I suppose, because I’ve looked at the course ID saying that we need to have digital literacy and all these things, and then I’ve come in and seen that you’ve got to also have skills for NAPLAN and all these others things that maybe aren’t so high level, but they need to be addressed in some way because that is what is assessed._ (Brenda)

_So I guess that in most of my literacy teaching, I look at the digital literacy stuff but I also like the inquiry type of stuff; I like kids to look into things themselves and be independent—trying to get them to work on their own goals and be as independent as they can. Then I try to mix in the vocab stuff and the smaller things to try to make sure we’re covering the smaller chunks as well._ (Brenda)
A number of the participants held the view that literacy needs to be relevant to the world in which their students live and learn. It needs to have aspects of ‘real world’ application in addition to academic application. Literacy learning in schools is about enabling students to live and learn in their current world, as well as preparing them to live and learn in their future worlds. Christine positioned it as needing to equip children with the life skills to enable them to ‘keep up with a future that we know little about’.

Others also mentioned this notion of ‘life skills’. In fact, all the respondents concurred that for learners to be able to thrive in their adult lives, they must be introduced to the notion of life skills, which includes literacy skills, in order to engage in everyday tasks such as shopping, budgeting, communicating and so on. Ann put it this way:

…literacy needs to be authentic. I know that word gets thrown around a lot, but if it isn’t real, then students don’t feel they need to know it. They need to see purpose in it. And after all, the brain is wired that way. It’s part of our survival instinct; to learn what we need to learn in order to survive in our environment. (Ann)

There were strong views that literacy in Year 6 needs to be balanced between traditional and contemporary literacy practices and should therefore focus on both the current and future literacy needs of the students. The overwhelming response from participants was that the balance was far too heavily weighted towards traditional literacy learning, with a focus on traditional models of literacy pedagogy at the expense of more real-world applications with a 21st century focus. Georgie put it quite eloquently:

…we know that we need to teach real world or authentic literacy … all the professional development sessions tell us that … but the reality is we don’t have time … because we have all these tests we have to do, and that’s what our
students are marked on ... so we need to teach more traditional literacy ... it isn’t right, but it’s just the way it is in government schools. (Georgie)

6.3.3 Analysis of the theme

According to Gay (2000), 21st century literacy is a framework comprising many elements. The various definitions offered by participants in this research project suggest that 21st literacy embraces the following: communication, problem solving, the ability to make meaningful and informed decisions, the effective use of technology, personal management, and information management. Students must be given support, structure and explicit teaching in the literacy skills required for 21st century participation. Students who have these skills are capable of responding to and comprehending information given in different forms, and linking ideas and information with personal experiences and knowledge.

However, this requires teachers to have the right pedagogical knowledge and an awareness of societal trends. 21st century literacy is not just one aspect or one concept. It is an interwoven set of characteristics, skills and dispositions that we use to make meaning in our world. While it is evident that the participants in this study did not have a holistic view of 21st century literacy, it is interesting to reflect on their interpretations of different aspects of 21st century literacy.

Technology was a large and obvious domain in which participants located their definitions of 21st century literacy, and rightly so. According to Means and Olson (1995), technology will play a significant role in motivating students to learn in the 21st century. To substantiate this claim, Means and Olson (1995) conducted a series of case studies, in which almost all teachers reported that the students involved in technology-based projects displayed high levels of motivation in the process of completing their project tasks. Students who use computer technology in the learning process in the 21st century have been identified with a higher level of thinking, compared to students who use the traditional learning methods (Means and Olson, 1995). It is not clear why this is
the case, and it is not suggested that technology automatically creates higher order thinking capabilities. However, it is worth noting that technology, when used effectively, can enable students to explore, analyse and evaluate information in complex ways. This requires explicit teaching and, as explored in a subsequent theme, many teachers felt that they didn’t have the requisite skills to do this.

It was also evident within this study, that problem solving is seen as a crucial element of literacy participation, primarily because of the amount of information young people need to sort through, interpret and evaluate. ‘Problem-solving skills are a form of project-based learning that enables instructors to build, and learners to focus on, real-world and multifaceted problems through different approaches, such as case studies’ (Leu et al. 2004, p. 8). When students work in small groups to pose and research solutions to problems, a complex and collaborative environment is developed, and these skills of problem solving, group work and collaboration are essential in the 21st century.

Employers are calling for skills that can be loosely grouped under the heading of 21st century skills. Largely, these are based around the themes of critical and creative higher-order thinking, problem solving, collaboration and multimodal communication and participation. However, according to Crockett, Jukes and Churches (2011), even though it may be surprising, many students graduating from high school and college presently do not have the literacy skills needed for life-long learning, participation, or the work environment.

Thus, employers, educators, and policymakers need to work together better to guarantee that the primary and secondary education sectors are providing a solid foundation for students in the areas of higher order thinking, lifelong learning and other skills connected with the 21st century. The data from this study suggest that a critical step in achieving this, is working with teachers to
inform them about the sociological characteristics and trends of the 21st century, and also to equip them with a more holistic view, from a pedagogical perspective, of what literacy in the 21st century entails.

6.3.4 Reflecting on the theme
It is evident that in Victoria at present, workplaces are going through a striking, and at times painful, transformation fuelled by changing demographics, technology use, and globalisation. Furthermore, ICT skills are becoming increasingly imperative as the world continues to change from a manufacturing and industrial-based economy to one that is being propelled by technological innovation, knowledge and information. This suggests that policies which favour the incorporation of ICT skills in the curriculum need to be established, and a framework constructed that allows students to acquire a range of skills and dispositions associated with 21st century literacy.

According to the interpretations of the participants, it is clear that concepts of 21st century literacy are multifaceted, entailing various elements each with a role to play. Coming up with a comprehensive definition of literacy is complex and our natural tendency when presented with a complex picture is to simply concentrate just on the part we understand. This can be seen in the variety of definitions offered by the research participants. Therefore great caution needs to be taken to ensure that we do not encourage teachers to focus on just one aspect of 21st century literacy. 21st century literacy is not just technology, not just globalisation or multimodality. It is a complex interwoven set of skills and dispositions, influenced by sociological factors, which allow us to make meaning.

Furthermore, students should be provided with a platform from which they can practise and utilise literacy skills for the 21st century, and these skills need to be valued equally, relative to traditional literacy practices. Students’ ability to be innovative and creative in their adult life will be influenced by the skills they
acquire and are exposed to in their formative years. Therefore, our education system, and the teachers operating within it, have a moral responsibility to provide an assortment of teaching styles, techniques, and resources, underpinned by offering students a window into the world beyond school and ideally, of the world they will be entering as they leave school.

6.3.5 Recommendations

21st century literacy is a complex and multidimensional concept. In order to promote learning for teachers in this area, and in the light of the findings of this study, I would make the following recommendations:

1. Focus literacy professional development for primary school teachers on the broad concepts of literacy pedagogy. An orientation towards philosophical literacy considerations rather than ‘skills only’ professional development would benefit teachers’ understanding of literacy, and in turn would impact how they enact literacy for their Year 6 students.

2. Encourage critical engagement with literacy theory within primary schools. School leaders and teachers need to reflect on their own understanding of literacy theory, to be acquainted with current thinking and best practice, and to consider pedagogical enactments that they feel would equip students for participation in their current and future worlds.

3. Take into account sociological evolutions in society and in children when implementing policy reform in the area of literacy pedagogy in primary schools. Considering the question of ‘why’ change is required would help teachers navigate the complex concept of 21st century literacy.

6.3.6 Conclusion

This theme has explored how the participants constructed 21st century literacy. The data suggests that the participants in this study had aspects of expert knowledge associated with 21st century literacy skills and dispositions, but there was an overwhelming gap in the ability of participants to construct a holistic
view of 21st century literacy. The data from this study, and from other research, would suggest that for teachers to effectively enact literacy practices with a 21st century orientation, both knowledge of pedagogical practice and of the context in which it sits, are equally necessary. One informs the other, and neither can stand in isolation.

6.4 THEME 2: ‘I know I need to change—but where do I start?’ The challenge of understanding and enacting 21st century literacy pedagogy

6.4.1 Introduction

While the preceding theme focused on the fact that many teachers don’t have a clear or consistent understanding of what 21st century literacy is, or what skills are required to be literate in the 21st century, most understand that this ‘new’ literacy is different to what has gone before. In this theme I explore the view that while teachers know that the 21st century world is different and they need to change, they don’t know where to start in embarking on that change.

Many commentators today within education and beyond, have raised questions concerning the nature of the future job market: what jobs are our young people going to be undertaking, and how different will those jobs be, compared to what we have known historically? Closely tied to that question, but also of concern more broadly, is the debate about the literacy skills people require to live, learn and communicate in the 21st century.

In answering this question, many authors of recent research studies agree: communities now and into the future require diverse and creative thinkers. As mentioned in the preceding theme and as highlighted throughout this paper, 21st century literacy is a complex concept, and the skills that underpin it largely group around critical and creative higher-order thinking, problem solving, collaboration and multimodal communication and participation.
Many teachers in this study know that the world in which they are operating today is very different from the one in which they grew up, and that their students need to be armed with new skills. As was seen in the preceding theme, the challenge is that they don’t have a common and comprehensive definition of 21st century literacy skills, or of what constitutes appropriate 21st century pedagogy, and teachers appear to be ill equipped and/or lack the dispositions needed to meet this challenge. This results in an education system in Australia that seems to be focused on a dated model, one with an emphasis on low level thinking and closed questions. Teachers in this study, despite knowing that it is not necessarily in the best interests of their students, are fundamentally developing students to think uniformly and homogeneously.

Based on the findings of this research project and on the literature more generally, it appears clear that the Australian education system needs to change. It needs to evolve from a conventional system to a contemporary system: put another way, from a 20th century model to a 21st century model of education—a system that embraces progressive globalisation ideals.

In this section, I discuss this need for change in pedagogy in Australian schools as well as the perceived barriers to that change.

6.4.2 Discussion of the theme

All participants in this study were unanimous in their view that Victorian primary schools need to evolve the way pedagogy is constructed and enacted, to reflect the realities of literacy in the 21st century. What then is impeding this change?

6.4.2.1 The challenge of not knowing even where to begin

One barrier that was shared by a number of participants was people simply didn’t know, or weren’t sure, where to start. Christine’s comments were typical of the views of the group in this regard:
I know that we need to change, but we have just been doing traditional literacy for so long that we don’t know how to change. It’s imprinted. It’s frustrating and I see that in my mindset. I would like to see change. I would like us to embrace more of a 21st century literacy curriculum, but really, nobody knows where to start. (Christine)

It seems that the world is changing, and that this transformation is taking place rapidly and yet industrial concepts of pedagogy that were once successful seem to continue to endure in primary schools across Victoria.

Christine talked about teaching ‘old’ (20th century) literacies but using technology to deliver them. She knows that ‘deep down’ this is not right, but she doesn’t quite know what is right. Even though she realises that there is a need for changes in pedagogy, the fact that she has been a part of a traditional literacy framework for so long seems to be holding back her progress towards a more contemporary version of literacy pedagogy. The result is a teacher wanting to change, but unable to. She and others in the study are of the view that no one knows how to go about constructing a truly 21st century literacy curriculum. Mary summed it up succinctly when she talked about not understanding what 21st century literacy means for teaching, or knowing where teachers should start in trying to figure out how to embrace this ‘new world’.

6.4.2.2 The challenge that 21st century literacy skills aren’t highly valued and in some cases are actively discouraged in schools

The world is radically changing almost everywhere, except in our schools (Prensky, 2010), and at a pace that is faster than ever. How we can equip young people with literacy skills that focus on critical and creative thinking, multimodal communication and active participation within an environment of constant change, is the challenge that education faces into the 21st century. The issue for Victorian schools is that even though the need for change has been
realised, encouraging teachers and facilitating changes in literacy pedagogy remains a challenge.

Data from this study confirms that 20th century literacy pedagogy is prevalent in our schools. Participants also indicated that education is still struggling to place high value on these skills, and in fact, appears to be edging towards the opposite, in terms of the new emphasis on high-stakes standardised testing, a barrier that is discussed below. 21st century literacy learning is apparent in many education curriculum documents, but the value that is placed on this aspect of the curriculum seems at odds with the value society places on these skills. In some instances, school policies actively discourage the teaching of 21st century literacy skills, especially in the area of digital technology. Ann’s comment supports this view:

…the kids are constantly using technology. They’re constantly getting iPads and iPhones, but we still struggle to use them effectively in our teaching. I think a lot of the time it is because we know how we use them in everyday life, but we don’t really know how to use them in a classroom. And we have policies at our school that says kids can’t use their phones or iPads … so that is really limiting too. We have to get better at it or we are going to be left behind. (Ann)

Ann’s response is laced with frustration, particularly with reference to the policies and regulations that have been established. Tanya also pointed to the impact of school policies:

I’d really like to teach more digital stuff in literacy. I’d like us to use Facebook and all the tools that we use every day. But then again, there are all the policies against it. And you’re not really supposed to bring your mobile phone to school, and if you do it’s at your own risk, and Facebook’s blocked at school. (Tanya)
So in summary, the challenge that many participants identified is that their schools not only don’t value the tools to enact 21st century literacy pedagogies, they are actually prohibited from using them by their school’s policies and practices.

