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Whole-school benchmarking of writing (WSBoW) in a primary school - outcomes for teachers

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The WSBoW approach:

Whole-school benchmarking of writing (WSBoW) in a primary school - outcomes for teachers

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Thesis submitted to fulfil the requirements of
Master of Education
Southern Cross University
I, Stephanie George, declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

Signed ............................................. Date ...........................................
Abstract
This is a qualitative ethnographic study that investigated the lived experience of twelve teachers working in a regional NSW Catholic primary school. This study is positioned in the complex and continuous agendas of school improvement. It describes the way that a Whole-School Benchmarking of Writing (WSBoW) approach implemented at the school was experienced by and had influenced the teachers. The school had aimed to improve teachers’ ability to use assessment data about student writing to achieve sustained growth in writing results. The WSBoW approach engaged the teachers in peer collaborations where the benchmarking of each student’s writing was the central focus. The investigation considered the outcomes for the teachers of the increasingly collaborative nature of their teaching and the consequences of this for teacher practice in a school culture which focused on student-centred, evidence-based learning.

This research is a qualitative short-term ethnographic study (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 1990). The epistemological framework is social constructivism which aligns with an interpretive stance (Creswell, 2009; Willis, 2007). The research is framed as an ethnographic case study (Creswell, 2009; Flick, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Merriam, 1998) because the purpose was to understand the experiences of the teachers as they engaged in a whole-school improvement innovation. Data from semi-structured interviews with twelve teachers at the school provided thick, rich descriptions of teachers’ experiences. The teachers described their experiences of the WSBoW approach, including the use of a shared writing assessment rubric and marking scale as a formative and summative assessment tool and their collaboration in Professional Learning Teams (PLTs).

The key findings of the study were that the nature of school leadership at the school was integral to the development of this culture, which focused on collaborative, deprivatised and data-evidenced teacher practice. Whilst the findings replicated some of the unintended consequences of standardised testing such as NAPLAN, that are evident in the academic literature, the data showed that the WSBoW approach provided these teachers with a supportive pedagogical tool for improving student achievement in writing. The study may have wider significance for schools and school systems which aim to engage teachers in collaborative, data-evidenced teaching and learning.
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Chapter 1  Identifying the Research Problem

1.1 Introduction
This introductory chapter provides a statement of the research problem, defines key terms used in the study, outlines the background to the study and then provides a more detailed description of the context of the problem.

1.1.1 Statement of the research problem
This study examined the experiences of teachers when a whole-school teaching renewal process, one aspect of which was the Whole-School Benchmarking of Writing (WSBoW) approach, was introduced into a primary school in northern New South Wales, Australia. More specifically, this study has described, explored and analysed teachers’ responses as they involved themselves in processes that facilitated students’ mastery of the writing process. The process of benchmarking of student writing at the case study school was a key step in the teacher renewal process that both enhanced the quality of the teaching and learning experiences and was part of the continuous school improvement process. The WSBoW approach was centred on the classroom teachers’ use of a standardised assessment rubric for pre- and post-testing of student progress across each of the four school terms. This study focused on teachers’ self-stated engagement with the existing WSBoW assessment rubric and marking rubric as they strove to improve their teaching of writing in response to student assessment data. In the context of this study, possible outcomes for teachers encompassed both those intended to occur as a result of the benchmarking initiative and those unintended outcomes that arose when individual teachers and teams of teachers engaged with the process.

Teachers in the 21st century are the focus of demands from government authorities, parents and the general public to improve the quality of school education (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Masters, 2012; Rowe, 2003; Sahlberg, 2011). The political nature of the continuous school improvement agenda (Brady, 2013; Cuttance, 2005; Masters, 2012), the increasing focus by governments on high-stakes testing (Au, 2007; Bieber & Martens, 2011) and the growing emphasis on the quality of teaching practice as integral to student learning outcomes have consequences for teachers (Rowe, 2003). It is in this context that the research is set.
The WSBoW approach was designed by the case study school and is described in Appendix Five. The WSBoW approach sits within a whole-school Case Study School Collaborative Learning Model, as described in Appendix Six. These documents will be discussed in the following sections. The Case Study School Collaborative Learning Model document describes the approach to learning taken by the school from 2009-2013, as a response to the complex and continuous agendas of international, national, state and system level school improvement. For the purposes of examination, the name and location of the school have been anonymised by the use of the generic term ‘case study school’ throughout this thesis. The key terms used in this research will now be defined in the context of the case study school, to help position the literature review in Chapter 2.

1.1.2 Definition of key terms

In this research, the following key terms are defined in relation to the Whole-School Benchmarking of Writing (WSBoW) Approach and the Collaborative Learning Model outlined in Appendices Four and Five respectively. These key terms will be further elaborated on and described in Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature. It should be noted here though that many of these terms are interrelated and are, in the context of the school and the study, interdependent.

**Benchmarking:** Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) define benchmarking as a process of “learning and inquiry into one’s own performance” (Hargreaves & Shirley, p. 13 authors' italics). Educational benchmarking is a complex term which is defined and discussed in detail in Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature. In this research, benchmarking refers to the alignment of student assessment data with school-identified achievement standards for students across the school year levels. The purpose of such benchmarking is to make transparent the areas for improvement and the areas of good practice in the teaching and learning of writing across the case study school. The school planned to identify expected student achievement standards in writing for each year of schooling from Year One to Year Six, by aligning standards stated in the original NSW syllabus, the K-6 English Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 1994), the current NSW syllabus, the NSW English Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum (Board of Studies NSW, 2012) and the National Minimum Standards for Writing (ACARA, 2011a) with the marking rubrics used in the WSBoW approach. The marking rubrics used by the teachers to mark these assessment tasks were the NAPLAN marking rubrics (ACARA, 2011d). At the case study school, student assessment data was gathered by teachers twice per term through the administration of writing assessment tasks. All student writing samples were marked using the same marking
rubric, regardless of school year level or writing ability. For assessment of persuasive and narrative texts, the NAPLAN marking rubrics were used verbatim. For informative texts, for which there is no corresponding NAPLAN marking rubric, the school created a marking rubric using very similar criteria. See Appendix Seven: WSBoW Approach Marking Rubrics.

High-stakes testing: In common usage, a high-stakes test is any test that has major consequences or is the basis of a major decision (Seifert & Sutton, 2009). NAPLAN is an example of a high-stakes testing regime with significant consequences for stakeholders, particularly due to the publication of NAPLAN results on the My School website (ACARA, 2014; Polesel, Dulfer, & Turnbull, 2012). The WSBoW approach was introduced at the case study school as a direct response to this high-stakes testing regime because the school wanted to improve its NAPLAN results in writing. More on this is noted in the review of the literature chapter.

School culture: Culture, in the context of this research, is “the collective gathering of norms, values, beliefs, activities and possessions that characterise a certain group” (Allen, 2004, p. 428), the group being the case study school community. This definition has been selected from the myriad of understandings and definitions of school culture within the academic literature because it summarises succinctly the primary characteristics of what constitutes the culture of a school. The leadership team at the school were responding to the imperative to change the culture of schools in order to improve learning outcomes for students, which stemmed from the continuous school improvement agenda. This change in school culture is described by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) as a process of changing professional relationships, at school, system, state and national level, to improve what teachers and school leaders do to help students learn. A change in school culture was the focus of the case study school’s 2009-2013 Strategic Plan Personalising Learning – Pursuing Excellence (Case Study School, 2008). Four interrelated initiatives through which the school culture was changed in the three years prior to the introduction of the WSBoW approach were: the implementation of Professional Learning Teams (PLTs); a specific focus on collaborative teacher practice; the resulting deprivatisation of teaching practice; and the use of student assessment data to improve teaching. These are introduced and defined below.

Professional Learning Teams (PLTs): Darling-Hammond & Richardson (2009) define professional learning communities in the following way:
In this model, teachers work together and engage in continual dialogue to examine their practice and student performance and to develop and implement more effective instructional practices. In ongoing opportunities for collegial work, teachers learn about, try out, and reflect upon new practices in their specific context, sharing their individual knowledge and expertise. (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009, p. 3)

At the case study school, PLTs were introduced as teams of three or four teachers teaching the same year level. The PLTs had operated as professional learning communities since 2009 and had focused on student and teacher learning, collaboration and student achievement (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Their introduction was instigated by the school leadership team based on their understanding of the work of DuFour and Marzano.

**Collaborative teacher practice:** Collaborative teacher practice involves professionals sharing a common purpose to facilitate student learning, learn from each other and to effect continuous school improvement beyond individual classrooms according to Darling-Hammond & Richardson (2009). Based on a body of academic literature (Fullan, 2007b; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Hopkins, 2007; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007) and discussed further in Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature, the aim of collaborative practice is that, working in a coordinated way, each teacher contributes to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This means that the quality of collaborative teaching practice aims to be greater than the quality of each individual’s teaching practice, if each individual is working alone. At the case study school, this was achieved through a combination of management-driven and teacher-driven processes, where decision-making was shared between the leadership team and the teachers in the PLT, depending on the situation. This flexible, negotiated decision-making is a form of collaborative practice in itself, between the leadership team and the teachers.