6.4.2.3 The challenge of the education policy environment

Another barrier to the implementation of a 21st century literacy pedagogy that was cited by a number of participants is the involvement of the Victorian Education Department. According to Ann and Tanya, without effective policies in place to ensure a ‘real’ transformation, the skills and dispositions of teachers are restricted. Tanya made the following comment:

*The Education Department talks about literacy for the 21st century, but offers no real professional development, and it actually develops policies that restrict the use of technology. We seem to be living in a world where the rhetoric suggests one thing, but the reality suggests another. (Tanya)*

The problem with policies that restrict the use of technology in classrooms is that the literacy practices students use outside the school are 21st century in nature. Both participants in this study and the commentary more generally in the literature, suggest that the literacy practices students use beyond school are potentially dangerous if their knowledge about them is limited. A number of participants suggested that this is a reason why literacy practices, particularly those associated with technology, should be an essential part of the curriculum. Angela made the following comment:

*…students use Facebook, instant chat, and mobile phones to communicate with friends all over the world. Yet we don’t see this as relevant in the classroom literacy program. We are more concerned about them getting the structure correct in a narrative. I think the emphasis is wrong. (Angela)*
One particular policy area that was common amongst the study data, and which generated a lot of emotion amongst participants, was that of standardised testing. The focus on standardised testing is seen as a significant impediment to enacting 21st century pedagogy and as a result, Government policy is encouraging teachers to teach within a dated framework. Christine summed it up like this:

[Changing the way we teach], that’s my trickiest thing, because I’ve been data and assessment reporting for so long … Terrifyingly, the things we probably need to stop doing in literacy, if we are focused on 21st century literacy, are the things that standardised testing seems to be imposing. (Christine)

Christine is not alone in her views, as the following quotes illustrate:

On the one hand we have a government standardised testing regime that is testing traditional literacies. On the other hand we have students engaged in a world that is anything but standardised. (Liane)

When something is in the best interests of the Year 6 student, I’m all for it. But when we have to do six weeks of testing so they perform on a test that needs to be sent to the Region, I really wonder what we are doing. (Dale)

[The curriculum says] that we need to have digital literacy and all these things, and then I’ve come in and seen that you’ve got to also have skills for NAPLAN and all these others things that maybe aren’t so high level, but which need to be addressed in some way because that is what is assessed. (Brenda)

NAPLAN doesn’t encourage 21st century literacy; it does the exact opposite. For me 21st century literacy is about digital texts, collaboration, online learning, real world tasks with real world learning tools … NAPLAN encourages everything that 21st century literacy isn’t. And because so much emphasis is placed on NAPLAN we have to teach like we are back in the 1800s. (Clare)
6.4.2.4 The challenge of lack of time

A further barrier mentioned was that of time, specifically lack of time. While participants in this study are willing to embrace technology and 21st century literacy pedagogies, little time is available for them to familiarise themselves with particular forms of technology or with evolved pedagogical practices as Shaun pointed out:

Sometimes it’s an inability to get my head around how to use a new tool. It takes time, and we just don’t have the time. So I guess you just revert back to what you know best. It’s not that we don’t think 21st century literacy is important, we just don’t have the time to really understand and embrace it I think. (Shaun)

6.4.2.5 The challenge of insufficient professional development

The seriousness of the challenge of time is aggravated by the realisation that the majority of the teachers in this study are more familiar with the traditional literacy practices than with their 21st century equivalents. When introduced to digital tools, they are willing, but often feel unable to enact them effectively, not just because they feel the time pressures are so great, but because there is so little training. This influences the planning for, and meaningful integration of, 21st century literacy skills in their teaching practices. Clare supported this interpretation:

21st century literacy is a lot about digital literacy; the children come in and tell me all the different things they’re using, and I’m just playing catch up all the time. It’s probably still the same [underlying skills] though. They still need to be able to take in all those sources and make something of it. That’s where those critical [literacy] skills come in, in the analysing and the summarising, because out there it’s even more open for them. (Clare)

Others spoke more directly about the fact that the amount of professional development offered to teachers is minimal:
Professional development is just non-existent in this stuff. The young teachers come in with all this knowledge, and this makes me feel old and antiquated, and then the Principal looks at me as though I’m an underperforming teacher … which I don’t want to be. (Todd)

I know the digital revolution is here, and our classrooms are full of digital natives, but that doesn’t mean teachers know how to teach digitally. A lot of the time it’s just too big—there is too much out there, so it is just easier to keep with traditional literacy. (Dale)

We have a National Curriculum that is talking about multimodality and equipping students with 21st century skills, but the professional development that we receive still focuses a lot of the time on phonics! (Liane)

The participants in this study felt that relevant professional development in 21st century literacy skills and pedagogy is lacking. Courses that can assist teachers to not only learn about the tools, but the practices to enact them meaningfully, either doesn’t exist or they don’t have access to them. Lambert and Gong (2010) recommend that schools should venture more into continuous training programs for the teachers and ensure that the training is made as accessible and effective as possible.

6.4.2.6 The challenge of parent expectations

One barrier that wasn’t immediately obvious until the data from a number of participants were was compared side by side, was the influence of parent communities in the enactment of 21st century pedagogy. A number of participants spoke about how parents expected them to be teaching traditional literacies. Clare spoke about how she was ‘banned’ from using multimodal literacies as a result of parent intervention:

Last term I went to a professional development day on using social media in my classroom. I got some great ideas. I worked these ideas into my work program,
cleared them with the Literacy Coordinator and slowly set about teaching them. It wasn’t radical. It was using Twitter for reflective writing, and asking students to keep a blog. Anyway, it lasted about a week. Parents hated it. They said they wanted their children to learn how to read and write ‘the normal way’ … and by this they meant like they did. It was very difficult because my Principal sided with the parents and told me to just hold back for a while because the school was very traditional … (Clare)

[In addition] I have been using Evernote all year, but when parents thought I was not teaching the way they thought I should be, even that became an issue. Last week we were doing summarising so we gave them non-fiction articles and they were putting them in their Evernote so we could see them afterwards. Anyway, a small group of parents found out about that, and now that’s gone too … Can you believe it? I’m back to using a chalkboard in 2013! (Clare)

Another participant, Michael, referring to himself as a maverick, spoke about his ‘battle’ with parents:

This sort of stuff just doesn’t happen in this school. The literacy coordinator is completely against it because she can’t map it or colour code it. It’s a new way of thinking about literacy, and this is scary for everybody. I’ve had to battle with parents, even the School Council, but I really believe this is the right thing to do for my students. (Michael)

Tanya described herself as a 20th century teacher who is, therefore, not actually teaching her students 21st century skills and she attributes at least part of her reason to the parent community:

I just feel in my classroom, no matter if it is the 20th century, the 21st century or even the 22nd century, children need to know the basic English conventions. Parents expect it, society expects it and therefore I expect it … I just think it has to be a lot of rote learning, and I’m quite sure all the older people would agree
with me, and parents would agree with me. That’s how they learned at school, and they can do it. (Tanya)

Finally, in a particularly interesting example, Shaun, who had quite a developed understanding of 21st century literacy, was nonetheless teaching 20th century literacy skills to his students. He explained that he teaches the way he does because he feels that this type of teaching is what is expected of him; in particular, he feels pressure from colleagues and parents to enact this type of learning for his students.

6.4.3 Analysis of the theme

The 21st century world is driven by innovation, knowledge, technology, and productivity. To emerge as a competitive country globally, Australia needs to have a population that has the skills, ingenuity, and creativity appropriate for time and place. These elements are required to ensure the continued prosperity that Australia has enjoyed for many years. Sardone and Devlin-Scherer (2010, p. 10) outline that in order to accomplish this, we need to start with pedagogy and the fundamental skills imparted to young people from an early age. The authors add that part of the role of education should be enabling people with the skills needed to participate socially, intellectually, and economically in the 21st century.

Graff (2010) agrees that there needs to be a distinct gap between the education that was practised in the 20th century and education for the 21st century. While all the participants acknowledge the need for change in the 21st century, the challenge of complacency still remains. It was evident that many were of the view that they needed to change their literacy practices. However, what was less clear is why the participants felt they needed to change. There was also a distinct lack of awareness of the reality of globalisation, and of the changing nature of work in the future. Angela and Todd’s points illustrate the point:
It’s a different world. I mean we do communicate differently, but there are a lot of things that we do [that] are still sort of done the same [way] … (Angela)

Sometimes it’s hard, because we are charged with equipping our students with skills for the 21st century, but often we don’t really know what the world is like beyond school, because many of us have never left school. (Todd)

The notion that teachers in this study were unaware of what the world of the 21st century really looks like (including characteristics, trends and predictions going forward) was troubling, but it may help to explain why such a strong view of the importance of traditional literacy still holds a very prominent place in today’s schools.

At the heart of a rapidly changing world in the early part of the 21st century is a literacy discourse that is changing to reflect the ‘new’ ways we live, work and communicate. While the illiterate of the 20th century were those who could not read or write, ‘the illiterate of the 21st century will be those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn’ (Toffler, 1995). Literacy in the 21st century embraces and demands skills in multimodality, digital citizenship and information management, within a context of fluidity and change. Jukes suggests that ‘we need to move our thinking beyond our primary focus and fixation on factual recall’ (Crockett, Jukes & Churches 2011, p. 17). While this seems obvious, the focus on factual recall seems to endure, e.g. the trend in Australia around the introduction of high-stakes standardised testing, where teachers are either directly or indirectly being encouraged to teach to the test to improve school data (Breivik 2005).

So how do we address this dilemma? We need to begin with challenging policies and practices within education and, most importantly, empowering teachers through training and professional development. Revising not merely
the content of the curriculum, but also the pedagogical practices through which it is taught, is a crucial starting point in equipping students for the 21st century.

A specific example of this is the issue of digital technology. The majority of the respondents explained that they were not familiar with the digital technology that is required in the current era; a finding that is supported by Muir-Herzig (2004). Equipping teachers with sufficient knowledge of digital technology and how it supports 21st century literacy is imperative, if students are to be appropriately exposed to, and successful with, 21st century literacies.

6.4.4 Reflecting on the theme

Given the reality of globalisation, accelerating societal transformation, changes in the nature of work, and increased knowledge production, it is evident that the content learned by students and the methods they employ to learn that content are changing rapidly and yet the education system and teaching practices aren’t in synch with these trends.

A specific example underscores this point. Over the last decade, progress has been made in the field of learning, and consequently, more is now known about how people learn and think. Research reveals that students learn more if they can do so through relevant and meaningful work tasks that they can connect to their lived experiences and yet this approach wasn’t a feature in the majority of classrooms I visited for this study.

It was surprising to see a number of participants reflecting on the flaws in the current Australian education system, a system that encourages a dated model of literacy pedagogy. Yet, not only does the education system need to change, but more training and professional development addressing the realities of globalisation, workplace and societal transformations would seem necessary if teachers are to understand why their literacy practices need to change.
The data from this study exposes a number of challenges that the participants viewed as hindrances to the integration of 21st literacy practices into the curriculum:

- Not knowing even where to begin
- 21st century literacy skills not being highly valued and, in some cases, being actively discouraged in schools
- The education policy environment
- Lack of time
- Insufficient professional development
- Parent expectations

Many of these challenges are interconnected. For example, clarity in education policy and improved professional learning would go a long way towards solving the issue of not knowing where to start. A lack of time is tightly connected to the lack of training and professional development, particularly given the fact that there is so much out-of-class work to be completed by teachers that is administrative rather than educative in nature. In addition, if education policies were to evolve, these elements of lack of time and of training would represent less of an obstacle. Finally, schools clearly articulating the value, and championing the cause of 21st literacy skills to the parent community, would help educate parents and perhaps remove some of the pressure they place on teachers and educational leaders.

With globalisation comes the major challenge of producing learners who can meet the ever-increasing requirements for innovation and creativity. In order to facilitate such capabilities in our young people, there must be a change not only in many of our educational policies, but also in the emphasis and importance we place on contemporary literacy pedagogies.
6.4.5 **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, in order to promote literacy pedagogy with more of a 21st century orientation, I would make the following recommendations:

1. Increase the variety and breadth of professional learning for in-service and pre-service teachers to include issues around globalisation, societal trends and the characteristics behind those trends.

2. Provide teachers with greater insight into the skills and dispositions that employers, corporations and professions are requiring from young people. This is not to encourage an education system that serves only to prepare young people with skills for work—rather; it is to offer a justification for the necessity of 21st century skill development.

3. Explore ways to enhance the effectiveness of teachers so that new skills and pedagogical dispositions can be considered and enacted. Change of any description needs learning and reflection, and requires time. If teachers are not afforded the time, and feel as if they are constantly running, doing ‘busy work’, the likelihood of enacting real literacy pedagogical reform will be significantly compromised.

6.4.6 **Conclusion**

Change is recognised as a constant within our 21st century society. Teaching and learning are not immune from this. As globalisation continues, so will the demands for more advanced and improved skills, which can only be realised if our young people develop capabilities and skills that prepare them to deal with the demands of a globalised world. 21st century literacy presents as an avenue through which these skills and capabilities can be acquired.

This theme has discussed different responses from the participants and some challenges that they experience in relation to literacy teaching. It is clear that many of the participants want to change: they want to enact more contemporary
literacy pedagogies. However, what is equally apparent is that many of the participants feel they cannot do this because they don’t know where to start, and they don’t feel that 21st century literacy skills are valued, either by their schools or by their parent groups. They also point to the challenges of lack of time, policy directions, parent expectations and training.

Unless these matters are meaningfully addressed, it is arguable that young people in Victorian primary schools will be at a distinct disadvantage compared to their contemporaries elsewhere in the world, because the literacy skills, dispositions and practices they possess will not be those required by a global world beyond school.

6.5 THEME 3: ‘Old wine in new bottles’: Using 21st century technologies to engage in 20th century literacy practices

6.5.1 Introduction
To some extent, this theme draws on both the first two. Teachers know that 21st century literacy is different to that which prevailed last century, yet they don’t quite know exactly what it is, or where to start in enacting new pedagogies. One example of this is using 21st century technologies to deliver traditional literacy practices.

Sociologically, the world today is very different from what it was during the 20th century, owing in part to advances in ICT (Richardson 2006). The financial systems of leading countries are now founded more on the production and delivery of services and products than on the manufacture of the products themselves. Almost all trends occurring in the contemporary world require the incorporation of digital skills. Yet, the majority of educational systems still operate much as they did during the 20th century.
Significant reform is required in education globally, to react to and to embrace global trends that are both social and economic in nature (Richardson 2006). Pedagogies also must evolve to embrace the economic and social realities of the contexts in which young people live and learn. These reforms, while underway, are evolutionary rather than revolutionary and arguably are not keeping pace with the broader community. The result is dated pedagogical practices in our schools.

A theme that emerged from the data of this study is that teachers are using 21st century tools to engage in 20th century practices. I’ve termed this ‘old wine in new bottles’, to convey the idea that teachers in this study are using very current modes or tools (‘new bottles’) to engage with, and through which, to teach very traditional literacy skills (‘old wine’). This is a term that has been used before (see Lankshear & Bigum 1999), but I am struck that 15 years on from their work, the term still seems to fit.

### 6.5.2 Discussion of the theme

#### 6.5.2.1 ‘We use iBooks!’

Within this study, many teachers were using iBooks. The participants suggested that Grade 6 students were highly connected through the learning experience associated with iBook editions. For example, Shaun commented that iBooks appeared to assist students to become more engaged:

*iBooks has its own internal dictionary that I think is much more powerful and better time-wise than having a separate dictionary beside them in which they often can’t find the word. It just comes up. When you turn it on, it has the speak option, so for those kids still struggling with decoding, they can hear and repeat it. I’m really looking forward to having 1 to 1 iPads next year and doing it all the time.* (Shaun)
Generally, the responses obtained from the teachers translate to the fact that Year 6 students appreciate the technology of iBooks. Additionally, it is exciting and interesting for the students, because they are connecting with the world using a means that is relevant to them.

However, when the participants were questioned on how they used iBooks it became startlingly obvious that they were using iBooks in a very traditional manner. The following examples underscore this point:

- My students love iBooks. They come in after lunch and sit down and read their iBooks silently. (Clare)

- I use iBooks in all my Guided Reading classes … it means I don’t have to find copies of all the books for my students. (Kate)

- iBooks are great. They can read them when they finish work early, and my Year 6 students all enjoy them. (Brenda)

### 6.5.2.2 ‘Our students use blogs!’

According to Richardson (2006), with technological growth, many individuals have created their own blogs. They are easy to create and can be shared widely. Considering the growth of blogs, young people are spending more and more time reading them and, in many instances, creating their own.

Consequently, blogs have been identified as powerful tools for 21st century communication.

Many teachers in this study identified blogs as a way for students to record information, and also as a means of gathering content. Twelve out of the fifteen participants identified that they have used a class blog. This number is impressive. However, how teachers use blogs with their class is of particular interest. Below is a range of examples from participants within this study:
In my class we have a class blog. We use it like a diary and put on events for the week and things like that. (Tanya)

My students all have a blog—and we use it for diary writing on a Monday … it’s great! The kids love it! (Michael)

… we have used blogs regularly throughout the year and we do reflection writing weekly on their class blog. A lot of the time they publish pieces of work on their blog and they’re quite happy to do that. We never know if anyone outside the school is reading them, but for some of them, it is just about the fact that they could be. There have been some extra pieces of writing on their class blog partly because they know it’s going to be published for the world to see, and that makes spelling and grammar and punctuation a big thing, something they often forget. When they publish a piece of writing on a good piece of paper and it’s beautifully handwritten, their commas and full stops are all in the right places. And then when they type it into the computer all sense of grammar and spelling disappears. And it’s a good learning thing to be able to put something up on the screen and say, right, what’s wrong with this. You’ve written something just for me, the teacher, and it’s perfect and beautiful. Now you’ve written something for the whole world to see—what needs to change? And I’ve found this is as a good strategy for them, and also an assessment tool. (Mary)

Generally, the participants agreed that blogs allowed students to demonstrate their literacy skills using a multimodal platform for a wide audience. There was agreement that this enhances the students’ confidence and engagement in writing. Further, through publishing their thoughts, reflections and work samples on their blogs, students can create an assessment portfolio. What is silent in the participants’ discussion on blogs is how the use of blogs is any different to a traditional folder or portfolio. Much of the use of blogs was more for the ‘play’ or ‘engagement’ value than specifically for 21st century literacy skill development.
6.5.2.3 ‘Apps ... The potential worksheet of the 21st century’

All of the participants in this study were using apps for a variety of literacy-based tasks. The apps were housed on devices such as iPads or iPods.

Generally, participants felt that apps presented an exciting opportunity for Year 6 classrooms. They are fast, cheap and can engage students. The following quotes demonstrate this viewpoint:

*Why wouldn’t we be using apps? They are easy to load, and can engage kids quickly.* (Angela)

*Apps are great. I can download them and just give them to my class so I can work with my guided reading group.* (Tanya)

*My students love the apps I download. I make sure they are relevant to literacy, but even then kids will say to me, can I download this app? I generally say yes, if it is appropriate.* (Leo)

However, Michael expressed great concern over how apps were being used:

*Another place where we run into trouble is that a lot of the teachers want to know what are the good apps: okay, what’s a really good app for spelling? It’s just another form of a worksheet. We work really hard to make sure it’s not about that; it’s not about the app. People ask me, what are your top ten apps? And that is not the right question. Ask me a proper question because that’s not a real question. If that is your view of literacy, you need to rethink your job.* (Michael)

Michael’s response was the outlier in the data. That said, he appears to have identified a growing problem within education, and particularly in Year 6 classrooms in Victorian government schools; the use of apps being more associated with keeping students busy, than being targeted at learning. This is
another example of old wine in new bottles. Apps are valuable, but only if they are appropriate to the learning.

Georgie reinforced this point:

*I went to a PD Friday a week ago. It sounded pretty good and it was all on iPads and things, but there was a question that everyone was asking: what apps do you use? And can I print out [what the kids do within the app]? People were just looking for digital worksheets! (Georgie)*

While the majority of the respondents agreed that apps are certainly a 21st century tool, the reality is they appear to be using them as the equivalent of the 21st century class worksheet.

**6.5.2.4 ‘We have digital portfolios’**

Portfolios no longer need to be confined to one-dimensional print forms. All participants in this study had experience with digital portfolios to varying degrees. With ICT evolving in the curriculum, students and teachers can now develop dynamic and vivid portfolios that demonstrate student learning. For some time, digital portfolios have allowed a more holistic way to communicate and present a student’s learning, in some cases using multimodal methods.

Dale is one teacher who was certainly doing this:

*They have to do actual reading, and then there’s your public speaking and your listening skills. They’ve got to be able to comment on what they say, how they speak, the quality of information they’ve got in there and their time management skills; in other words, did they get things done in the required time? And then they’ll fill out their critique and pass the sheet on to the person who actually presented the topic. I’ll collect it, take it home and type it into a little template. [Gets example]. And then I just copy that into the digital portfolio. (Dale)*
In the 21st century, digital portfolios are being used to demonstrate learning (often to parents), and as an authentic assessment approach. According to the participants in this study, digital portfolios can also act as a time capsule for the student, showing the efforts involved and the progress attained in specific tasks.

While the use of the digital portfolio is admirable, there was no evidence within the data that participants were using them any differently to a traditional portfolio; in fact, the reverse was often the case. The following are some examples that support this conclusion:

*We went on an excursion to XXX. [Name suppressed as it may identify the participant]. When we got back, I put a heap of digital photos on the server and my students created a PowerPoint presentation that they put into their digital portfolio.* (Ann)

*Our students type their narratives up and put them into their digital portfolios.* (Christine)

Why is this happening? Christine probably offered the most compelling reason:

*Digital portfolios are great, but they are very time consuming and at the end of the day they are not a school-based assessment. So they are really just to collect the students’ work so we can show it to the parents. And often for the work involved, it’s just not worth it.* (Christine)

This ties back to the barriers presented in the previous theme, offering a different insight into the impact of current assessment techniques, the parent community, and a lack of time, on efforts to enact a 21st century pedagogy.
6.5.2.5 ‘We’re multimodal!’

Multimodality (i.e. the variety of modes in which students can access, create and share their learning) is a vastly different and more powerful concept now than it was in previous generations (Rotherham & Willingham 2009).

Generally, the respondents affirmed that multimodal pedagogies can result in a dynamic learning environment that can help students engage with the content. However there is growing commentary in the literature and the media that utilising practices around multimodality has the potential for negative outcomes, depending on the skill of the publisher or the interpretation of the audience, which need not necessarily be the intended audience. Treyvau (2012) also talks about the dangers of such communication modes when the adolescent user underestimates their power. This is a view that was shared by a number of the participants. Kate summed it up this way:

> So basically, you’re not going to be terribly successful at anything if you can’t read and write. We do a lot of blogging and things like that, which are skills that are going to become more and more important in life. A lot of people are going down that path and having their personal blog, Facebook, MySpace and Twitter accounts and everything else that you can imagine. [But] they are exposed and public. We need to teach children how to use these effectively and safely. (Kate)

The increase in the multimodal options available to learners has also brought about a change in scale. No longer is a letter the only way to communicate with people over distance. In fact, even email is becoming less common as a way of communicating. The scale of communication also has changed (Rotherham & Willingham, 2009). Students are now ‘texting’, ‘tweeting’, and ‘posting’ as legitimate forms of communication, using literacy discourse that is vastly different to that of a formal letter. Consider that ‘tweets’ (individual messages sent using Twitter) are less than 140 characters, as are most text
messages sent using cellular networks, or updates posted to one’s social network on Facebook. This creates a need to develop a micro literacy, in communicating sophisticated ideas with very few keystrokes (Rotherham & Willingham, 2009).

While many participants were using multimodal tools, once again, there was evidence from this study that they were using these tools to complete very traditional tasks. The following comments illustrate this:

*When we got back from our excursion, we wrote thank you letters and emailed them to the parents who came to help us.* (Mary)

*I often use talking books in my class to help the slower readers.* (Leo)

*I’ve started getting my kids to read the newspaper online of a morning, and then they have to write a response, print it out, and stick it on the Issues Wall.* (Angela)

### 6.5.3 Analysis of the theme

Many transformations in society have been facilitated through the broad employment of ICT (Perry 2007). Nevertheless, education has been sluggish to react. For the most part, assessment, school organisation, pedagogy, and curricula are much more aligned to 20th century ideals. While individuals outside of education employ an assortment of resources and digital tools to resolve issues and to complete tasks, students in learning institutions seem to have been left out of this shift. According to Perry (2007), teachers cover typical content through lecturing students in class while the learners listen. Learners work alone and reflect their knowledge in school assessments; their ability to utilise technology is restricted.

What is exciting is that the potential is there to revolutionise classrooms. Resources such as iBooks, blogs, and digital portfolios could enable learning to
be relevant to the 21st century. However, this requires specific pedagogical knowledge, as well as the skills associated with each resource and this study suggests is that while teachers want to use the tools outlined above, they don’t have the knowledge or skills to do so in ways that reflect 21st century literacy discourse. Instead, teachers tend to use 21st century tools to deliver 20th century practices.

An alternative (or maybe additional) explanation is that we still have content standards that encourage a very traditional view of literacy. Thus, even though teachers are using and wanting to use 21st century tools, curriculum regulation requires that they do so to teach traditional literacy, often at the expense of 21st century literacy skills.

6.5.4 Reflecting on the theme

Within the 21st century we have developed powerful tools that can help equip young people with skills and dispositions that they require to live and work in an ever changing and complex world.

Respondents were generally of the view that incorporating tools and resources that are technologically based can enhance skills such as reflection, writing, creativity, reading, and spelling. Additionally, because often these are tools that they are comfortable with, see as relevant, and utilise outside the classroom walls, they increase student confidence. This view is supported by the work of Means and Olson (1995), who suggest that technology plays a significant role in motivating students to learn. In addition, technology enables students to accumulate information and different concepts and as a result, encourages critical thinking, because students are required to manage this information and use it appropriately (Keengwe, Onchwari & Wachira 2008).

However, there is evidence in this study to suggest that teachers are using 21st century tools to engage in traditional literacy practices. It is unclear if this is
due to a deficit in knowledge, skills or disposition. It is possible that it is a combination of all three. Whatever the reason, the problem is that the process of mastering a technological application does not guarantee that vital strategies and skills for making literate choices and informed decisions automatically follow (Jenkins et al. 2006, p. 3). The solution then, is not to teach teachers more about technology and apps. According to Barron and Goldman (1994), this is a flawed approach; instead, teachers should be equipped with the required skills to *utilise* technology to create, manage, and communicate knowledge to their students.

It is also problematic that assessment, particularly high stakes testing, generally does not embrace 21st century literacy dispositions. From the evidence in this study, it would appear that testing is having a detrimental effect on teachers’ willingness to engage with 21st century literacies.

### 6.5.5 Recommendations

Based on the data from this study, in order to encourage the meaningful and authentic use of resources and technologies associated with 21st century modality, I would make the following recommendations:

1. Offer professional development for teachers that focuses not just on using a specific tool or technology, but rather that explores the literacy practices behind the tool or technology, and identifies the literacy practices that are possible and probable for that specific tool or technology.
2. Encourage schools to reflect on their own definitions and policy documents, and to challenge their thinking on what literacy in the 21st century actually is. Encourage schools to ask themselves if they have a relevant and current view of literacy. This has the potential to inform the content standards being enacted and therefore, the way that tools or technologies are used.
6.5.6 Conclusion

21st century technologies and tools are available within most schools to varying degrees, and teachers are attempting to use them. However, it seems apparent that if these tools are really to become a meaningful part of 21st century literacy learning, teacher knowledge, skills and dispositions also need to be addressed. Teachers need to understand not just how to use the new tools, but why and how to do so as a vehicle to equip their students with 21st century literacy skills.

It is the challenge of all teachers to find meaningful ways to engage students in practices that enable them for now and into their futures. There is evidence in the research that iBooks, blogs, digital portfolios and multimodal literacy tools can both engage students and equip them to participate in a world that uses a range of socially constructed literacies to make meaning. Therefore I would argue that in addition to educating teachers on the tools and resources, we might need to consider testing students to ensure that they are using the tools and resources in a meaningful way.