**Deprivatisation of teaching practice:** Deprivatisation of teaching practice is when teachers work collaboratively in a reflective, open way to improve instruction (Fullan, 2007a). Traditionally, teaching practice has been considered to be ‘private’ because teachers have been isolated, working as one teacher in one classroom. The newer focus on collaboration then anticipates that they will make changes in the ways that they teach. In the context of the school’s **Collaborative Learning Model**, as described in Appendix Six, teachers continually operate as learners as well as teachers by reflecting on their own and others’ teaching practice in relation to student achievement (Babkie & Provost, 2004; Fullan, 2007a). This is done
through the collaborative work of the PLTs and has engendered the development of collaborative teaching practices.

**Student assessment data:** In this research, student assessment data refers to numerical data gathered through student pre- and post-testing, as described in the *Whole-School Benchmarking of Writing (WSBoW) approach* document in Appendix Five. Marking rubrics (see Appendix Seven) used to mark the pre- and post-tests were based on those used in NAPLAN, as described above. In this research, student assessment data also refers to informal and anecdotal data gathered by teachers during the learning process.

The next section gives more details about the background contexts leading up to the study itself.

### 1.1.3 Background to the study

This section provides a broad overview of factors at the global, national, state and system levels that have led to the identification of the research problem.

The *Whole-School Benchmarking of Writing (WSBoW)* approach employed by the case study school is seen as an example of a school-wide pedagogy (Conway & Abawi, 2013) developed in response to the current educational imperative for continuous school improvement. The past decade in Australian education has been one of rapid change and development (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012; MCEETYA, 2008). Educational stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, school leadership teams, principals, policymakers and politicians are affected by the push for excellence at all levels of Australian schooling (Dinham & Crowther, 2011; MCEETYA, 2008). As part of this push a national, standardised testing regime, NAPLAN, was introduced by the Australian Government in 2008 to replace state administered tests and to increase comparability of student achievement across the nation (ACARA, 2013b). Many of the outcomes for the aforementioned stakeholders are intended but at least as many are unintended (Brady, 2013; Polesel et al., 2012; Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2012; Thompson, 2013). Whether they are seen as positive or negative, once again depends on the perspective taken (Fullan, 2007b). These tests are increasingly becoming high-stakes tests because of the ways in which they are being used. Nevertheless, few would deny that school improvement is a worthy goal which aims to lift student achievement standards, promoting excellence and equity across all systems, states and territories (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Hattie, 2009; MCEETYA, 2008).
The changing nature of Australian schooling, including the push for continuous school improvement, has been heavily influenced by the global context (Klenowski, 2011; MCEETYA, 2008) in which international benchmarking of student achievement, for the purpose of comparability between nations, plays a significant role. More detail on the local and global contexts is included in Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature.

Benchmarking of student academic achievement against international standards is driving educational reform across the world (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Sahlberg, 2011) and heavily influencing Australian educational policy makers. International standards are derived from measures such as the OECD’s Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) states that “Australia should aspire to improve outcomes for all young Australians to become second to none amongst the world’s best school systems” (p. 5). This indicates that Australian policymakers are paying close attention to international benchmarks of educational standards. Australian students in Years Three, Five, Seven and Nine complete NAPLAN assessments (ACARA, 2011c), in literacy and numeracy, the results of which are benchmarked against national minimum standards. These benchmarks are used to guide decisions about resourcing for school improvement at a national, state and system level. Publication of the results on the My School website (ACARA, 2014) significantly increases the high-stakes nature of the program for schools (Beycioglu, Wildy, & Clarke, 2011). NAPLAN and benchmarking of student achievement data in Australian schools will be further examined in Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature. In response to this global and national climate, the case study school had attempted to benchmark student achievement in writing against descriptors drawn from the NSW English Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum (Board of Studies NSW, 2012). The marking rubric used for student assessment in the WSBoW approach was directly derived from the one used in NAPLAN (ACARA, 2011d). Hence, benchmarking has been used by the school as a tool for school improvement with a focus on improving the quality of teaching in writing by targeting instruction to meet each student’s needs. Benchmarking as a school improvement tool will be examined further in Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature, including perceived advantages and disadvantages that are evident in the literature.

The impact of politics on school reform, especially curriculum and pedagogical change, provides an important background facet of this study. In Australia, schooling is not listed in the
constitutional powers of the federal government and so is the domain of the states and territories (Klenowski, 2011; Lingard & Sellar, 2013). Federalisation of the curriculum has been challenged as the states and territories “jealously guard their responsibility for education” (Lingard & Sellar, 2013, p. 19). Hence the situation arises where The Board of Studies NSW (2012) has developed its own version of syllabuses drawn from the Australian Curriculum. The states and territories across Australia also retain the responsibility for implementing teacher accreditation and school registration. In NSW, a new education authority BOSTES (Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards NSW, 2013) was constituted in January 2014 to combine the operations of the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Institute of Teachers. The relevance of the political context to the current study lies in the influence that this constant state of flux and tension has on teachers trying to engage in the continuous school improvement process while remaining compliant with the education authorities’ regulations. The constantly changing nature of these regulations adds uncertainty and great challenge for teacher and school compliance (Brady, 2013; Thompson, 2013).

At the case study school, the WSBoW approach focused on using student assessment data to guide teaching decisions in a formally structured, centralised format from Year One to Year Six. (See Appendix Five for a detailed description of this format.) The current decade has been named “the accountability era” (Klenowski, 2011, p. 78) and “the audit age” (Geyer, 2012, p. 20) by educational commentators, indicating an increasing reliance on student assessment data in educational decision making. Significant consequences for teachers in regard to the use of student assessment data in their day-to-day teaching and collaborative work are well documented in the literature (Ainley & Gebhardt, 2013; Pettit, 2010; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012; Siemens & Long, 2011). This research examines the experiences of teachers at the case study school in relation to the use of student assessment data in writing.

In the case study school, as part of the 2009-2013 strategic plan Personalising learning – pursuing excellence (Case Study School, 2008), distributed leadership (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007) was strategically enacted in the form of the establishment of Professional Learning Teams (PLTs), based on the work of DuFour et al. (2010). These autonomous teams based on year level teaching groups met formally at least once per week and informally on a daily basis. They were supported by school leadership personnel. The PLTs were largely responsible for decisions about student learning within the cohort in which they worked. The WSBoW approach was
one part of the teaching and learning focus for these teams. The introduction of PLTs was aimed at producing a significant change in school culture, resulting in much greater collaboration between teachers. In the context of this research, this is examined only in the light of teachers’ self-stated experiences of the WSBoW approach, specifically the teaching of writing.

The deprivatisation of teaching practice has been described by Fullan (2007a) as the best way forward for teacher professional development. The increasingly collaborative nature of teachers’ work in PLTs can be directly linked to the deprivatisation of teaching practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Wyatt-Smith & Castleton, 2005). In the case study school, flexible, open learning spaces and a team approach to planning, assessment and teaching had been implemented to facilitate teacher collaboration and the deprivatisation process. This research examined the consequences for teachers of this changing nature of their work in the area of teaching writing.

Deprivatisation of teaching practice allows teachers and school leaders to evaluate the strategies used by individual teachers in light of student achievement data. This is important because, as Hattie (2009) highlights, the quality of teaching is the most significant school-based influence on student achievement. Much research has been and continues to be carried out to “build new feedback and evaluation systems that support teacher growth and development” (Cantrell & Kane, 2013, p. 3). Creating “a performance and development culture in all Australian schools” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012, p. 2) is a key goal of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), as outlined in the Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012). AITSL is funded by the Australian Government but decisions are made by an independent Board of Directors. Its goal is to “provide national leadership for the Australian, State and Territory Governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014, p. 1). Hence, this research examines if and how increased collaboration between teachers in a deprivatised teaching setting such as working in PLTs at the case study school, has increased teachers’ self-stated ability to improve the teaching of writing for all students. The change in school culture in the years leading up to the implementation of the WSBoW approach provides background to this study.
1.1.4 Contextualising the case study

This section outlines the contexts that exist for the case study school, highlighting the role of leadership in shaping school culture and the imperative to improve teaching by examining student assessment data. The case study school had focused teachers’ attention on examining student assessment data in order to improve all students’ educational outcomes. The demands of national, state and system education authorities for continuous school improvement have provided impetus to this focus. There are many levels of compliance and support that have influenced the case study school. These will be briefly described here to outline the context of the school improvement imperatives that have led to the development of the WSBoW approach.