6.6 THEME 4: ‘My students just need the (traditional) basics of literacy’: (Mis)conceptions of student literacy ‘needs’ in the 21st century

Kids need to be taught the basics of reading and writing. They will need these skills if they want to get a job or go to university. (Tanya)

6.6.1 Introduction

An overwhelming theme emerging from the data in this study was the view that students need what was referred to as ‘the basics’ of literacy. Interestingly, this belief may be another barrier to ‘knowing where to start’, the challenge discussed in Theme 2.
Participants defined the basics as reading, writing, and spelling, and these were often framed within a traditional sphere. Although participants emphasised the importance of incorporating 21st century literacy skills into their teaching practices, a number still saw this as ‘optional’. Skills such as critical and higher-order thinking, collaboration, creativity, problem solving and multimodal communication, often took second place to writing, reading, and spelling.

6.6.2 Discussion of the theme

Although many participants within this study embraced technology and were keen to use it in their classrooms, even if only to use it as a medium through which to teach traditional literacy skills, a number constructed it as the enemy. This group saw their role as a literacy teacher to protect students from technology, and to ‘show’ them a way to communicate and make meaning (using a more traditional approach). Angela had an interesting insight:

> It is very different. It’s all that texting language. My concern is that kids don’t know how to communicate and they are becoming depressed and unhappy because they don’t actually talk. We need to teach the basics of literacy, reading, writing, and communicating. If they can’t do that then they can’t learn anything online either. They do the Facebook thing. They don’t know how to communicate. And when they do communicate, it’s not through the right medium. And they’re sitting at home and their feelings are hurt and they’re not actually talking to anyone. We get a lot of it happening. We really do. They don’t even talk to each other on the phone. We need to teach the basics of literacy. It’s a foundation! (Angela)

While the implications of Angela’s observations about the impact of not communicating are far broader, she appears to be suggesting that one part of literacy teaching, particularly for Year 6 students, is about teaching what she refers to as ‘the basics’: reading, writing and communicating. What is more interesting is how she defined these basic skills:
I mean we want students to pick up a book and read ... not just play on the computer. We want them to be able to write a story, use a pen correctly, that sort of thing. I know it's not the 21st century way ... but it's important! (Angela)

‘Basic skills’ seems to be a point of contention. Most participants in this study referred to ‘the basics’, but when questioned about what the basics actually are, they either felt confronted or were unsure about how to define ‘basics’ in a discussion about literacy in the 21st century. Michael’s comment illustrates this:

> Teaching the basics is important ... We have to teach kids to read and write ... it’s our job ... I think that the problem is that the ‘basics’ have changed and there are so many more basics to teach now ... and we don’t really know how to teach them all ... so we teach the ones we think are most important ... and maybe they aren’t the most important ... I’m really not too sure about that. (Michael)

What Michael is emphasising is an awareness of the complexity of what ‘the basics’ actually are. This was refreshing to hear, as most respondents in this study did not have this level of insight, and were much more focused on ‘traditional basics’ for various reasons. Christine’s description of ‘the basics’ is illuminating in this regard:

> We have to teach our students the basics of literacy, which really is reading, writing and spelling. Our parents expect it. They have to be able to write narratives, and read traditional texts. Our parents get nervous if they spend too much time on the computer, they think it isn’t good teaching, and this makes our job even more difficult. (Christine)

Various participants offered reasons as to why they felt traditional ‘basics’ were an important part of their literacy teaching, but what was of note was the tone in which they presented their explanations. Collectively the tone sounded
somewhat apologetic … as though the reasons they were offering were, in their minds, unsatisfactory. Leo’s point sums it up:

*I know this doesn’t sound right … and I hear myself saying this stuff about traditional literacy, but I know, as I’m saying it, it isn’t really right.* (Leo)

However, not all participants were apologetic … some felt very strongly about ‘traditional basics’. The following example was provided by Mary:

*I also hope that they value traditional writing. And if they’re sitting down to do an essay perhaps that they’re not just handing something in that will do. They’re actually going back and thinking critically and they’re polishing and it’s the best piece of work that they can produce. You can’t do that on a computer. It’s something that I really focus on. We’ve got a bit of a writing process that we worked through at my old school. We plan, draft, then revise and then edit. I think that step of revision, as not just looking for mistakes, but improving. Doing this on paper makes sense and seems to produce better work samples from my students.* (Mary)

Overwhelmingly though, the respondents agreed that ‘basic’ literacy skills in the 21st century include the ability to think critically when requested to engage in activities of a descriptive, reflective, or persuasive orientation. In addition, they felt that students must be able to follow the instructions, and they need to be able to work collaboratively. The challenge emerging from this study appears to be that while participants feel these skills are important, they come second to more traditional literacy skills, which many referred to as ‘the basics’.

*You still need to be able to have the skills to operate that sort of thing. Like we still need to build up their literacy skills to know how to open up a Word document, or more technical things like how to write a formal letter. We still have to teach them the basics of literacy. If we don’t do that we will have a whole lot of kids who can’t read, write or spell!* (Shaun)
According to Shaun, even with an emphasis on incorporating more contemporary literacy practices, there still must be a platform of ‘traditional’ literacy; reinforcing the ‘old wine in new bottles’ view that is central to this theme.

Another sub-theme emerged during this study. Embedded within this justification of ‘teaching students the basics’ is the view that schools are somehow responsible for teaching traditional English conventions. This was a view shared by three participants, who felt strongly that technology has eradicated many of the formal English conventions, and that a teacher’s job is to ensure that students are taught them. Georgie sums it up in the following comment:

* Kids now days spend their life on computers and phones, and they can’t write properly. We have to teach them how to write properly or they won’t be able to apply for a job or [they] will fail at university … it’s our job! (Georgie)

Many participants in this study saw themselves in some sort of struggle between different literacy paradigms, rather than seeing them simply as different or evolving practices. They took the view that one paradigm was ‘wrong’ and that students needed to be ‘taught the right way’. Mary put it this way:

* Well, it’s interesting because, I suppose, there’s a lot of writing that’s done now in the real world that’s very informal, and at the end of the day it’s plain wrong … English has rules and the rules are not being followed. And for that reason I worry that there’s an assumption that good quality and formal writing is old hat. And I don’t necessarily think that it is. And so that makes our writing and literacy programs at school more important, because if they’re not getting it here, then they’re not getting it out there in the real world. And so I think it has to come from school. If we don’t teach them the formal English conventions they may never learn them, and eventually they will be lost forever. And a lot
of parents absolutely back us up at home. But largely I think, and I predict, that kids are sort of getting lazier and there’s this ‘that’ll do’ approach to literacy and that feeds into reading. Because the number of really intelligent kids who are just skim reading and coming out with really random responses because they’re just not tracking it themselves is increasing, I think it’s behavioural and schools have to take a stand. (Mary)

These views are potentially concerning because they appear to suggest that there is one view of literacy being valued within our schools and, by implication, another in the ‘real world’. In addition, these views support the notion that traditional literacy is being constructed as the right way, and that all other literacies are being constructed as somewhat suspect, or certainly less valued.

While the teaching of traditional literacy was a strong theme for the majority of participants, there was one participant who took an entirely different approach. Michael was of the view that the ‘basics’ had to be challenged, because the ‘traditional basics’ were no longer the ‘basics’ in the 21st century:

I’m sick of hearing about ‘the basics’ from teachers who just don’t get it … and parents too! The basics when I was a kid are not the basics kids need now. Yet some teachers still think it is their basics, from their childhood, that kids need nowadays. It’s just wrong. For me it’s just important to start on top of the recent stuff and just keep talking about it [with students], because that means when they’re not with us, they’re still continuing to do it themselves. (Michael)

In this regard, Michael was an outlier in this study, and his views were not shared by many of the participants. However, it was interesting to note his strong views on this, and to hear the challenges that he faces when considering what the ‘basics’ are with respect to literacy pedagogy in and for the 21st century. His challenges also link to the barriers mentioned in the previous
theme: namely, the pressure that teachers face from colleagues and parents as they try to enact 21st century pedagogy.

6.6.3 Analysis of the theme
Graphic design, desktop video editing, video production, podcasts, instant messaging, and blogging are all 21st century literacy practices that young people may experiment with. However, not all young people have the necessary knowledge about the technology or the discourses associated with them. According to recent studies, learners still require instructors to be working in collaboration with them, to instruct them how to communicate and learn with emerging technologies (Levy & Murnane 2005). Sadly, our current education system in Australia is not uniformly fulfilling that role. Consequently, workplace and out-of-school literacies are gradually becoming more and more disconnected from in-school literacies (Leu et al. 2004).

Arguably, one of the fundamental features of 21st century literacy learning is that the definition of ‘literacy basics’ is now too narrow. As globalisation and interconnectedness continue to gather pace, educators, governments and key stakeholders in education need to challenge the traditional notion of ‘the basics’ and ask instead what are the basics of literacy in the 21st century. They then need to work with those charged with teaching literacy to ensure that the skills children are being exposed to and explicitly taught in schools, are skills that are productive in the communities and societies to which they belong.

That is not to suggest that traditional literacy knowledge and skills are not important or valuable, but it implies the need to question the value that is placed on traditional literacy as against emerging literacies, and to address the balance between the two. 21st century literacy implies more than fundamental computing, writing, and reading skills. In the view of Alvin Toffler, the illiterate of the 21st century will not be the individuals who cannot read or write, it will
be those who are unable to learn, unlearn, and relearn (Lewis, Enciso & Moje 2007).

Lewison has identified that 21st century ‘basic literacy skills’ are increasingly significant to organisational success (Lewison, Flint & Sluys 2002). Two skill sets are identified. The first is ‘expert thinking’, which has been defined as the capability to solve unanticipated issues for which no programmable and predictable rule-based solutions exist. The second is ‘complex communication’, a basic skill that entails interrelating with other individuals to attain or communicate information. Studies show that individuals who perform these skills proficiently have superior job prospects (Longworth & Davies 1999).

I would argue that the ‘basics’ of literacy beyond our schools have changed. Technology is becoming more and more important in routine jobs. This impacts literacy requirements at all levels of the employment market (Levy & Murnane, 2005). From the 1960s through to the 1990s, jobs that required high levels of communication and thinking rose steadily, while the call for routine manual work fell (Martinet, Raymond & Gauthier 2001). While literacy education in schools is not solely about preparation for the job market, the marked change in the skills now necessary for employment is an indicator of the literacy transformations that are taking place within our society. A challenge for all educators is to consider whether schools are responding to or even reflecting the world in which our students live and learn.

6.6.4 Reflecting on the theme
In the 21st century, traditional and emerging literacies must begin to hold equal value in our learning institutions to those of the 20th century. Both 21st century and traditional literacy skills are necessary and, if enacted meaningfully, each can enhance the other.
This is not to suggest that traditional and contemporary literacies must compete with each other. Rather, in education there needs to be a critical engagement with the literacy practices our societies and communities value. In the process, thoughtful consideration needs to be given to what literacy skills and dispositions are important for young people to be exposed to, as well as those that need to be explicitly taught.

6.6.5 Recommendations

Based on the data analysed in this study, in order to consider what literacy skills and dispositions are important for Year 6 students to be exposed to in the 21st century, I would make the following recommendations:

1. Encourage teachers to consider two essential questions: ‘what are the essential literacy skills that Year 6 students need in the 21st century?’ and ‘why do students need exposure to these skills?’ Most of the participants in this study were not paying sufficient attention to the reasons for their literacy decisions.

2. Offer teachers an exploration of literacy skills and dispositions beyond the classroom. There was no evidence in this study that any of the participants had systematically considered literacy skills beyond either their own skills and practices, or those of their profession. Considering how society, professions, workplaces and so forth enact 21st literacies may help provide greater insight and increased awareness of literacy practices beyond the classroom, which in turn may better inform pedagogical practices in Year 6 classrooms.

6.6.6 Conclusion

‘The basics’ of literacy was a strong theme that emerged from this study. Reflecting on this, it is feasible to suggest that this is language that is commonly used within schools. What was equally clear from the data was the participants’ view that the ‘basics’ tended to revolve around traditional literacy skills and English conventions. There was only one participant in the study who was
questioning the ‘basics’. How educators and policy makers address this question to embrace the complexities of a 21st century conception is the challenge going forward.

6.7 THEME 5: ‘These students just need to learn how to read and write to a basic level’: Perceptions of the influence that student backgrounds and lived experiences have on literacy pedagogy

6.7.1 Introduction

A significant theme apparent from the data was the view from some participants that children either from lower socio-economic or working class backgrounds somehow needed a different set of literacy skills to students in more affluent areas. As troubling as this is, I felt it necessary to report it.

Two equally troubling sub-themes emerged. The first was the view that because some children come from a lower socio-economic background they somehow need only to be taught ‘basic’ literacy skills, defined as traditional literacy skills associated with low-level thinking. The second sub-theme was that children who live in either regional or remote towns that have a strong focus on manufacturing, are less likely to go to university, and therefore they need literacy skills that are more traditional in nature.

6.7.2 Discussion of the Theme

6.7.2.1 ‘Our kids come from poor backgrounds. We need to try and teach them the basics.’

Some participants in this study suggested that their lower literacy standardised results, when compared to State standardised testing data, was a consequence of the socioeconomic background of their students. While there is evidence to suggest that socioeconomic background can impact a person’s literacy learning (Leu 2004), what was of note was the view from some participants that because
students come from low socio-economic backgrounds, they needed to ‘be given only basic literacy instruction’. The following quotes illuminate this view:

*Like, you know: what are we going to do? ...How are we going to get through to these kids, because you know that’s just what their parents are like and their grandparents and they’re in that poverty cycle.* (Georgie)

*Some kids just don’t have a good start in life, and we are continually playing catch up. Often we need to give them some basics around reading and writing, and we know that these are the skills they need. They are not going to be doctors or lawyers ... and we need to be realistic about that.* (Michael)

*Well some kids have it tough at our school ... they are from poor backgrounds ... They don’t have a lot of books in their house or even have parents who value literacy ... So school needs to be a place where we have realistic expectations, despite what the Government thinks. We try and teach them some basics of literacy. But they start from behind, because they often come from families who are illiterate and don’t care. We just have to try and get them to do a few things and often that’s a really big achievement.* (Tanya)

It was surprising to see such strong views from some of the participants. The implication is that because the young people come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or from backgrounds with lower educational attainment, it somehow ‘gave permission’ for teachers to aspire to lower standards of literacy teaching. Participants who had this view were not being overtly discriminatory. In fact, they were almost unaware of the discrimination that they were suggesting. In some cases they were almost trying to protect and nurture their students, towards whom they felt a deep sense of responsibility. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that such a strong sense of difference was suggested towards literacy teaching between children from different backgrounds.
6.7.2.2 ‘Our kids won’t go to university. They just need the basics.’

Building on this, there was also strong evidence within the data that teachers felt that young people from working class areas were less likely to go to university and therefore that the literacy skills they required in Year 6 were somehow different to their contemporaries from more affluent areas. Ann and Clare’s views were representative of this point:

Well, I guess with the kids at our school and some of their backgrounds and stuff, it’s not about going to university or stuff like that. They don’t even think about that. That’s not achievable for them. (Ann)

A lot of my Grade 6 children [have] parents who are working class, and they don’t want them to go to university. They want them to get a job and earn a decent income. We need to respect that, and focus on the literacy skills they need for that kind of employment. (Clare)

What was most striking was the idea that because some children and their families may have been considering employment in the manufacturing sector, they required either lower or more conventional literacy skills. This is exactly opposite to what the research suggests (Kay 2001). It is therefore concerning that participants in this study had views that were not only dated, but also incorrect and arguably detrimental to the students’ development and prospects.

6.7.3 Analysis of the theme

As already stated, the amount of information that young learners are able to access is greater than at any other time in human history (Foggarty 2007). Texts are being created and re-created at astounding speed. Texts are being published in a variety of modes, to culturally different audiences. All this has an impact on the young learner. No longer can a student simply operate in a mass education mode (Osland, Bird, Osland & Mendenhall 2006); the information that young people of the 21st century can access makes that impossible.
All young learners in the 21st century, regardless of socioeconomic level or cultural background, must have sophisticated, critically literate skills that allow them to interpret and understand not only what they are reading, but also why they are reading it, and the intention of the publisher (Leu 2004). Anstey and Bull suggest that ‘because of the advances in technology and the many contexts in which we now operate, we are often exposed to, or are required to access, large amounts of information from many and varied sources’ (Anstey & Bull 2006, p. 231). We must be aware that the texts we access have been consciously constructed to shape particular information in particular ways, shaping our attitudes, values and behaviours. This applies to all young people, regardless of background. Technology has become very accessible and the use of it is in general, not conditional on socio-economic status. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that the literacy pedagogies enacted in our schools need to reflect this, and must be consistent for all students.

6.7.4 Reflecting on the theme
This theme was particularly troubling for a number of reasons. First, and most obviously, the idea that teachers adapt literacy expectations based on a student’s background. This was both challenging to understand and to report. Secondly, I was concerned about the justification that participants offered to explain this teaching difference. It was often couched in protectionist language. Participants in this study gave every indication that adapting their literacy expectations on the basis of background or lived experience was not about discriminating; rather, it was nurturing or protecting.

6.7.5 Recommendations
Based on the data analysed in this study, in order to challenge views of literacy expectation and enactment relative to student background or lived experience, I would make the following recommendations:

1. Offer teachers significant professional development opportunities that explore why all students, regardless of background or lived experience,
need explicit literacy instruction that incorporates elements of criticality and multimodality.

2. Offer teachers significant professional development opportunities to encourage them to consider how literacy, with a strong focus on criticality and multimodality, can be taught to students who may have lower levels of traditional literacy attainment.

6.7.6 Conclusion

Personally, as a teacher and researcher, this theme caused me a great deal of angst. While the theme is clearly represented within the data, clearly participants were entirely conscious of what they were reporting and many were not overtly aware of what they were implying. This demonstrates a broader issue with expectation and teacher bias of which all educators need to be cognisant, because left unchallenged or unchecked it will have an impact on student learning.
6.8 THEME 6: *Leadership makes THE difference*: Perceptions of the influence of school leadership on 21st century literacy pedagogy

6.8.1 Introduction

In this theme I develop further one of the barriers identified in the second theme; that of the role of leadership within schools.

There is strong evidence within the data that leadership within a school has a significant impact on the literacy pedagogies teachers enact. Even though the influence of school leadership on student performance is well researched, the complexities of how this is enacted and practised by school leaders within the 21st century are of interest (Basu, Maddox & Robinson-Pant 2008). Studies on school leadership (Bawden 2008) outline six fundamental characteristics of effective leadership within an education context: taking risks; being proactive; listening and communicating effectively; valuing human resources; believing that learning institutions are for learning; and being visionary. These characteristics are worth considering in the context of literacy teaching and learning for the 21st century, as teachers are often required to be courageous, and it is easier to make courageous decisions in a culture where leadership values learning and has an awareness of, and openness to, the world beyond school.

6.8.2 Discussion of the theme

Five of the fifteen participants identified that the leadership teams in their schools were aware of the importance of 21st century literacy and that this made it easier for them to introduce more multimodal elements into the literacy curriculum. However their views went beyond just having supportive leadership teams (in the more passive sense of the term). They explained that real progress can only be made when the leadership of a school is positively
supportive (in a proactive sense) and even encouraging. This encouragement
gave the teachers the vehicle through which they could embrace more
contemporary literacy pedagogies. The following are a couple of examples:

We were very lucky. The Principal saw the value four or five years ago of
having a Netbook program and using ICT tools to engage students. She was
very positive in that regard and if we had it in the budget she was happy to buy
Flipcams and extra headphones and computers. Then a couple of years ago
when the iPad craze started she was very receptive to buying them and using
them, and getting people trained in how to use them. (Dale)

Our leadership team understands literacy and tailors professional development
around it. It helps that they see themselves as learners and teachers of literacy
too. (Kate)

Some of the participants also identified that their school leaders were not only
aware of contemporary literacy tools, but they encouraged literacy practices
that matched the needs of their student populations. Liane made the following
point:

Our Principal gets it. She knows more about literacy than any of us. She is an
expert and really cares about literacy. Her support makes all the difference
because she encourages us to do exciting and innovative things—but it has to
be well thought out and explained. (Liane)

While there was evidence that some leadership teams had an interest in and
knowledge of literacy, particularly associated with new or contemporary
literacies, and that as a result, they were more likely to promote or encourage
21st century literacy pedagogies, there was an equal amount of evidence
suggesting the opposite; leadership teams that did not have the knowledge of, or
interest in, literacy pedagogies. Based on this study, it is clear that this is having
a detrimental effect, not just on teacher enactment of literacy learning, but also
on teacher engagement. Several teachers interviewed for this study expressed enormous frustration that while they felt they knew what they needed to do in terms of 21st century literacy, they were actively prevented from doing so, due to the attitude of their leadership teams. One teacher even talked about wanting to leave the profession as a result. The following examples bring these views to light:

*Our leadership team is full of dinosaurs. I don't think they have seen the inside of a classroom for decades. As long as we give a spelling test on Friday morning, they are happy.* (Shaun)

*Within this school a majority of the leadership team are between 50 and 60. So I am the youngest staff member at the school. I do come up against challenges in terms of using technology in literacy. Most of it is due to the fact that they don’t understand and they don’t have knowledge in the area.* (Georgie)

Four respondents indicated that they had met a lot of resistance when attempting to introduce more contemporary literacy pedagogies. Among these examples, is the common theme that social media as dangerous and something to be avoided. Clare offered the following story to illustrate this point:

*I remember going to a professional development day where they were using Twitter for student reflections as well as teaching a range of digital strategies. I was so excited. I came back to my school, spent the weekend getting ready to try it with my class, only to come in and share it with my Principal on Monday morning and be told that ‘we don’t use Twitter at our school’, and I wasn’t to do it. Reflections had to stay handwritten in the diary, and I was to continue to sign them like we have done for about the past 15 years of my teaching here. I was devastated.* (Clare)

As with the other themes, the influence of the parent community as a key stakeholder group was apparent. Participants frequently cited parent
expectations as a reason why educational leadership was not embracing technology, and specifically, online literacy practices:

In my last school it was a nightmare. The leadership team blocked everything we tried to do in the area of digital literacy. They were old school. And the parents supported them. They wanted beautiful bookwork, with no spelling mistakes. As long as we did that, we were fine. This school is very different. The Principal is a ‘teacher’ and she really understands literacy. (Christine)

This perception that technology is evil is an issue, and it’s perpetuated by a lot of principals and consultants. Twitter is evil and YouTube is evil and the Internet is—well it is evil too. And the less educated your leadership team is, the more that’s going to affect you, and our parents take the lead from the Principal. (Shaun)

Curriculum leadership is about sharing a vision, being true to your vision, but [you have to locate] it within a vision that is imposed on you. If you go against government directives you will be isolated and eventually moved out of the system. I seek out those teachers who want to value add, who want to think about and try different things. That is where my renewal comes from. (Michael)

Sadly, in the case of Christine, although she holds a leadership role in her school, even in this capacity she finds herself caught up in a ‘bureaucracy’ that discourages innovation. She was exploring the idea of making a unit in her classroom multimodal, but ended up abandoning the idea. She explains why:

How would we assess it? We have a rubric that we use, and that we are required to report against, that doesn’t account for multimodality in report writing. This would then require me to develop a new rubric, get it approved, then develop a different set of lesson plans and get them approved. All the while working against a school culture that actually aspires to more traditional writing: things that we can put in their Portfolios and send home. I know it’s
wrong, but the bureaucracy of curriculum is now so strong that more often than not it stops us doing interesting things. (Christine)

While some participants were very enthusiastic about including digital literacy in their classes, it is evident that some leaders were very challenged by the prospect. This in turn has a significant impact on teachers’ pedagogical enactments. Further, it has an impact on the professional development offered to teachers, as this is often determined and approved by the very same leadership teams or individuals.

6.8.3 Analysis of the theme

The data in this study uncovers an obvious, yet very important, point: in order for leaders to be able to facilitate learning through their teachers, they need to understand learning. Better still, they need to understand and locate pedagogy within a contextual framework: this is the piece that is often missing.

Nixon observes that leaders place too much time on managing rather than leading (Nixon 2003), and that ‘leading’ in the context of 21st century literacy means embracing this concept, encouraging teachers to adopt new ideas and approaches, while helping to remove obstacles that prevent innovation and adoption.

Stoll, Fink and Earl highlight a significant point that is also relevant in the context of leadership in education. They suggest that leaders often have to make decisions where the results of those decisions may not be evident for years to come (2003, p. 196). What this suggests is that leaders need to have the capacity for critical thought. They need to reflect on the context and the appropriate pedagogy, and to facilitate the making of decisions that have a lasting impact. Leaders also need to have the dispositions to critically analyse and interpret the data they encounter, particularly in the information age, where there is such a plethora of data that it is easy to be convinced of a particular view. Without critical thinking skills, leaders leave themselves open to
persuasion without merit, thus potentially affecting student literacy learning. Put another way, criticality is the new currency for the 21st century leader.

This research project highlights the important point that if a leader does not have the pedagogical and the contextual knowledge and understanding, it is unlikely that things within their schools will change. This limits the opportunities available for teachers to embrace new thinking and try out new approaches.

6.8.4 Reflecting on the theme
The needs of the student must be kept front and centre. Teachers have a duty to ensure that their students are continually developing their literacy knowledge, skills and dispositions. This research project highlights the significant impact that school leaders have in this regard. It is important that leaders maintain objectives in both learning endeavours and teaching practices, around leading improvement and innovation. Effective leadership takes place within a model of purposeful, structured and visionary dispositions, while embracing interpersonal relationships with individual teachers. Teachers are often positively impacted if the leaders for whom they work understand literacy, and are passionate about curriculum and learning.

6.8.4.1 Contextual understanding matters
Malcolm Gladwell suggests that the world is changing at a rate and pace new to human history, and that understanding the context is important if change is to be embraced successfully (Gladwell 2000). The data within this study appears to support Gladwell’s claims. In various ways, all the participants made references to the pace of change, to the need for change, and for an understanding of the context: local, national and international. Teachers interviewed reflected on the need to understand the world and the place of literacy in that world. They indicated that school leaders play a direct role in this. As the literature around literacy suggests, social discourse is what drives literacy. Literacy is a socially-constructed activity, by people. Understanding
the context of place, and people within place, helps to inform decisions about literacy practices, skills and discourses.

6.8.4.2 Pedagogy and leadership are not mutually exclusive concepts

The literature supporting leadership for learning is compelling in its suggestion that leaders need to be experts of pedagogy. This is not the sole responsibility of the teacher. Leaders need to be life-long learners of pedagogical practices (Swaffield & Macbeath 2009). When leaders absolve themselves of the responsibility of being a part of pedagogy, student outcomes suffer (Topsfield 2012). This claim is overwhelmingly supported by the data from this research project: all participants viewed their leaders, and educational leadership generally, as a critical element of the literacy pedagogy in their schools. Effective leadership was seen as being critical to their work.

6.8.5 Recommendations

Based on the data analysed in this study, for educational leaders to have a positive impact on literacy pedagogy, I would make the following recommendations:

1. Support educational leaders (principal, assistant principal, curriculum leaders, etc.) by encouraging them to take an active and informed role in literacy pedagogy. Offering high quality professional development for school leaders that focuses on outlining contemporary literacy pedagogies together with their impact on student learning and outcomes, and teacher engagement, may position them to be more active and informed in the literacy discourses of their school communities.

2. Encourage educational leaders to be a part of the pedagogical environment of literacy, to help inform decision-making and provide an increased sense of awareness of literacy practices within their schools.
6.8.6 Conclusion

This theme explored the concept of school leadership and its impact on student learning. A leader’s understanding of literacy influences literacy pedagogy and student literacy outcomes and that was evident in this study. What is also clear is that a significant percentage of school leaders still do not support the incorporation of 21st century literacy resources or concepts. There is also some evidence that parents in such school communities support this decision. This becomes challenging and is a barrier for teachers who believe in more contemporary literacy pedagogical practices. In such cases, it is important for school leaders to realise that there needs to be a collective responsibility for the literacy learning of students, that this needs to be contextually relevant, and that leaders play a central role in its implementation.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to present themes that were identified across all fifteen participants, using a phenomenological approach.