The case study school is a large (650+ students), regional Catholic primary school in New South Wales, Australia. As a Catholic systemic school, it falls under the jurisdiction of the Catholic Schools Office (CSO) of its local diocese. From 1 January 2014, BOSTES (2013) became the new curriculum authority for all schools in New South Wales, to which the CSO is answerable. BOSTES replaced the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Institute of Teachers (Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards NSW, 2013). ACARA, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2013c) is responsible for the national curriculum, national assessment program (NAP) and national data collection and reporting program. ACARA receives direction from the Australian Government and the state and territory education ministers (ACARA, 2013c, p. 1). AITSL provides “national leadership for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2013, p. 1). Each of these authorities imposes accountability measures on the case study school as part of the process of continuous school improvement.

As evidenced from international research, school leadership is a key factor in continuous school improvement (Fullan, 2007b; Masters, 2012). Sustainable school improvement in Australian primary schools is heavily influenced by the nature of the leadership within the school, particularly the principal’s leadership style (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011). The principal of the case study school had a clearly articulated vision for school reform drawn from research and experience. This included fostering distributed leadership through the formation of a dynamic school leadership team and year level PLTs, as well as building a school culture which recognised and developed teachers as educational leaders (Madden, 2012; Madden, Wilks, Maione, Loader, & Robinson, 2012). The principal of the case study school at the time of the...
implementation of the WSBoW, was an active researcher whose passion was to build teacher capacity around the concept of the ‘teacher as researcher’ (Babkie & Provost, 2004) as a means to foster school improvement. In response to the school improvement agenda described above, the case study school had strived to be recognised as a leading school in the area of data-informed teaching and learning. Other initiatives and programs had grown out of this school improvement and teacher leadership agenda. This study examines one such initiative, the WSBoW approach, as described in full in Appendix Five.

At the case study school, there had been a significant focus on changing school culture in the three years prior to the introduction of the WSBoW approach. One structure which aimed to influence school culture was the development of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). This model, incorporating the formation of Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) of teachers working with students of the same year level, formed an important aspect of the WSBoW approach at the case study school. Working collaboratively in these PLTs, teachers were able to professionally challenge and support each other. As such, the PLC model, employing PLTs, had been a key structure to assist teachers to develop their own practice in the teaching of writing. As discussed above, increased teacher collaboration and the deprivatisation of teaching practice had been key elements of the implementation of PLTs in the case study school. The WSBoW approach sits within these organisational structures.

The WSBoW approach employed at the case study school grew from several evidence-based catalysts:

- Data gathered from NAPLAN (ACARA, 2011b), school-based assessments and International Competitions and Assessments for Schools (ICAS) academic competitions (Education Assessment Australia, 2014) revealed that the quality of student writing across the school was low in relation to state and national benchmarks.

- Anecdotally, the principal, school leaders and teachers had observed that the quantity of writing that students were engaged in was also low, particularly the provision of substantive, rich writing opportunities to challenge and engage students.

- After reflection, it was noted by the principal and school leaders that the school had an ‘ad hoc’ approach to data gathering and mapping of student progress in writing across the school.
A national agenda had emerged, focusing on the role of the teacher as the most significant in-school influence on student learning (Hattie, 2009). All schools, including the case study school, were under increasing pressure to demonstrate commitment to a continuous practice of goal-setting aimed at improving teacher performance and development (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012).

Significant professional development had been directed at supporting whole school cultural change towards “the implementation of a new school curriculum framework underpinned by 21st century teaching and learning theory, policy and practice” (Madden et al., 2012, p. 19) aimed at the personalisation of learning for all students.

Against this background, this research has investigated the self-stated lived experiences of twelve teachers in relation to their engagement with the school’s WSBoW approach, as a mechanism for improved teaching quality in the area of writing. These teachers were working with student groups from Year One to Year Six in a regional NSW Catholic Primary School. It is set in a primary school that aimed to improve the performance of all students in the area of writing by engaging teachers in collaborations where student assessment data was the central focus. The investigation has taken into consideration the experiences of teachers immersed in the increasingly collaborative, deprivatised nature of teaching practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) and the use of a standardised marking rubric for benchmarking student writing, for the purposes of improved quality of the teaching experiences and greater consistency in assessment. The thesis is premised on a circumstance where teachers and schools are coming under increasing pressure to improve the learning outcomes of all students, using data to inform and communicate this improvement (Ainley & Gebhardt, 2013; Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Pettit, 2010; Rowe, 2000). Thus this study sits in the landscape of continuous school improvement and is linked to the high-stakes national testing program NAPLAN (ACARA, 2011b).

1.2 The aims of the research
This study investigated the experiences of teachers when a whole-school teaching renewal process, the WSBoW approach, was introduced into a primary school. More specifically this study examined teachers’ responses to student assessment data in the area of writing. Benchmarking of writing at the case study school was a key step in the teacher renewal process that both enhanced the quality of the teaching and learning experiences and was part of the continuous school improvement process. The WSBoW approach was centred on the
classroom teachers’ use of a standardised marking rubric for pre- and post-testing in each of the four school terms. This study focused on teachers’ self-stated engagement with this existing marking rubric as they strove to improve their teaching of writing in response to student assessment data. In the context of this study, possible outcomes for teachers encompassed both those intended to occur as a result of the benchmarking initiative and those unintended outcomes that arose when individual teachers and teams of teachers engaged with the process.

The overarching aim of this research project was to investigate the experiences of teachers following the implementation of the WSBoW approach at the case study school. More specifically, the research has explored, analysed and described the teachers’ self-stated experiences as a result of their engagement with the WSBoW approach.

1.3 The research questions
The following research questions were generated in order to address the aims of the study:

- **Research Question One**
  What have been the teachers’ self-stated experiences following the implementation of the WSBoW approach at the case study school?

- **Research Question Two**
  How has the WSBoW approach influenced teachers’ self-reported teaching practice at the case study school?

From these research questions, the study sought detailed understandings about the teachers’ experiences and the ways in which their engagement with the processes may have influenced their pedagogy. Of particular interest were their understandings of such issues as data-evidenced teaching and learning practices, increased teacher collaboration and the deprivatisation of teaching practice in the area of writing.

1.4 Significance of the Research
As highlighted in the literature on benchmarking (Levy, 2012; LSIS, 2012; Moriarty, 2011; Pemberton, Stonehouse, & Yarrow, 2001), and discussed in more depth in the next chapter, the endpoint of any benchmarking initiative is to bring about lasting and significant improvement in the performance of the organisation. In the case of educational organisations, the intended and essential outcome is improved student learning, evidenced by student
achievement. As noted by Anderson, Leithwood and Strauss (2010) “while information about achievement is obviously critical for schools, it has little to say about the causes of such achievement or about the strategies that might be useful in moving such achievement forward” (p. 296). In the context of the case study school, this study has provided information about how these teachers have experienced benchmarking and the impact on them in improving the quality of their teaching in the area of writing. Thus, this research contributes to this body of knowledge by describing some of the effects that the continuous school improvement agenda and the benchmarking of student learning has had on teachers and teaching practice at the case study school.

In a recent action research project conducted within the case school, it was found that “carefully designed professional development to support the teachers around whole-school change was vital and needs to be ongoing, targeted and effective if it is to mitigate teachers’ fears and anxieties and address their learning needs” (Madden et al., 2012, p. 33). This present study sheds further light on these teachers’ knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding the WSBoW approach at the case study school, specifically in the areas of data evidenced teaching and learning, increased teacher collaboration and the deprivatisation of teaching practice in the area of writing. At the school level, further development and improvement of the WSBoW approach was likely to continue to occur following the release of the results. The results of the study were intended to be used at the case study school itself to guide future decision making about whether a similar approach can be applied to other curriculum areas and about how best to support teachers through professional development. Other schools may be interested in applying this information to their school contexts, thus providing a wider audience with potential avenues for school improvement pathways.

As a whole-school initiative, the WSBoW approach provided a significant opportunity to enact continuous school improvement. This research contributes to the body of knowledge about continuous school improvement by describing, examining and analysing some of the effects that the whole-school approach at the case study school has had on teachers and teaching practice.

1.5 The research design

This research is a qualitative short-term ethnographic study (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 1990). The epistemological framework is social constructivism which aligns with an interpretive
The research strategy is an ethnographic case study (Creswell, 2009; Flick, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Merriam, 1998) because the aim was to have a deeper understanding of the experiences of these teachers as they have engaged with the WSBoW approach. *Chapter 3: Design of the Research* provides a detailed explanation of the research methods used in this study and a detailed timeline.

### 1.6 Limitations of the research

The limitations of this project lie within the following parameters:

- **Place:** The study focuses on one Australian (NSW) Catholic primary school and is solely investigating the problem within the particular context of this school. This is a limitation because it means that the findings cannot be claimed to be representative of all school contexts. It does however, provide insights and analyses that may, in part, be transferrable to other educational contexts.

- **Time:** This was a short-term study, with the majority of the data collected over several weeks in the third year after the introduction of the WSBoW approach. As such, the data captures ‘a moment in time’ in the experiences of these teachers as opposed to a longitudinal study conducted over an extended period of time. Nevertheless, the teachers were able to describe and reflect on their entire experience of the WSBoW approach over two and a half years since its implementation.

- **Scope:** The study focuses on the experiences of the teacher participants. It is acknowledged that experiences are unique to each individual and that other teachers may have experienced the WSBoW in a different way to that described by these twelve participants. While each participant’s experience is honoured for its unique perspective, the analysis also suggests common themes and threads that weave through the teachers’ self-reported experiences.

Having introduced the research problem, defined key terms and described the context of the problem, Chapter 2 of this thesis provides a review of the available literature that informed this study.
Chapter 2  Reviewing the Literature

2.1 Introduction and overview

This research examined the experiences of teachers following the implementation of the Whole-School Benchmarking of Writing (WSBoW) approach in the case study school. More specifically, the research has described, explored and analysed the teachers’ self-stated experiences, including the intended and unintended consequences experienced by teachers, as a result of their engagement with the WSBoW approach. The WSBoW approach engaged teachers collaboratively in Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) as they strove to improve teaching for all students in the area of writing. A review of the available literature on concepts relevant to this research problem is included below and provided background to the study. The themes were garnered from reading of the literature and, based on the researcher’s understanding of the contexts, the data and its analysis, these themes were considered the most appropriate for discussion and noting in the literature review.

The key concepts that warrant critical review and discussion are:

- Benchmarking
  - Its historical origins
  - The role of benchmarking of student achievement as a tool for continuous school improvement in the current Australian educational context
  - The impacts of benchmarking of student achievement on teacher practice and student learning

- The continuous school improvement agenda and its impact on school culture and climate

- The increasingly collaborative nature of teaching practice
  - Professional Learning Teams – their definition and purpose
  - Deprivatisation of teaching practice
  - Impacts of collaboration on teachers

- Current best practice in the teaching of writing in schools
To begin, it is important to understand the historical and current meanings of the process of benchmarking before leading into a discussion of its use as a tool for school improvement and some possible implications for teachers stemming from this use.

2.2 Benchmarking

Definitions of benchmarking abound in the literature and clearly show a marked change in the meaning associated with this term over time. In the following section, these changes and the use of benchmarking in industry and education will be briefly described.

2.2.1 Historical perspectives on benchmarking

Historically, the practical nature of the benchmarking process is reflected in its trade-based roots. The following quote describes one such scenario:

The etymology of “benchmark” was in words used circa 1842 to describe the surveying practice of establishing marks in the ground to ensure that subsequent placements of a bench supporting surveyor’s tools or instruments was assured to be on a level plane and assurance that subsequent measurements from the same place were on exactly the same basis. (Moriarty & Smallman, 2009, p. 486)

An alternative example comes from the trade of shoemaking in the 19th century. The person for whom the shoe was being made placed his foot on a bench so the shoemaker could mark out the pattern to ensure a good fit (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012). This led to the term benchmark as a blueprint for ensuring personalised service. The surveying example of benchmarking is more aligned to standardisation and consistency. The shoemaking definition links to personalisation and service. As discussed later in this chapter, this contrast has significant relevance for the way benchmarks are defined and used in international education policy in the 21st century.

The practice of benchmarking as a tool for organisational development and change started in the management and business world, introduced by the Xerox Corporation during the early 1980s (Weller, 1996). The company began a process of examining the practices of competitor companies and others, in order to devise plans of action aimed at organisational improvement and change. The goal of the benchmarking process was for the Xerox company to regain market share lost to Japanese producers and to continuously improve product quality and processes within the organisation (Ossiannilsson, 2011). Robert Camp, as Manager of
Benchmarking Competency at Xerox for 23 years, is credited with the first definition of benchmarking in this context (Przybylak, 2010) known as industrial benchmarking. Interestingly, benchmarking moved from being a tool to “measure and guide existing practice in shoemaking or surveying, to being deployed as a tool to improve other kinds of practice elsewhere” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, p. 12, authors’ italics). Implications of this shift are examined further in the section: 2.2.3 *Benchmarking student achievement as a tool for school improvement.*

### 2.2.2 Definitions of benchmarking

A useful definition can be taken from the European higher education sector, the *European Centre for Strategic Management of Universities* (ESMU). This definition is more complex than the historical view of benchmarking in that it defines the cyclic nature of benchmarking by describing the way it relates to past experience and performance in relation to established criteria.

**Benchmarking:** a process inside an organisation with the aim to improve its performance by learning about good practices for primary and/or support processes through looking at those processes in other, better-performing organizations, building on evaluation of relevant performances (if possible through measurement of Key Performance Indicators) in own and others’ organisations. (Van Vught, 2008, p. 16)

In defining benchmarking as a general concept, the following points summarise the definitions which have been taken from a variety of historical and contextual perspectives:

- Benchmarking is a verb, a process, which indicates it is fluid, not fixed, active, and organic (Francis & Holloway, 2007).
- The process occurs within an organisation, showing that it is intrinsic to that organisation which engages in the process to bring benefit to itself. In this sense, it is not imposed from outside the organisation and implies reflection and review on the part of the organisation (Hinton, Francis, & Holloway, 2000; Ronco, 2012).
- The aim of the process is to improve performance (Moriarty, 2011; Pemberton, Stonehouse, & Yarrow, 2001).
- Benchmarking is all about learning what works most effectively in the current context of the organisation, by looking both outwardly and inwardly (Moriarty, 2011; Pemberton et al., 2001).
  - There is an outward focus on how exemplary organisations conduct the same or similar practices.
There is also an inward focus involving reflecting on evaluations and assessments of performance from within the organisation (Ronco, 2012).

- These processes need to be aligned to standards, indicators or criteria to guide the process (Hinton et al., 2000).

For this study, the above summary helps to define the basis of the WSBoW approach, that is, it was a standardised process of aligning students’ achievement in writing to criteria contained in a shared rubric. The aim of the process was to improve the performance of the teachers in using student assessment data for the purposes of enhancing teaching and learning experiences for students. Teachers looked outwardly at what other teachers were doing and inwardly when reflecting on their own teaching in the light of the benchmarked data. Thus, they were applying the data to the processes of their teaching and learning. They also looked outwardly at standardised student assessment data from other sources such as NAPLAN. The teachers and leadership team in the case study school had undertaken this process as intrinsic to their school, thus it was not imposed from outside the organisation. Their aim was to improve the teaching of writing by collaboratively examining the student assessment data to determine each student's learning needs and achievements.

This historical perspective leads to an examination of the increasing use of benchmarking of student achievement as a tool for continuous school improvement.

### 2.2.3 Benchmarking student achievement as a tool for school improvement

Research has been undertaken on the nature of benchmarking in education and the benefits that this process holds for educational organisations across sectors and locations (Darling-Hammond & Wentworth, 2010; Francis & Holloway, 2007). International organisations such as McKinsey & Company and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have actively engaged in investigating the top performers in particular areas of human society, including education, in order to identify the key processes leading to this success (Breakspear, 2012; Moursched, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010; Snart, 2011). This strategy, known as international benchmarking, is widely used to bring about improvement in educational systems that are falling behind. The OECD’s international assessments of students’ academic performance (PISA and TIMSS) are often used as benchmarking tools. Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) define benchmarking as a process of “learning and inquiry into one’s own performance” (Hargreaves & Shirley, p. 13, authors’ italics). The Australian Government is keen to engage in
this type of benchmarking process to improve Australian students’ performance in these benchmarking tests (Donnelly, 2007; Donnelly, Stephens, Redman, & Hempenstall, 2005), as evidenced in the Melbourne Declaration:

In international benchmarking of educational outcomes for 15-year-olds in the 2006 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, Australia ranked among the top 10 countries across all three education domains assessed. Over the next decade Australia should aspire to improve outcomes for all young Australians to become second to none amongst the world’s best school systems. (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5)

This broad goal of improving Australian students’ performance on benchmarked tests has a myriad of implications for teachers and students in Australian schools and more specifically, for the case study school. Some of these will be discussed in the next section: 2.2.4 Benchmarking of student achievement: Impacts on teacher practice and student learning.