Much is expected of teachers in the 21st century, and this study has attempted to highlight the lived experiences of these expectations. I would conclude, based on this analysis, that participants have an awareness of 21st century literacy, but that there are many barriers to its effective enactment. Some of these barriers arise from pedagogical practices and professional attitudes that do not value 21st century literacy, while others come from external influences, such as leadership and parental expectations.

What was pleasing to find was that most teachers want to engage in professional development, and to improve their own pedagogical practices; they are aware that they need to change.

In the following chapter I generalise my recommendations to address how Year 6 teachers, and teachers more generally, can make positive steps towards either
evolving their literacy pedagogies, or enhancing what they already do within their literacy classrooms. The recommendations are based at the classroom level and school level, and are intended to empower teachers rather than to criticise the work they do.

6.10 Dear Diary—What has hermeneutic phenomenology offered to this research?

As I write this entry in my journal, I am remembering that this chapter wasn’t part of my initial research plan and design. I was going to focus exclusively on individual experiences. However, as I interrogated my research design I became increasingly aware of the importance of considering shared experience. In fact, without my being overtly cognisant of it, my research questions demanded it.

Now as I conclude this chapter, I feel that the hermeneutic phenomenological approach has offered a different lens through which to view the data, and it also offered me a different way to interpret the data. I’m aware that some people in reading this thesis may think that my conclusions are drawn only from the phenomenological interpretation. But they are wrong. I think the narrative and the phenomenological interpretations give different views of the same experiences. One is not superior to the other.

There is no doubt in my mind that the phenomenological analysis allowed very strong themes to emerge. I feel it is important to present these themes, because it demonstrated that participants in this study had similar experiences, but often in very different ways. So in many ways, narrative and phenomenology worked together to give a rich picture of shared lived experience.

When I now look back on my research questions, I realise that actually both methodologies were required to adequately consider the research questions. Narrative captured and reported the individual experience, and phenomenology allowed for the consideration of similarities and differences.
So I have learned that I need to be flexible with my research design. In some ways, and up to a point, it needs to be organic. Had I not allowed phenomenology to enter my research design, I think it would have been a much weaker piece of research. So, what has hermeneutic phenomenology offered to this research? To my mind it has highlighted the shared phenomena of the research participants but, importantly, it has also taught me about the importance of organic research design, and the power of flexibility in order to create rich data to interpret research questions.
7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This research project highlights the range of views held by teachers as to what constitutes 21st century literacy. These views were informed by professional development, lived experience, and school cultures. Most participants in this study viewed literacy in and for the 21st century as entailing engagement with technology.

This study has also highlighted the many challenges to understanding sociological considerations and of constructions of childhood, and how these influence literacy discourse.

In this chapter I offer some concluding remarks in response to the each of the research questions. I suggest ways to enact the findings of this research for the primary teaching community, and I reflect on future research pathways. My final diary entry considers my identity as a researcher and educator.

7.2 Learnings about how teachers in Victorian primary schools define 21st century literacy, and how they enable this learning for their Year 6 students

It is evident from the Literature Review and discussed elsewhere in this paper, that societies are going through a striking and at times painful transformation and that ICT skills are increasingly important to a world that is propelled by technological innovation, knowledge and information.

It is also evident that from the literature that there is no one comprehensive definition of 21st century literacy and the responses from the participants
underscore this. What is clear in both cases is that concepts of 21st century literacy are multifaceted, entailing various elements, each with a role to play.

When viewed at an individual level, it is evident that no one participant had a holistic view of 21st century literacy. However, when the data from this study is viewed collectively a definition emerges; one that suggests that it should embrace, communication, problem solving, the ability to make meaningful and informed decisions, the effective use of technology, personal management, and information management.

Given that when we are faced with understanding a complex picture, our natural tendency is to concentrate just on the part we understand, great caution needs to be taken to ensure that we do not encourage teachers to focus on just one aspect of 21st century literacy. 21st century literacy is not just the skills listed above and it is not just about just globalisation or multimodality. It is a complex interwoven set of skills and dispositions (influenced by sociological factors), which allow us to make meaning.

Students’ ability to be innovative and creative in their adult life will be influenced by the skills they acquire and are exposed to in their formative years. Therefore, our education system, and the teachers operating within it, have a moral responsibility to provide an assortment of teaching styles, techniques, and resources underpinned by offering students a window into the world beyond school and ideally, of the world they will be entering as they leave school.

### 7.3 Learnings about the literacy skills and practices that Victorian teachers perceive as necessary for Year 6 students in the 21st century

Just as this research project has uncovered a wide variety of views as to what 21st century literacy is, so to has it presented a broad range of ideas about the
types of skills and practices that young people require as part of their literacy learning. These need further research, in order to understand the situation better. However at the core of these is the challenge that despite teachers’ willingness to discuss change at a philosophical level, when it comes to practical implementation, they tend to revert to the importance of children knowing ‘the basics’.

There are many reasons discussed as to why this is the case, but fundamental to the discussion is the need to value equally both traditional and emerging literacies. Both are necessary and, if enacted meaningfully, rather than compete, each can enhance the other. Furthermore the education sector needs to engage with the literacy practices and dispositions that are valued in our societies and communities and then decide which are important for young people to be exposed to, and which need to be explicitly taught.

Sitting alongside the challenge of incorporating traditional and contemporary literacy skills into students’ learning was the very concerning finding that some participants believe that children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds needed a different skill-set compared to ‘other’ students. The idea that teachers adapt literacy expectations based on a student’s background was challenging to understand and report, not the least because the Literature Review makes it clear that all students need particular literacy skills that are 21st century in nature, in order to be able to interact with and contribute to their societies. Equally troubling was that participants justified this teaching difference from the perspective of ‘protecting and nurturing’ their students.

The challenge with this is that while teachers’ motives were genuine, their views had potential to do significant and long lasting damage. Challenging this view is not merely a matter of literacy professional development: it is much more concerned with better understanding of the context in which all students will be living and learning, and consequently, the skills and dispositions needed in
order to be able to successfully participate, regardless of socioeconomic background.

7.4 **Learnings about the influences that impact teachers’ practices associated with the development and enactment of literacy learning for Year 6 students in and for the 21st century**

This research project identified a number of significant influences that impact the development and enactment of 21st century literacy:

- Not knowing even where to begin
- 21st century literacy skills not being highly valued and, in some cases, being actively discouraged in schools
- The education policy environment
- Lack of time
- Insufficient professional development
- Parent expectations
- School leadership

An extensive discussion of each is included earlier in the previous chapter. Viewed collectively however, they represent a significant impediment to the enactment of contemporary literacy practices.

Not only must many of our educational policies change, we need to reassess the emphasis and importance placed on contemporary literacy pedagogies, otherwise the literacy skills, dispositions and practices young people in Victorian primary schools possess will not be those required by a global world beyond school.
The role of school leadership demands a special mention. As discussed in the preceding chapter, leaders need to be life-long learners of pedagogical practices (Swaffield & Macbeath 2009). When leaders absolve themselves of the responsibility of being a part of pedagogy, student outcomes suffer (Topsfield 2012). Indeed, the findings from this research project overwhelmingly support this claim. Further, it was evident that where the Principal still saw him/herself as connected to the classroom, and teachers felt that the Principal was ‘on their side’, there was a significant difference in attitudes towards change and 21st century literacy.

7.5 How narrative inquiry and phenomenology helped me to better understand literacy in and for the 21st century

As I reflect on my own professional journey I am reminded of the frustration that I often felt as a classroom teacher, particularly the feeling that we were always ‘being done to’. By that I mean we were always part of a cycle where new initiatives were being imposed or new programs implemented without being consulted. As a classroom teacher I was not involved in the decision-making processes. I recall the frustration of feeling like I did not have a voice in my own professional journey.

In many ways this partly explains why narrative inquiry as a methodology has been so important for me. It has allowed me to legitimately understand story and lived experience as ‘real’ and valuable data. Phenomenology on the other hand let me put individual stories together to look at shared experiences.

This research project formed because I was questioning my own teaching practices. Narrative inquiry, through the telling of individual stories, enabled me to consider a series of questions that I was wondering about. Rather than being told ‘what we should be doing’, I was able to ask ‘how individuals were
experienced their work’. This view offered a different way of interacting with a series of questions that many teachers and organisations are starting to consider.

Drawing on both narrative inquiry and hermeneutic phenomenology allowed for interpretations of both the individual and the collective story. It offered interpretation of the experiences and the context of the experiences. It valued individual identities and sought to understand the phenomenon within the context. This richness of interpretation offers understandings about teacher experience, teacher identity and how teachers are navigating their professional practice within a context of change.

7.6 Thoughts for the future

Based on the evidence uncovered in this research, a number of thoughts for the future might be considered by teachers or schools in contemplation of literacy in and for the 21st century.

These recommendations are not listed in any particular order. Rather, they are general recommendations for consideration:

- Incorporating sociological professional development into pre-service and in-service teaching would likely offer teachers a much greater justification for why ‘teaching the [traditional] basics’ is no longer enough. Providing teachers with insights into how the sociological and economic landscape is changing in many ways, justifies why students need exposure to 21st century literacy practices.

- Sitting beside sociological professional development is the suggestion that there is need for a greater understanding of childhood sociology specifically. Childhood and constructions of childhood are undergoing rapid change in the world beyond school. Conceptions of childhood differ even from the late 20th to the early 21st century. If teachers and school cultures do not understand this, the conditions for conflict are
created. Literacy teaching and learning that can be described as truly 21st century in nature, can be characterised by a real understanding and appreciation of these differences.

- However, too much focus on 21st century literacy has the potential to alienate teachers. It is important to stress that 21st century literacy does not abandon traditional literacies, or traditional literacy practices. Rather, it is concerned with questions that focus on creating meaning in a 21st century context, considering aspects of multimodality, power, and social discourse. It is these practices that need to be considered within the context of literacy in order to help define 21st century literacy. Professional development, planning, and developing policy documents that deal with such aspects, may be useful measures for schools and teachers to consider.

### 7.7 Future research

This research project serves as the beginning of what I now intend to be a research career for myself. I have identified an area of research that I am interested in, and want to pursue, together with a research methodology that I am passionate about. Understanding lived experience helps illuminate how and why teachers do what they do. For me, the project was a privilege to undertake, and incredibly rewarding.

Specifically, there are three areas of future research that emerge from this project:

- There was some evidence in this study that teachers make judgements about students based on their background. I would like to explore this further, and attempt to better understand how teachers craft and enact curriculum based on their students’ backgrounds.
- There is also some evidence in this study that teachers have a limited understanding of sociological and economic influences, and an even more limited awareness of how these influences affect learning. I would
like to learn more about teachers’ understanding of childhood sociology and the impact that this understanding has on their pedagogical decisions. I am interested in exploring, within a 21st century sociological construction, whether teachers have a dated view of childhood sociology and if so, what impact this has on student learning.

• Literacy was always at the heart of this research project, and will stay as a central theme to my research. What has emerged from this research project is the varied and at times limited nature of teachers’ understandings of literacy in and for the 21st century. In the future I would like to specifically target schools and practitioners who are enacting 21st century literacy practices, in an attempt to better understand how they do this and how they overcome barriers. Further, I would like to compare and contrast the findings from this research project, with findings about how teachers and schools enact 21st century literacy successfully, and then offer some suggestions as to how the challenges observed in this study might be overcome.

7.8 Concluding remarks

This study has sought to understand the lived experiences of Year 6 teachers as they consider and enact literacy. Specifically, it has tried to better understand how teachers think about 21st century literacy, both for now and into the future: that is, literacy in and for the 21st century. I have highlighted a range of views, but in the end some compelling conclusions can be drawn. Primarily, participants in this study philosophically understood the need to consider literacy with a 21st century orientation, and yet the challenges in doing so were often overwhelming; it is clear that many barriers were in their way. Some of those barriers were external, such as school leadership; while other barriers were influenced by participants’ lived experiences, such as their attitudes to literacy learning based on student backgrounds.
This study was a privilege to conduct, as it offered an insiders’ view of the practices and motives behind pedagogical practice. There are findings here that also merit future research, but I leave this research project feeling overwhelmingly confident that teachers are wanting to enact a more 21st century oriented literacy pedagogy, and I feel excited by the prospect of perhaps being able to make a contribution to this.
7.9 Dear Diary—What have I become? Reflecting on my ‘becoming’

Well, I’ve finally arrived … the Conclusion chapter has been written. I remember sitting with my Supervisor about two years ago discussing this stage. Our plan was to write the Introduction and Conclusion chapters last. Secretly, I had been longing for this day—because it would signal to me that I had pretty much completed the intellectual work of my doctorate, that indeed I was on the downhill run!

Why then, am I sitting here full of fear, tinged with a little bit of dread? Is it that I don’t really want the journey to come to an end just yet? Is it that I am so engrossed in my research that I don’t actually want to step out of it … or is it, as I suspect, something else?

I began this journey as a classroom teacher. Three years ago I appeared to have it all as a classroom teacher. An ongoing job at one of Australia’s most prestigious schools, a master’s degree, the beginnings of a doctorate, and a very clear career pathway. Curriculum Coordinator was where I was heading! I always wanted to be a ‘thinking teacher’—that’s why I went on to postgraduate study. It was never about career progression; it was about gaining a better understanding of the profession that I feel is my vocation. It was about my own learning. It was about personal growth.

Over the past two months, I’ve turned my attention to writing job applications. I’ve looked at more job descriptions than I care to count, and visited a number of schools that I had identified as potential places of employment. Why then, do I walk away from these schools with a sense of disinterest? Why am I not passionate about writing job applications? Is it just the stage of my career I’m in? Or is it something else?
I’ve met with four school principals now for ‘informal conversations’, and the chat has been interesting. We’ve talked about the political landscape of education, teacher education, parents, and education in and for the 21st century. We then moved on to my potential role as a classroom teacher or administrator … Each time the conversation moves to this point, I feel myself disengaging. Why!? This is what I’ve spent the last three years as a full time PhD student working towards … haven’t I?