Research (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Stobart, 2008) has centred on the intended and unintended effects of the increasing accountability of schools related to high-stakes testing, performance targets and the use of data to drive policymaking (Lingard & Sellar, 2013). The Australian government’s My School website (ACARA, 2014) is one example of the representation to the public audience of complex data into moderated, simplified information which compares supposedly statistically similar schools with each other. This ranking of schools stems from the National Assessment Program (NAP) which is a series of assessments aimed at giving governments, school systems and individual schools information about the performance of students in relation to specified outcomes (ACARA, 2011c). For this study, the most relevant aspect of the NAP is the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (ACARA, 2011c) which has had significant impacts on the teaching of literacy and numeracy in Australian schools (Hardy & Boyle, 2011). The relevance of the above discussion to the study is in the way the case study school had responded to this external testing and benchmarking regime by introducing the WSBoW approach. It was anticipated that, with a more robust, organised whole-school focus on the teaching of writing, directly linked to NAPLAN and NSW syllabus descriptors of expected student performance for each learning stage, the quality of teaching and learning would improve and the school would meet its accountability and school improvement targets. The possible consequences for teachers of this situation will be further elaborated in the next section: 2.2.4 Benchmarking of student achievement: Impacts on teacher practice and student learning.
An interesting criticism of the benchmarking approach arises from its intrinsically backward-looking focus where any strategy adopted will be, by definition, historical and may even be unrelated to the future direction of the exemplary system or school (Moriarty & Smallman, 2009). It can be seen from this criticism that one major challenge for a school or education system using benchmarking to drive improvement is that it may not be a useful tool for education systems wishing to stay at the cutting edge of best practice. By the time the lesson has been learned and changes implemented, the ‘exemplar’ institution or system has moved on, or the goals of the developing institution or system have changed. This is illustrated in this quote, showing that there is a constant tension between learning from the best and taking risks to find new and better ways for the future:

There needs to be a mix of committing to best practice (existing practices that already have a good degree of widely agreed effectiveness) and having the freedom, space, and resources to create next practice (innovative approaches that often begin with teachers themselves and that will sometimes turn out to be the best practices of the future) (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, pp. 50-51, authors’ italics).

These authors further caution of the need to guard against using benchmarking “blindly to reinforce or repeat past practice that may be moving beyond its sell-by date” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, p. 54). It was acknowledged that a possible unintended consequence of the use of the WSBoW approach at the case study school could be the restriction of freedom and creativity in teaching practice that is mentioned by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012). This will be discussed further in Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.

Przybylak (2010) also reviews the definitions of benchmarking in the literature and identifies several key components of effective educational benchmarking, including:

- continuous, ongoing improvement cycles for the school
- a focus on individual and organisational self-improvement
- recognition of best practice within the school and beyond
- comparison between current organisational practice and best practice
- internal and/or external comparison of achievement
- understanding of what makes best practice the best (and)
- striving to surpass expectations. (Przybylak, 2010, pp. 32-33)

She goes on to state that, in regard to these key components, “it is rare to find them being used effectively in the education sector” (Przybylak, 2010, p. 33). This may be because the focus, at least in the Australian education context over the past two decades, has been
towards the use of benchmarks as an accountability tool, largely employed by policy makers and politicians for their own purposes rather than using it for effective school improvement. Woods (2007) is scathing in her criticism of the Australian Commonwealth and State governments’ ongoing development of standardised, benchmarked assessment regimes for literacy and numeracy. This continues to be a matter for heated debate as Australia implements the national curriculum. The Australian government’s increasing focus on high-stakes testing in Australia has direct implications for the study because the rubric used in the WSBoW approach is based on the NAPLAN rubric. Additionally, benchmarks used in the WSBoW approach were, at the time of this research study in the process of being agreed upon by the case study school’s teachers based on the Board of Studies NSW (1994, 2012) English syllabus documents and aligned with NAPLAN expectations.

In contrast to the accountability agenda discussed in the previous paragraph, the Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) illustrated a shift in government policy towards a balanced focus on national, standardised testing and the judgement of teachers in school-based assessments. It also outlined the importance of three types of assessment: assessment of, for and as learning, that have been significant in the educational literature around assessment and learning (Brown, 2004; Gardner & Gardner, 2012). The Melbourne Declaration states that:

To ensure that student achievement is measured in meaningful ways, State, Territory and Commonwealth governments will work with all school sectors to develop and enhance national and school-level assessment that focuses on:

- assessment for learning—enabling teachers to use information about student progress to inform their teaching
- assessment as learning—enabling students to reflect on and monitor their own progress to inform their future learning goals
- assessment of learning—assisting teachers to use evidence of student learning to assess student achievement against goals and standards.

Australian governments commit to working together with all school sectors to ensure world-class curriculum and assessment for Australia at national and local levels (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 15).

Noteworthy in this statement is the focus on benchmarking national education standards to international benchmarks. Also of interest is the recognition of the importance of data derived at the local or school level and of valuing students’ own data gathering and reflection as well as that of teachers (Elwood & Klenowski, 2002). It may be inferred from this statement that Australian students and teachers will need to be using some form of benchmarking against
standards to guide this reflection and goal setting in the assessment process. The WSBoW approach at the case study school is an example of this interplay between standardised testing in the form of NAPLAN, and school-based assessment involving the judgement of teachers and students about student achievement in writing. The gap between policy and practice is evident in the fact that NAPLAN data is the only data available to the general public about a school’s performance (ACARA, 2014). The experiences of teachers in relation to the benchmarking of student achievement data and the role of teacher and student judgement about writing achievement will be discussed in Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.

Despite this broader national and international approach to benchmarking, the current definition of national literacy and numeracy benchmarks has not varied since the 1990s. This definition retrieved from The National Education Directory of Australia (The National Education Directory of Australia, 2014) is still firmly focused on minimum standards rather than exemplar standards. It defines the National Literacy and Numeracy Benchmarks as:

A set of indicators or descriptors which represent nationally agreed minimum acceptable standards for literacy and numeracy at a particular year level. In this context ‘minimum acceptable standard’ means a critical level of literacy and numeracy without which a student will have difficulty making sufficient progress at school. (The National Education Directory of Australia, 2014, "Educational Terminology")

Since this definition has remained unchanged since the late 1990s, it appears to sit in contrast to the Australian Government’s stated desire to rank at the highest possible level in international educational standards (MCEETYA, 2008). The implications for this study lie in examining the form of benchmarking that underpins the WSBoW approach, whether it is focused on minimum standards or expected standards in line with high, but realistic, expectations. The implications for this research are in the investigation of these teachers’ knowledge, skills and attitudes about the benchmarking focus of the WSBoW approach, and this will be described and analysed in Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.

The historical context of benchmarking in Australian education will be further developed in the following section, investigating benchmarking as a driver of government policy and the consequences this has had for teachers.
Benchmarking of student achievement: Impacts on teacher practice and student learning

As noted at the beginning of this chapter in the discussion about definitions of benchmarking, the endpoint of any benchmarking initiative is to bring about lasting and significant improvement in the performance of the organisation. In the case of educational organisations, the intended and essential outcome is improvement to student learning, evidenced by student achievement of learning outcomes. This achievement can be viewed holistically or specifically, depending on the context. For example, a holistic outcome of education, widely seen as desirable, is that students will become independent, self-actualised learners (Darling-Hammond & Wentworth, 2010; MCEETYA, 2008). An example of a specific outcome may be for students to use a variety of well-constructed sentences in their writing. In either scenario, the effect of teacher practice on the students’ success, or lack of success, in attaining the stated goal has been increasingly put under the research spotlight (Anderson et al., 2010).

Of great interest in this discussion, is the impact of national, standardised testing and benchmarking on the reality of literacy and numeracy education in Australian schools. Many criticisms (Au, 2007; Polesel et al., 2012; Thompson, 2013) are raised about the impacts of these testing and benchmarking processes, including that “outcomes based education has in fact been the Trojan horse that has carried such measures as minimalist benchmarks, simplistic testing, dumbing down of teacher professionalism and commodification of literacy into our education systems” (Woods, 2007). Lingard (2010) argues that Australian educators need to “reject the view that improved test results on NAPLAN are indicative of improved schooling or a more socially just school system” (p. 144). This is in direct opposition to the Australian Labor Government’s policy objectives outlined in the document Quality Education: The case for an Education Revolution in our schools (Rudd & Gillard, 2008), calling for increased equity, improved teacher quality, and greater transparency and accountability for schools.

The benchmarking policies have been touched upon in the previous section, particularly in regards to the Australian context over the past two decades. It has been shown that the move to outcomes-based education and away from content driven curriculum has led to a perceived need to define minimum standards of student achievement at key stages of schooling (Ainley & Gebhardt, 2013; Donnelly et al., 2005). There appears to be ongoing and significant tension between this focus on defining minimum achievement standards and the more positive role of benchmarking in industry and business (Przybylak, 2010; Woods, 2007). The latter view defines benchmarking as a relationship between lower and higher performing organisations, with the
key goal to improve performance in one or more specifically defined areas. Increasingly, this type of benchmarking is being employed by Australian and international education authorities (Sahlberg, 2011; Snart, 2011). The WSBoW approach at the case study school provided the opportunity for teachers to use the benchmarking process as a way of improving their own knowledge and skill as teachers of writing. In light of the trends in educational benchmarking (Oláh, Lawrence, & Riggan, 2010; Ronco, 2012), this could be done by comparing their students’ results with members of their PLT and reflecting on processes that could improve student learning outcomes. Further benchmarking opportunities existed in relation to NAPLAN results by comparing school-based assessment data with NAPLAN assessment data when it became available each year. This research has examined the experiences of, and influences on, teachers at the case study school when engaged in implementing the WSBoW approach as a benchmarking program.