Something has changed—something is different in me, and it is affecting the way I see myself as an educator. My identity has evolved, and I hadn’t even realised. What if schools are no longer the place for me?

Today I was at another meeting with my Principal Supervisor, and this time my Associate Supervisor was also there. I walked into the meeting, with my agenda in hand. I had a clear finishing plan, and I wanted the conversation to follow the path of completion. But something happened during that meeting that I know is focusing me on my career pathway. We engaged in ‘academic discussion’, and I felt alive, enthused, and interested! I really hadn’t felt this before. For so much of my PhD journey, I felt like I had been playing ‘catch up’—trying to understand methodologies, literature and research. Today was different. I pretty much had a full working draft of my PhD, and I was talking with my Supervisors with confidence, with interest, with a feeling that I had a contribution to make! I felt alive in education again! We did speak about ‘the completion plan’, but we spent more time talking about the methodological orientations of my research.

I walked away from the meeting with my emotions all over the place. Excitement, enthusiasm, engagement … but also fear, uncertainty, and yes, dread.
I think I know what this means … from the first day of my PhD journey it was about understanding schools better, and literacy in and for the 21st century better. It was about ensuring that I could take this learning back to schools. But I don’t think this work belongs in schools. I don’t think I belong in schools anymore. My identity has evolved. As I draw to the end of my PhD journey I’m seriously considering walking away from schools and from primary school teaching. I’m seriously considering going from being an expert in my field of primary school teaching to a novice, a beginner at something else … That something else is academia.

For the last three years I’ve engaged in an identity shifting exercise without even realising it. I don’t want to go back into schools because I feel sure that much of the work I’ve done in the area of 21st century literacy will be lost. Schools are places of practicality, and I fear that the ‘thinking’ work that I’ve done over the past three years will be smothered by the day-to-day realities of a classroom teacher’s life. More than that though, I have more ideas, more wonderings, and more aspects of my research that I want to investigate.

As I write this entry, I now know why the re-engagements with schools have been so disheartening. It’s not that I don’t love primary school teaching, or the craft of teaching, or the day-to-day engagement with children. It’s that I have a different contribution that I want to make. I want to contribute to children’s learning by understanding the craft of teaching better—and sharing that learning. Academia fills me with optimism, maybe idealistic optimism, but optimism nonetheless.

I’ve changed … I think differently, I view my world differently. I’ve evolved without even realising it.

I’m lucky; I had a taste of academia very early in my career. I worked at Deakin University on the Warrnambool campus for a number of years. When people,
who don’t understand my journey, ask me, ‘why are you considering going back to academia, didn’t you leave because you didn’t like it’? I’m confident in my answer … Indeed I did leave the university sector because I didn’t like it. But only the people close to my PhD journey will understand when I say that what the PhD journey has done is led me to evolve as a thinker, a researcher, and a person. I’ve changed. My dispositions and skill sets have evolved. And I’m now ready to be a researcher. My early career as an academic gave me a taste. I know some of the limitations and challenges of academia. I know the workload challenges, the financial constraints. So, I hope as I re-enter the world of academia, I don’t have a totally Pollyanna view. I think I understand the profession a little, and I hope this understanding has helped guide my decision.

I’m not sure what the next chapter looks like. I hope it has elements of teacher education work, research, and service to my profession. I’ve made a decision that I want to be the kind of researcher who works on aspects of education that in-service teachers can access, and find useful. Research relationships will matter to me. I’m sure there are a lot of teachers, like me, who crave learning, who crave understanding, who embrace the intersection of theory and practice. I want to be that kind of researcher…
8 References


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9 Appendix

9.1.1 Deakin University ethics form and approval letter

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY HUMAN ETHICS ADVISORY GROUP (HEAG)

LOW RISK APPLICATION FORM

Project Title: Literacy for the 21st Century: How teachers in Victorian primary schools are enabling Year 6 students to learn 21st century literacy skills.

Proposed Start Date: May 2013
Proposed end date: December 2014

Principal Investigator/s: Dr Muriel Wells

Student Researcher/s (if applicable): Mr Damien Lyons

Degree/s for which student/s enrolled: E900

School: School of Education
Faculty: Faculty of Arts and Education

Contact Telephone No: +447408834903
Email: damien_lyons@me.com

Other researchers involved in the project:
Name: Role: Contact email address

Please note: As of 2 April 2012, all first time applicants are required to complete compulsory human research ethics training prior to submitting their first ethics application to DUHREC or a Faculty
PART A: Excluded Categories (See National Statement 5.1.6)

1. Does your project focus on any of the following?
   - Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples or issues; No
   - Research involving pregnant women or the human foetus; No
   - People highly dependent on medical care who may be unable to give consent; No
   - People with a cognitive impairment, an intellectual disability, or mental illness; No
   - People who may be involved in illegal activities; No
   - Interventions and therapies, including clinical and non-clinical trials and innovations; No
   - Human genetics; No
   - Human stem cells; No
   - Projects involving ionizing radiation; No
   - People in countries that are politically unstable, where human rights are restricted; and/or where the research involves economically disadvantaged, exploited or marginalized participants from such countries; No
   - Projects involving active concealment or planned deception of participants. No
   - Collection of identifiable personal information, without permission from the person identified. No
   - Risk of harm to participants (more serious than discomfort, National Statement 2.1.6) No

   If your project focuses on ANY of these elements, it is not eligible for low risk review.
   You should complete the Full Ethical Review Application for DUHREC.

2. Does your project involve ethical review by another organisation?

   If yes, your project is not eligible for review by HEAG. You should consult the Human Research Ethics Manual regarding the Prior Approval processes.

3. Does your project involve ONLY use of existing collections of non-identifiable data?
   (Data are non-identifiable when they do not identify the people to whom the information relates – identifiers should never have been collected, or should have been permanently removed from the data set before you received it.)

   If yes, you should complete the application form for Exemption from Ethical Review.

PART B: Checklist
This checklist will help you decide whether your research may be submitted for Expedited Review. Research is eligible for Expedited Review if it is **low risk** (the foreseeable risk level is no more than discomfort).

If you answer ‘YES’ to any items on the checklist **your project is not eligible for expedited review unless** you can explain how this potential risk will be managed or minimised to ensure that the project remains low risk. This should be explained in the special case assessment section (section 6) below.

**It is your responsibility to assess the level of risk associated with your project. If your project is not considered low risk by the HEAG, you will be required to complete the application for DUHREC approval.**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
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<td>Sensitive personal issues</td>
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<td>Sensitive cultural issues</td>
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<td>Grief, death or serious/traumatic loss</td>
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<td>Gambling</td>
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<td>Eating disorders</td>
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<td>Illicit drug taking</td>
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<td>Substance abuse</td>
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<td>Self report of criminal behaviour</td>
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<td>Any psychological disorder, depression, mood states and/or anxiety</td>
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<td>Suicide</td>
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<td>Sexuality, sexual behaviour or gender identity</td>
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<td>Race or ethnic identity</td>
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<td>Any disease or health problem</td>
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<td>Fertility</td>
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<td>Termination of pregnancy</td>
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<td>Use of personal data obtained from Commonwealth or State Government Department/Agency</td>
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<td>Concealing the purposes of the research</td>
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<td>Covert observation</td>
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<td>Audio or visual recording without consent</td>
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<td>Recruitment via a third party or agency</td>
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<td>Withholding from one group specific treatments or methods of learning, from which they may ‘benefit’ (eg in medicine or teaching)</td>
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<td>Psychological interventions or treatments</td>
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<td>Administration of physical stimulation</td>
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<td>Invasive physical procedures</td>
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<td>Infliction of pain</td>
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<td>Administration of drugs or placebos</td>
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<td>Administration of other substances</td>
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<td>Use of medical records where participants can be identified or linked</td>
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### 3 PARTICIPANT VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT

Does the research specifically target participants from any of the following groups?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children or young people under 18 years</td>
<td>☑</td>
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<tr>
<td>People with a physical disability or vulnerability</td>
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<td>People whose ability to give consent is impaired</td>
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<td>Residents of a custodial institution</td>
<td>☑</td>
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<tr>
<td>People unable to give free informed consent because of difficulties in understanding the Plain Language Statement or Information Sheet (e.g. language difficulties)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Members of a socially identifiable group with special cultural or religious needs or political vulnerabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>People in dependent or unequal relationship with the researchers (e.g. lecturer/student, doctor/patient, teacher/pupil, professional/client)</td>
<td>☑</td>
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<tr>
<td>People with existing relationships with the researcher (e.g. relative, friend, co-worker)</td>
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<tr>
<td>People in a workplace setting with the potential for coercion or problems of confidentiality (e.g. employer/employee)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants able to be identified in any final report when specific consent for this has not been given</td>
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<td>Persons not usually considered vulnerable but would be thought so in the context of the project</td>
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### 4. RESEARCH IN OVERSEAS SETTINGS ASSESSMENT

Does the research involve any of the following:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Research being undertaken in a politically unstable area</td>
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<td>Research involving sensitive cultural issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research in countries where criticism of government and institutions might put participants and/or researchers at risk</td>
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### 6. SPECIAL CASE ASSESSMENT

If you have answered ‘YES’ to an item in the checklist but you still believe that because of the particular nature of the project and the participants your project may still be eligible for expedited review. Please provide details below, or attach an additional sheet.

**SPECIAL CASE DETAILS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are there any risks to the researcher, (e.g. research undertaken in unsafe environments or trouble spots)?</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Are there any other risks not covered in this assessment that you consider may be relevant?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
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PART C: PROJECT

1 Aims of the project

This project aims to explore three questions, including:

• What literacy skills do teachers in Victorian primary schools perceive as necessary for Year 6 students to be able to participate successfully in their 21st century world?
• How do teachers in Victorian primary schools define 21st century literacy skills, and how do they enable the learning of these skills for Year 6 students?
• Who influences teacher’s practices associated with the development and enactment of 21st century literacy skill for Year 6 students?

The skills required to be successfully literate in the 21st century are different to previous eras. The 21st century is a place of multimodality, exponential information, and sophisticated and powerful tools for communication. Primary school teachers are charged with the task of understanding what being successfully literature in the 21st century is, and how to enable their students to achieve literacy success both now and into the future. This research aims to better understand how teachers are conceptualising 21st century literacy, with a particular focus on literacy skills, how Year 6 students are learning 21st century literacy skills, and the factors that influence a teacher’s decision making processes associated with literacy skills.

2 Research design and methods

Give a concise and simple description of the proposed research design and the methods to be used. Please include all data collection procedures and all groups of participants.

This research project will collect data from 15 participants, who will be primary school teachers within Victoria, Australia. Data will be collected through a one-hour semi-structured interview.

Sample questions include:

• What literacy skills do Year 6 students need to be successful participants in their current school environment?
• Do Year 6 students require different literacy skills to participate in out-of-school literacy practices?
• Could you predict some of the literacy skills students currently in Year 6 may require to be successful when they leave school?
• How would you define 21st century literacy skills?
• Can you reflect on the literacy skills you identified within your four weekly reflections and identify which of those skills you would consider to be 21st century literacy skills?
• What professional skills do teachers need to enable Year 6 students to learn 21st century literacy skills?
• What professional behaviours do teachers need to enable Year 6 students to learn 21st century literacy skills?
• What factors within schools enable teachers to promote the development of 21st century literacy skills for their Year 6 students?
• What factors within schools inhibit teachers to promote the development of 21st century literacy skills for their Year 6 students?

3 Use of existing stored data

Please list any existing stored data that you plan to use as part of the project eg health or employment records used for recruitment, or comparison. Please include in your answer:

• The type and number of records being accessed
• Whether the records identify individual people
• How you will obtain permission to use them (consent from individuals or permission from custodians of non-identifiable data).

No existing stored data will be used.

4 Risks and benefits

Give a summary of the expected benefits of this project

This may include benefits to the broader community, the participants, people with whom the participants identify or the researcher (See National Statement on benefits).

This research seeks to explore the professional opinions and stories primary school teachers have about what 21st century literacy skills are, how they should be taught, and who influences the enactment of them.

Benefits of this research may include a more informed contribution to policy debate about what constitutes effective literacy learning, how this learning is currently being enacted, and the challenges that exist to effective 21st century literacy learning from the perspective of the practitioner.

Participants may benefit through the reflection on their own practice that will occur during the on-line diary activity and semi-structured interviews. Schools are often very
busy places, and creating the time and space for thoughtful reflection can be challenging. This research project may offer participants the opportunity to reflect on their literacy teaching practices, and consider what they are doing well, why they are choosing the practices they are and what they may want to consider for improvement.

**Give a summary of the expected risks of this project and how they will be managed**

This should include any risks to participants, researchers, to the environment or to Deakin or other organisations. (See National Statement on assessment of risk.)

It is unlikely that any harm will come to participants. At all stages participants will be offered copies of their data entries and transcripts, at which point they can add or alter their comments. It will be explained to participants that they do not have to answer questions in the semi-structured interview if they feel uncomfortable. Participants will be informed in the PLS that they can withdraw from the study at any time.

5 Monitoring

As the researcher, how will you monitor the progress of the research? (See National Statement 5.5.3)

This research project will be monitored in the following ways.

- An annual performance review, instigated by Deakin University will be the formal monitoring tool. This will be a time to formally report progress and outcomes. This will be informed by evidence of the research to date, Supervisor feedback and personal reflection.
- Monthly meetings between my Principal Supervisor and myself have been established. During this time progress is reflected upon and future goals are discussed and set. This is informed by the Research Timeline that was established as part of the Colloquium.

6 Resources

Please explain how the project is funded (sponsorship, tender, grant etc.). If there are specific resources required for the project how will they be provided?

This research project is self-funded, with the exception of fees, which are covered by the Australian Government.
7 Conflict of interest

Do any of the researchers or others involved in this project have any conflict of interest in relation to it? If so, please explain how this will be managed.

There are no conflicts of Interest that I am aware of. I am currently not employed by any primary school at this point in time.