As outlined here, in the Australian educational context, benchmarks have been perceived to be a guide to the minimum standards expected at key stages in a student’s schooling, usually Years Three, Five, Seven and Nine (ACARA, 2011a; Wyatt-Smith & Castleton, 2005). Decisions are made about three essential benchmarking factors including “what literacy capabilities constitute critical performance levels for subsequent success in schooling; which tasks reflect the contents of the benchmarks; and where the minimal capability cut-score should be located” (Wyatt-Smith & Castleton, 2005, p. 132). Federal and state funding has been linked to ensuring remediation programs are provided for students who do not meet these benchmarks (Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2014). Accountability expectations are high and place significant pressures on schools in these situations (Brady, 2013; Gable & Lingard, 2013; Thompson, 2013; Thompson & Cook, 2014). There is some concern in Australian and international education circles that conflict about standards can impact in many ways on student learning outcomes, often in ways that are contrary to their intended purpose (Brady, 2013; Woods, 2007). During this time of national curriculum and assessment reform, Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith (2010) have undertaken an examination of the complex relationship between student learning as measured by set educational standards and teacher judgement of where students are in their learning journeys. These authors attempt to “make explicit how different sectors (political and educational) view standards in relation to schooling, and to emphasise how the competing beliefs about standards can result in unintended consequences for student learning” (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2010, p. 108). Intended and unintended consequences for teachers have also arisen from these competing
beliefs (Au, 2007; Brady, 2013; Polesel et al., 2012; Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2014; Thompson, 2013). Whilst beyond the scope of this review, the politicisation of educational learning standards and benchmarking practices in Australian education reform has had a major impact on the way teachers and schools address the goal of continuous school improvement and ongoing improvement of student learning outcomes.

There are examples in international literature of the use of benchmarking of student achievement as an inspection tool (Geyer, 2012). In the UK, Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills) is the independent, impartial regulator and inspector of child and youth related services reporting directly to parliament. Their website (https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted) explains that there is a great deal of confusion and misuse of the term ‘benchmarking’ in many sectors, including industry, medicine, business or indeed education. This misunderstanding by those who strive to bring about structured improvements in their organisation can result in an ineffective use of benchmarking (Francis & Holloway, 2007; Hinton et al., 2000). The aim is, of course, to improve practice and results (Breakspear, 2012). However, the Ofsted interventions in schools are by nature, that of an external ‘inspector’ coming in to rate, judge and mandate change, resulting in unintended consequences for schools and teachers (Geyer, 2012).

Increasingly, schools are looking for a more school-centred approach to school improvement and the raising of standards. In an investigation about the performance gap between teachers and departments within the same school, the UK’s Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) found that a lack of school-wide structures for sharing best practice was part of the problem. In 2002, the LSDA endeavoured to identify how colleges “spread good internal practice to ensure optimal performance across all areas of provision” (Cox & Smith, 2004, p. 2). Among the key findings of the investigation, it was noted that overall internal benchmarking behaviour was non-existent but that one college had identified it as a key goal and other colleges had included it less explicitly in their plans for quality improvement. The literature suggests that systematic and specific benchmarking can help to pinpoint effective teaching strategies that are being used within the school and increase the chance that these examples of effective practice can be spread throughout the organisation (Cox & Smith, 2004).

Characteristics of high-performing countries as identified by international benchmarking programs include: a strong foundational knowledge approach organised into discrete academic
disciplines; precise, prescriptive syllabus documents; and a greater time on task in the classroom with less distractions (Donnelly, 2007). This conservative view of education is highly critical of the Keating government’s overseeing of the Outcomes Based Education approach (OBE) in Australia and can be seen to be strongly supportive of a syllabus approach or at the very least, a standards based, discipline and content driven approach as advocated during the Howard government administration. A similar journey can be observed in other countries that have adopted, then in some cases discarded, OBE such as the USA, South Africa and New Zealand (Donnelly, 2007; Singh, 2013). This discussion and viewpoint is included to illustrate that benchmarking against international exemplars has been a key driver in Australian educational reform in recent years. Inevitably, political bias will impact on how such benchmarking process are conducted, interpreted and how they impact on policy and practice in the Australian context (Yates, 2011). Some of these impacts will have influenced teachers at the case study school, especially as they relate to curriculum change and accountability measures linked to NAPLAN (Au, 2007; Thompson, 2013).

In praise of international benchmarking in education, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) claim that the OECD’s PISA program “has stimulated the appetite of more and more countries to learn from each other, especially about the practices, principles and strategies that lie behind the numbers of high-performing countries” (p. 184). In response to international tests such as TIMSS and TIMSS-R, education systems around the world are also focusing on curriculum development in an attempt to raise standards and to strengthen performance. Vital in achieving this is a willingness to look outside territorial boundaries to identify the characteristics of better performing countries and to adopt best practice (Donnelly, Stephens, Redman, & Hempenstall, 2005, pp. 2-3). The inherent problem with this form of benchmarking is the one mentioned earlier about best practice versus next practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

The Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority (ACARA) has ensured that, in addition to international benchmarking, the Australian curriculum has been benchmarked against existing state and territory curricula (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012a). This rich, detailed research has been conducted to ensure that “the curriculum being produced is world class” (ACARA, 2010, p. 9). The process of consultation with a variety of stakeholders including teachers (ACARA, 2013a), adds another layer of validity to the standards of achievement being set for Australian students. Unfortunately, Australia’s
state and territory differences, including geographic, historical and philosophical differences, have tended to interfere with the goal of establishing standards across the national educational landscape (Woods, 2007; Yates & Collins, 2010). Aims, rather than outcomes, are emphasised and content descriptors mandating what teachers must teach are specifically set down (ACARA, 2011). This seems to be a direct response to the benchmarking of international exemplars as identified through TIMSS and PISA and the conclusions described by Donnelly earlier in this review (Donnelly, 2007). Possible consequences for teachers of the implementation of the Australian Curriculum include the significant time and energy that it takes to integrate the new curriculum into teaching practice, combined with the state of flux and change that creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and anxiety around the implementation of the new curriculum. Once again, these factors are outside the scope of this review but have contextual relevance to the teachers’ response to the WSBoW approach.

As with all strategies aimed at organisational, and indeed personal, improvement, one key to ensuring successful outcomes is the willingness of all stakeholders to engage in reflection (Thoonen, Sleegers, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijsel, 2011). This introspective response to the externally focused act of comparing oneself to another can assist in the attainment of effective progress and change (Ossiannilsson, 2011). It is pertinent to note that benchmarking gives a common language and consistent standard for all teachers within a school or educational organisation. This standardisation of language and achievement descriptors assists in the teachers’ reflection process by providing an authoritative source of comparative data to guide teachers in their quest for improved student achievement. Through this study, the process of reflection engaged in by the teachers as part of the WSBoW approach is described and analysed. This description and analysis highlights aspects of teacher reflection as evident in the case study school. Section 2.6.1: Moderation practices and consistent teacher judgements examines the role of moderation engaged in by teachers as they assess work samples using pre-established criteria. The strengths and limitations of such moderation practices are included in that examination of the literature.

This leaves the critical reader of educational literature questioning whether or not benchmarking in schools and education systems does, in fact, facilitate the kind of “visible learning” to which Hattie (2009) refers. Enabling students to “know what they know and what they do not know” (Hattie, 2009, p. 37) can be particularly motivating for students when they are supported by teachers to focus more finely on the progress of their individual learning.
journeys. Appropriate use of benchmarking tools could assist teachers to clearly understand the steps taken by students in their learning journey. Without a thorough understanding of effective assessment for learning principles, visible teaching is impossible (Hattie, 2012). Black and William (1998) assert that such principles for effective assessment include, in summary: enhanced feedback between learners and teachers; students’ active involvement in their own learning; adjustment of teaching and learning programs in response to assessment results; the effects of assessment on learners’ motivation and self-esteem; and the powerful benefits of engaging students in self-assessment, particularly focusing on their understanding of how to improve. This study describes the knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers in relation to the benchmarking approach at the case study school and whether it has assisted them to enhance student learning in writing for all students.

Another aspect of benchmarking of student achievement is that it can lead to a focus on achieving standards in a predetermined timeframe. External pressure can also be brought to bear when, for a variety of reasons, this goal is not achieved (Brady, 2013; Lingard & Sellar, 2013). When working with standards, Darling-Hammond and Wentworth (2010) claim that it is important to reach benchmarks with a high level of fluency at that level of achievement. This idea impacts on teacher judgement and standards when assessing student work. A high degree of fluency on a topic or skill, at a nominated level, allows learners to progress to the next step in their learning. The ability to think deeply about the process of the task and make informed decisions is a sign that the student is approaching “expert status” (Hattie, 2009, p. 30). This is a warning to educators not to deny learners the time it takes to achieve such fluency in the race to achieve agreed benchmarks by a certain time, as noted by Wiggins and McTighe (2011) in their discussion about some of the problems of traditional curriculum design and delivery. Pressure from many stakeholders can be brought to bear on educators when the focus is on continuous school improvement targets. Geyer (2012) argues for an acknowledgement of the complexity and individual pathways to deep, enduring learning and consistent progress. This study describes the teacher-reported impacts the WSBoW approach has had on these teachers’ practice in the area of writing. Impacts of the WSBoW approach on teachers can be linked to this pressure to achieve agreed benchmarks by a certain time, and will be examined further in Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.
2.3 The continuous school improvement agenda and its impact on school culture

The continuous school improvement agenda, on a global, national, state and system level, was a catalyst for the development of the WSBoW approach at the case study school and as such, is an important background element for this research. Continuous school improvement is described in the literature as a process schools undertake to make use of data to identify issues, assess present position and plan for improvement by learning from the data available at the time (Anderson et al., 2010; Andrews et al., 2011; Dinham & Crowther, 2011). This picture of continuous school improvement illustrates a clear link to the use of some form of benchmarking to support the improvement process, as is evident in the WSBoW approach.

A global response to the continuous school improvement agenda has been the increasing use of high-stakes standardised testing to provide data on the performance of students in literacy and numeracy (Darling-Hammond & Wentworth, 2010; Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Masters, 2014; Polesel et al., 2012). Australia’s NAPLAN (ACARA, 2011c) has reflected the intended and unintended consequences of high-stakes standardised testing regimes that have been acknowledged in international contexts (Au, 2007; Polesel et al., 2012; Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2014; Thompson, 2013). Of these consequences, some are likely to lead to positive student outcomes, such as improving the coordination of literacy and numeracy across the school, stimulating collaborative practices among teachers, informing schools about areas for improving teacher practice and developing improved assessment practices (Au, 2007; Polesel et al., 2012; Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2014; Thompson, 2013). Unintended consequences that are likely to lead to negative impacts on student learning include limiting the variety of teaching strategies used, narrowing the curriculum focus, compromising student health and wellbeing, increased teacher anxiety and a decrease in student motivation (Au, 2007; Brady, 2013; Polesel et al., 2012; Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2014; Thompson, 2013).

The WSBoW approach, as a school-based response to the continuous school improvement agenda, was designed by the school to improve student outcomes in writing, including in the high-stakes NAPLAN tests. This study examines the consequences for teachers when this approach was introduced into the case study school and informally compares these consequences to those of high-stakes testing regimes.

According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), whole-school innovation and change requires action to “reculture the professional relationships of a school or a district in order to improve
what educators do there” (p. 105). The ultimate aim of innovation is to improve educational and other outcomes for all students. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) define two main types of professional cultures, “individualism and collaborative cultures” (p. 106). In order to best build and support continuous school improvement, they state that it is important to ensure deeply collaborative cultures. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) also assert that professional learning communities, at their best, are deeply collaborative in nature and support sustained improvement and learning for systems, schools, teachers and students. The case study school had valued, through the leadership team’s actions, these qualities and had implemented a range of structures and processes that encouraged collaboration.

PLTs (Professional Learning Teams), as used by the case study school, are one such mechanism that supports continuous school improvement. Hattie (2009) notes that PLTs and leadership teams such as those at the case study school, create an environment “where teachers can feel safe to learn, re-learn, and explore their own teaching knowledge and understanding” (Hattie, 2009, p. 37). Essential to this process is a school climate of trust and security which values the processes of innovation and struggle (Lewis & Andrews, 2007). Mistakes and wrong turns are seen as learning opportunities if followed by critical and collaborative reflection (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Hattie, 2009). Thus it can be seen that the literature supports the idea that continuous school improvement is significantly supported by the establishment of a professional learning culture, such as that which had been developing at the case study school. These changes that had been occurring effectively enhanced both the teachers’ engagement with a more collaborative approach to teaching and learning and their application of the WSBoW approach. The case study school’s teachers’ self-reported experiences of school climate and culture when engaged in the WSBoW approach will be discussed in Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.

2.3.1 The effects of leadership on school culture and school improvement
The academic literature affirms that the impact of leadership on school innovation and change is highly significant, rating “second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 5). Masters (2014) compares two types of policy drivers in the international school improvement agenda:

In some countries, reform efforts tend to have been focused first on building the capacity of school leaders and classroom teachers to deliver high quality teaching and learning, and on ensuring that excellent teaching and leadership are distributed throughout the school system.

In other countries, including a number of English-speaking countries, greater reliance has been
placed on using systems of accountability and incentives to drive improvement (Masters, 2014, p. 9).

The same author observes that these two approaches can co-exist within schools and school systems but that the most effective strategies appear to come from the first category and that school improvement is primarily influenced by highly effective leaders. The key role of school leadership in developing school culture and school improvement is described by Masters (2014) as centred on creating cultures where there are high expectations for every student’s achievement and a commitment to change across the school community. The role of principals in cultivating such cultures is identified throughout the continuous school improvement literature (Eilers & Camacho, 2007; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010).

Instructional leadership is focused firmly on student learning outcomes whereas transformational leadership tends to be more teacher focused, based on the premise that teachers who are engaged, valued and supported will teach effectively (Demir, 2008; Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Harris et al., 2003). Transformational leadership practices, stemming from the initial work of Burns (1978) and further developed in the 1990s, have been found to motivate teachers to engage in professional learning and to improve school organisational conditions (Thoonen et al., 2011). Extensive research has been undertaken on the influence of school leadership on student learning outcomes (Dinham & Crowther, 2011; Eilers & Camacho, 2007; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004; Masters, 2012; Neumerski, 2013). Hattie’s (2009) meta-analysis of the research on school leadership goes some way to summarising the key findings, noting that instructional leadership dimensions had an effect size of 0.66 and transformational leadership dimensions closer to 0.4. Examples of instructional leadership practices found through Hattie’s (2009) meta-analyses to have a greater than average effect, with average being 0.4, are: the principal’s awareness of the school’s goals; the principal leading teachers in learning about current theories and practices, and; the principal monitoring the effect of school practices on student learning outcomes. It appears crucial from Hattie’s analysis that the principal can provide clear communication of school goals as well as monitoring the impact, effective or ineffective, of teaching practice on student learning outcomes. In the case of the WSBoW approach, this was around the students’ skills in writing.

Another important element of this kind of organisational leadership, with a lesser though still significant effect size, is that the principal has up-to-date knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices (Hattie, 2009). Leadership in this area provides a clear road map for
teachers from which they can move their students’ learning forward and strive to reach the benchmarks identified as appropriate for each particular student. Further studies have identified that “effective principals were successful because they went about systematically developing internal and external social capital” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 145, authors’ italics). The role of the principal and the leadership team in the implementation of the WSBoW approach at the case study school provides context to this study. Investigating the leadership has not formed a direct part of the research but provides background information regarding how the WSBoW approach originated and the extent to which it was developed as a leadership decision.

In high performing schools, leadership is not only provided by the principal, but also by those in formal and informal positions of leadership within the school, such as members of the leadership team and teachers in professional learning communities (Neumerski, 2013; Thoonen et al., 2011). As described in the introduction, leadership at the case study school can be described, to some extent, as distributed or shared leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004) due to the integrated use of PLTs (see Appendix Six: Case Study School Collaborative Learning Model for further information). Leaders of professional learning communities of all descriptions need to be “humble and self-reflective” in order to manage the “relative contribution of pressure and support, push and pull, focus and flexibility, relationships and results” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, p. 135) that permeate successful PLTs. Hoyle (2006) describes transformational leadership as the best way to create inclusive and truly empowering learning communities. Investigating the teachers’ self-stated experiences of their work in PLTs, while engaging in the WSBoW approach, is integrally linked to the role of distributed leadership in the case study school. The role of PLTs in the use of student assessment data to facilitate quality teaching and learning will now be examined.

2.4 Student assessment data and quality teaching and learning

The academic literature shows that school improvement is most likely to be sustainable and successful when supported by a school system that demonstrates commitment to the success of every child, in every class, in every school within that system (Blanc et al., 2010; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Masters, 2014; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). In their work with Canadian and international schools and school systems, Sharratt and Fullan (2012) state that they find teachers are more motivated by the emotional attachment to the students in their care than the faceless statistics generated by assessment tools. However, these same authors (Sharratt
& Fullan, 2012) passionately argue for the essential role of using data effectively to ensure every student achieves to a high standard, particularly in the essential core literacy and numeracy standards. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) sum this up well when they say:

Educational performance data deserve intelligent interpretation. Indeed, sustainable improvement depends on it. When statistical data provide one source of information among many, when educators approach the data in a spirit of curiosity and inquiry rather than in a climate of panic and fear, and when teachers have the professional discretion to use data and to justify trying innovative approaches without anxiety and intimidation, then data can play a powerful role in improving learning and increasing achievement (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 39).