PARTICIPANTS

8 Describe your participant group/s

Please include the following information for each participant group.

- How many participants do you plan to recruit?
- What are the inclusion and exclusion criteria?

Within this research project I plan to recruit 15 participants. All will be current Year 6 primary school teachers within Victoria. All will be registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

Inclusion criteria will include:

- A teacher currently teaching Year 6.
- Currently registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

Exclusion criteria will include:

- Any teacher not registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

9 Explain your recruitment process

Please include the following information for each participant group.

- How will you locate the participants that you plan to recruit? If through existing records or contact lists, please explain how this will be done in a way that does not infringe privacy requirements.
- How will initial contact be made?
  If you plan to use a document or spoken statement eg flyer, letter, advertisement, phone call, please attach a copy of the document or script to this application.
- Will the participants be screened?
  If there is a screening tool, please attach a copy.

Recruitment of participants will occur in the following way.
• Permission will be sought from The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Once this permission is granted, I will contact The Department to obtain a list of schools within the South-West of Victoria.

• I will email the principals of a selection of schools within the South-West of Victoria an introductory letter, which will outline the research, research questions, and what would be required from Year 6 teachers in their school. I will attach to that email a formal invitation to Year 6 teachers to participate in the research. I will ask the principal to consider the request, and if approved, to forward the Invitation attached to the email to the Year 6 teaching staff.

• Potential participants, that is Year 6 teachers, who receive the letter, will be invited to consider the request to participate. Potential participants who consider they have the time and interest would then be invited to respond to me via email. Once I receive an email, I will arrange a time to have a telephone conversation with them where I will discuss their involvement, answer any questions and arrange to send the Plain Language Statement and the Consent and Revocation forms to them.

• Once the consent forms are signed, I will consider them research participants.

CONSENT

10 Describe the consent process

There are a variety of ways in which consent can be established, most commonly by giving participants a Plain Language Statement and Consent Form (PLSC) or by return of survey. You may wish to consult the Human Research Ethics Manual for more information.

Consent and Revocation forms will be sent to each participant, along with the Plain Language Statement.

11 Will there be reimbursement of expenses or incentives to participate?

See Human Research ethics Manual section 8 for more information.

There will be no financial reimbursement.

12 Pre-existing or unequal relationships

Do any of the proposed participants have existing relationships either with the researchers or each other? Please explain the relationship/s, and how you will make sure that participants don’t feel pressured to take part.

As I have been employed most recently within the Independent Schools Victoria system, and I am planning to conduct my research within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Victoria system, it is unlikely that there will be any existing relationships.
13 Does your project include children or young people under 18 years?

If your project involves people under the age of 18, please answer the following questions. For further information, consult National Statement chapter 4.2.

• What age group is involved?
• Will parental/guardian consent be obtained? If the young people will consent on their own behalf, how their capacity to do this will be judged?
• Is it necessary to involve people under 18? Could your projects be undertaken with adult participants?
• Is the methodology appropriate for children/young people?
• Is there any reason to consider that participation in the research is not in the best interests of the children/young people?

This research project does not include people under the age of 18.

14 Language and communication issues

Will your project involve people who cannot communicate easily in English? (ie people who are not confident English speakers, or who have a disability, such as a hearing impairment that requires special arrangements for participation). If so, please explain how translation/interpretation issues will be managed. For further information consult the Human Research Ethics Manual on Language and communication.

Participants for this research project will be employed as Generalist Year 6 classroom teachers within Victorian primary schools and as such will have good communication skills.

15 People in other countries

If you are planning to undertake research in other countries, please answer the following questions. For further information consult the Human Research Ethics Manual on Research in other countries.

• What are the legal and ethical requirements for conducting research in the designated country?
• What arrangements will be in place for a local, readily accessible contact to receive responses, questions and complaints about the research (National Statement 4.8.16).
• How will the research be monitored on site?
• Are there cultural sensitivities relating to the research? How will these be managed?

If the research is to be conducted in a language other than English, please ensure that you have covered all relevant language issues under question 14.

This does not apply.
CONFIDENTIALITY / PRIVACY

16 Will you be collecting data in identified form?

Data are generally divided into:

- Identifiable (also called personal): the person to whom the data relates can be established from the data – either because they are named, or information that identifies them is included (e.g., position in an organisation at the time)
- Re-identifiable (also called coded): the identifiers have been removed from the information and replaced with a code.
- Non-identifiable: the data were collected anonymously, or all identifiers have been permanently removed.

Please explain the form in which the data will be collected. If you plan to collect it in identified form and later remove the identifiers, please explain how and when.

Data will be re-identifiable. During the initial data collection phase, I will collect data via an on-line diary and a face-to-face interview, and as such I will know the person, and their work context. At the point of data transcription, all participants will be given pseudonyms and their workplace will not be named. At the conclusion of the transcription stage all participants will be given a copy of their interview transcript and diary entries to ensure they are comfortable with what they have said and presented. Participants will have the opportunity to delete any part of the transcription they feel uncomfortable with. Any reference to their place of work or a student/s will be removed.

17 Storage of data

Data storage should meet the requirements of the Authorship and Data Management Procedure. In most cases data should be stored securely at Deakin, for a period of at least 5 years after the final publication of the research outcomes. If the data will be stored in another location, please explain this, and how data security will be maintained. You should include:

- Whether the data will be identified/re-identifiable/non-identifiable
- How security will be maintained (locked storage, secure server, etc)
- How long the data will be stored
- If and when the data will be disposed of and how security will be maintained.

Data will be stored in the following ways.

On-line diary:

The on-line diary will be a weekly email that will be sent to my private, password protected, email address by the participants. When this email is received it will be transferred to a USB and stored in a locked safe in my home office.
Interview data:

The semi-structured interview will be electronically recorded as an audio file and the audio files will be transferred to a USB and stored in a locked safe in my home office. Transcription of the interviews will be captured electronically and stored on a USB in my home office.

All data will be backed up to a separate hard drive that will be stored in a separate safe within my home. This will be fire and flood proof. All data will be stored in a fire and flood proof safe for a period of 5 years. At the end of the 5 year period data will be deleted from the USB sticks and the external hard drive.

18 Publication of results

How will you notify participants of the outcome of the research?

Participants will be notified in the following ways:

- At the end of the transcription all participants will be given a copy of their transcript for their approval.
- All participants will be offered a copy of the published thesis.

How will your research be reported/published?

The research will be published primarily in the format of a thesis. In addition to this it is anticipated that a number of refereed journal articles and conference papers will be produced out of the data collected.

How will you manage participant confidentiality?

Throughout the data collection process, data will be stored in a locked safe. This includes consent forms and any personal information. All email correspondence will be stored on my computer, which will be password protected at all times.

Participant confidentiality will be managed through the use of pseudonyms in the data-reporting phase.

Pseudonyms will be used when I discuss the data with my supervisors.
Human Ethics Advisory Group

Date: 07 May, 2013 Subject: HAE-13-023

Literacy for the 21st Century: How teachers in Victorian primary schools are enabling Year 6 students to learn 21st century literacy skills

Please quote this project number in all future communications

The application for this project has been considered by the Faculty HEAG under the terms of Deakin University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (DUHREC).

Approval has been given for Mr Damien Michael Lyons, under the supervision of Dr Muriel Wells, School of Education, to undertake this project from 7/05/2013 to 7/05/2017.

The approval given by the Faculty HEAG is given only for the project and for the period as stated in the approval. It is your responsibility to contact the Faculty HEAG immediately should any of the following occur:

• Serious or unexpected adverse effects on the participants

• Any proposed changes in the protocol, including extensions of time.

• Any events which might affect the continuing ethical acceptability of the project.

• The project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

• Modifications are requested by other HRECs. In addition you will be required to report on the progress of your project at least once every year and at the conclusion of the project. Failure to report as required will result in suspension of your approval to proceed with the project. The Faculty HEAG and/or DUHREC may need to audit this project as part of the requirements for monitoring set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
Plain Language Statement to Principals

Dear Principal,

My name is Damien Lyons. I am a student at Deakin University, and am currently completing my PhD in the area of 21st century literacy practices. I am writing to you to explore the possibility of teachers at your school who currently teach Grade 6 being involved in my PhD research.

My project explores what Grade 6 teachers believe constitutes a quality 21st century literacy learning environment, what they perceive are the literacy skills Grade 6 students need to be exposed to now, and what literacy skills they may require into the future, and the role the teacher plays in enacting this learning with Grade 6 students.

Specifically, this research project will explore three questions, including:

- What literacy skills do teachers in Australian primary schools perceive as necessary for Grade 6 students to be able to participate successfully in their 21st century world?
- How do teachers in Australian primary schools define 21st century literacy skills, and how do they enact literacy learning for Grade 6 students?
- Who influences teachers’ practices associated with the development and enactment of 21st century literacy skill for Grade 6 students?

What would be required from Grade 6 teachers at your school?
I would like to conduct a one-hour semi structured interview with Grade 6 teachers that agree to be a part of the research. The interview would be broken into two sections. The first would be some general reflections about literacy in the 21st century, and the second part would consider a specific literacy lesson and explore the pedagogical practices employed within this lesson.

Specifically, we would explore the following questions:

Part 1: General reflections on literacy.
- What literacy skills do Grade 6 students need to be successful participants in their current school environment?
- How would you define 21st century literacy skills?
- Could you predict some of the literacy skills students currently in Grade 6 may require to be successful when they leave school?
- What professional skills do teachers need to enable Grade 6 students to learn 21st century literacy skills?
- What professional behaviours do teachers need to enable Grade 6 students to learn 21st century literacy skills?
- What factors within schools enable teachers to promote the development of 21st century literacy skills for their Grade 6 students?
• What factors within schools inhibit teachers to promote the development of 21st century literacy skills for their Grade 6 students?

**Part 2: Reflecting on a literacy lesson/lesson sequence.**
The second part of the interview would invite participants to reflect on a literacy lesson or sequence of lessons recently taught. Focus questions include:

• What was the purpose of your literacy lesson or lesson sequence this week?
• What literacy skills did you focused upon during your lesson or lesson sequence this week?
• What curriculum policy/guidelines influenced your literacy lesson or lesson sequence this week?
• Can you give a brief summary of how you taught your literacy lesson or lesson sequence this week, with particular focus on how you introduced the literacy skills you identified?
• How did the students practice the literacy skills that were identified in the planning stage of your lesson or lesson sequence this week?
• What evidence (anecdotal, qualitative or quantitative) do you have of student learning and or engagement within your literacy lesson or sequence of lessons this week?

If this is something you would be willing to give permission for, and you consider that Grade 6 teachers in your school may be willing to be interviewed, I would very much welcome this email, including the attachment, being forwarded to the Grade 6 teachers, for their consideration.

The Strategy and Review Group within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development have approved this research project.

If you would like to discuss this further with me, I would be very happy to. My contact details are below.

Kind Regards,

**Signature Redacted by Library**

**Damien Lyons**

Email: damien_lyons@me.com
Phone: 0478 228 165
Dear teacher,

My name is Damien Lyons. I am a student at Deakin University, and am currently completing my PhD in the area of 21st century literacy. I am writing to explore the possibility of you being involved within my research.

I am seeking to explore what teachers in Victorian primary schools believe constitutes a quality 21st century literacy learning environment, what teachers perceive are the literacy skills students need to be exposed to now, and what literacy skills they may require into the future, and the role the teacher plays in enabling this learning for students.

Specifically, this research project explores three questions, including:

• What literacy skills do teachers in Australian primary schools perceive as necessary for students to be able to participate successfully in their 21st century world?
• How do teachers in Australian primary schools define 21st century literacy, and how do teachers enable 21st century literacy learning for students?
• Who influences teachers’ practices associated with the development and enactment of 21st century literacy learning for students?

What would be required from you?

Having been a classroom teacher for many years, I appreciate how busy you are, and how precious your time is. So any time you could spare would be very much appreciated by me.

Specifically, I would like to conduct a one-hour semi structured interview with you. The interview would be broken into two sections. The first section would cover some general reflections about your views of literacy within a 21st century context. The second section would
consider a literacy lesson or sequence of lessons you have recently taught, exploring the pedagogical practices you employed within this lesson or lesson sequence.

Specifically, we would explore the following questions:

**Part 1: General reflections on literacy.**
- How would you define 21st century literacy?
- What literacy skills do students need to be successful participants in their current school environment? Are these skills different to what students need outside of school?
- Could you predict some of the literacy skills/practices students may require to be successful when they leave school?
- What professional skills do teachers need to enable students to learn 21st century literacy skills?
- What professional behaviours do teachers need to enable students to learn 21st century literacy skills?
- What factors within schools enable teachers to promote the development of 21st century literacy for their students?
- What factors within schools inhibit teachers to promote the development of 21st century literacy for their students?

**Part 2: Reflecting on a literacy lesson/lesson sequence.**
The second part of the interview would invite participants to reflect on a literacy lesson or sequence of lessons recently taught. Focus questions include:
- What was the purpose of your literacy lesson or lesson sequence?
- What literacy skills did you focused upon during your lesson or lesson sequence?
- What curriculum policy/guidelines influenced your literacy lesson or lesson sequence?
- Can you give a brief summary of how you taught your literacy lesson or lesson sequence, with particular focus on how you introduced the literacy skills you identified?
- How did students practice the literacy skills that were identified in the planning stage of your lesson or lesson sequence?
- What evidence (anecdotal, qualitative or quantitative) do you have of student learning and or engagement within your literacy lesson or sequence of lessons?

**When would this happen?**
If you were interested in participating in this research, I would like to conduct the interviews in late August or early September at your school.

Please also note that your school will not be named. And you will be given a pseudonym to protect your identity. Any information linking specifically to your school will be removed. You will also be given a copy of your transcript, and any data you wish to be removed can be up until the point of publication.

**If you are interested in participating in this research could you please reply, via email, to me indicating your willingness to participate? I will then contact you to discuss this further.**

Kind Regards,

Signature Redacted by Library
Damien Lyons

Email: damien_lyons@me.com
Phone: 0478 228 165