Hence, effective teaching and learning relies on data to provide information about the success of teaching strategies (Klenowski, 2011). Effective teachers want to know if their teaching has facilitated learning for each student and to adapt their strategies to ensure this happens (Graham, Harris, Fink-Chorzempa, & MacArthur, 2003). This is essential so that teachers have a clear idea of learning progressions within the content of what is being taught and learned so they can support learners in a meaningful and appropriate way with feedback and targeted learning and teaching (Hattie, 2012).

Research-based interventions used consistently by all teachers for all students have been proven to have a marked impact on positive student growth in standardised and school-based assessments (Halverson, 2010; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). Masters (2014) highlights four principles drawn from the research about what constitutes highly effective teaching. These four principles are:

- establishing where individuals are in their learning
- tailoring teaching to the progress and needs of individual learners
- providing personalised feedback that guides action
- assisting learners to see and appreciate the progress they are making (Masters, 2014, pp. 11-13).

These four points provide a map of what the research says that effective teachers do with the increasing amount of student assessment data at their disposal. The role of the learner in the use of assessment data is an important part of this map.

Fisher and Frey (2014) claim that a key aim of a successful whole-school approach is to facilitate the gradual release of responsibility for learning from the teacher to the learner. By scaffolding for greater consistency across years, teachers and classrooms, this release of
responsibility for learning is more likely to occur as learners are able to draw on routines, habits of mind and content valued throughout their school learning years (Hattie, 2009; Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). The use of a combination of data, including informal data gathered in day to day teaching, has begun to be more widely used and respected as a way to “identify and monitor student learning needs and progress and to plan for improvement” (Anderson et al., 2010, p. 295). Wyatt-Smith and Castleton (2005) highlight the importance of tracking past achievements in order to assist planning for future learning. They include an acknowledgement that benchmarking for global standard setting is also important. In setting up a whole-school writing program based on cyclic formative and summative assessment, the case study school has created such an opportunity for tracking students’ performance over time. The use of the WSBoW approach to guide the setting of learning goals by students and teachers will be discussed in Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.

The academic literature is awash with warnings about the obsession for data (Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Pettit, 2010; Rowe, 2000). Clearly, it is important to be “evidence-informed, not data-driven” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 171). A further shortfall of the relentless use of data walls and spreadsheets is noted by Baker et al. (2010) when they state that the common paradigm is based on a deficit view of education; that is, on who is falling behind and on who is responsible for that deficit. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) note that “When data are used to promote progress for all and not only to track those who might be falling behind, this benefits learning and achievement for all students and strengthens feelings of professional success” (p. 172). This study examines the way in which teachers at the case study school had engaged with the WSBoW approach as a data-gathering and interpretation tool introduced by the leadership team to provide such a data-evidenced approach to the achievement of each student in the area of writing. Furthermore, the WSBoW approach promoted a collaborative approach to the use of student achievement data. This section has outlined the use of student assessment data by PLTs to increase the quality of teaching and student learning. The next section will examine the increasingly collaborative nature of teaching practice in the current educational context.

2.5 The increasingly collaborative nature of teaching practice
To promote effective teaching and learning, “collective deliberation must become job embedded into the profession of teaching. It must become just as regular a practice as classroom teaching – as is true in all the top-performing countries” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 125, authors' italics). As expectations for continuous school improvement increase, greater
Collaboration between teachers means that they can “exercise creative leadership together and take responsibility for helping all students learn” (Kohm & Nance, 2009, p. 67). This section provides background information from the literature about collaborative teaching practice, as is espoused at the case study school in Appendix Six: Case Study School Collaborative Learning Model.

2.5.1 Professional Learning Teams and collaborative practice

This section adds to the discussion in Section 2.3.1: The effects of leadership on school culture and school improvement. Scribner, Sawyer, Watson and Myers (2007) describe a view of leadership, called “networked leadership”, which challenges the traditional belief that leadership is about who is in charge. Networked leadership is a form of distributed or shared leadership, as described in Section 2.3.1: The effects of leadership on school culture and school improvement. Networked leadership emphasises looking at what school personnel do, more than who is doing it, and it challenges the conventional belief that leadership is associated with particular positions. It is about a network of organisational relationships that result in tasks getting done (Scribner et al., 2007). This leads to a discussion about the formation of professional learning communities and the resulting collaborative practice at the case study school. Professional learning communities provide a way for “school communities to work and learn together to take charge of change, finding the best ways to enhance young people’s learning” (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006, p. 222).

Professional Learning Teams (PLTs), as they are applied in the case study school, are a form of professional learning community. DuFour (2004) states that a true professional learning community must “focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively and hold [itself] accountable for results” (DuFour, 2004, p. 6). Thus, a group of teachers working together with a cohort of students is not a PLT unless there is a level of collaboration, teamwork and collective accountability for the learning of all students. In addition, Stoll et al. (2006) identify “shared values and vision” and “reflective professional inquiry” (p. 226) as other key characteristics of professional learning communities. This then differentiates PLTs from other forms of collaboration and teamwork. In investigating the teachers’ experience of the implementation of the WSBoW, this research also noted the role and development of collaboration within PLTs as a key element in the experience and effectiveness of the approach.
In the literature, it is stressed that true professional learning communities are committed to using critical questions around what students learn, employing assessment methods which shows they have learnt, and what the response will be if they do not learn (Kohm & Nance, 2009). DuFour et al. (2010) assert that the most effective learning for students happens when teachers respond differently to these questions for individuals or groups of students, depending on their learning needs. The case study school has embedded the four critical questions devised by DuFour et al. (2010) into the PLTs work. In summary, these four critical questions are: What do we want students to learn? How will we know if they have learned? What will we do if they don’t learn? What will we do if they already know it? This research has examined the teachers’ experiences using this collaborative approach in the area of teaching writing and describes and analyses individual teacher’s responses to these questions as they implement the WSBoW approach. The next section describes the openness and deprivatisation of teaching practice required to successfully collaborate in professional learning teams.

### 2.5.2 Deprivatisation of teaching practice

A useful definition of deprivatisation of teaching practice, relevant to the context at the case study school, comes from Kruse, Louis and Bryke (1994) who define it as existing when:

- teachers share, observe, and discuss each other’s teaching methods and philosophies; for example, through peer coaching. By sharing practice ‘in public’, teachers learn new ways to talk about what they do, and the discussions kindle new relationships between the participants. (Kruse et al., 1994, p. 160)

Deprivatisation of teaching anticipates that teachers will be engaged in challenging, demanding work that involves critically reflecting on their application of formal and informal judgements of student learning (Lingard, Mills, & Hayes, 2000; Wyatt-Smith & Castleton, 2005). As Anderson et al. (2010) note, in this context, “educator expectations that the communities they serve should simply ‘trust me’ because of their credentials and presumed expertise no longer suffice” (p. 292). The WSBoW approach at the case study school is an example of such a context and this research examines the teachers’ experiences of this deprivatisation of teaching practice and the self-reported influences that such deprivatisation has had on their practice.

The recurrent impetus for identification of what it means to be an effective teacher with effective teaching practices is closely linked to the issues of collaboration and deprivatisation of teaching. Deprivatisation of teaching can be seen as a job-embedded approach to
professional learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) which ideally leads to teachers working together to improve their own and others’ teaching practices (Lingard et al., 2000). Collaborative practice at its most effective has been found to require teachers to work in an inclusive way on a clearly defined main task followed by reflective practice (James, Dunning, Connolly, & Elliott, 2007). The implementation of the WSBoW approach at the case study school claims to be founded in these elements of collaboration and deprivatisation. The teachers’ experiences of deprivatisation and collaboration during the implementation of the WSBoW approach have been analysed in this study and are discussed in Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.

2.6 The teaching of writing in schools
Writing plays an integral part in literacy and indeed, in holistic intellectual development (Boscolo, 2008). Rather than becoming less relevant in 21st century education, it is through rich, relevant and engaging writing tasks that students will come to reading, talking and a host of other thinking and problem-solving skills (Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). Hattie’s (2009) synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses found that writing programs made a significant contribution to student learning. He summarised the findings of Graham and Perin (2007) who at the time of Hattie’s work, had completed the largest study of writing programs to date and had found that the most powerful teaching practices revolved around the teaching of planning, revision and editing strategies, especially for struggling writers.

The results show the power of teaching students the processes and strategies involved in writing, structuring the teaching of writing by having students work together in an organized fashion, and of setting clear and specific goals, especially as to the purpose of each piece of writing. (Hattie, 2009, p. 142)

Hattie’s (2009) analyses are well-respected internationally and so provide a solid framework for school leaders and teachers to reflect on the quality of teaching writing in their schools. This research provides an analysis of teachers’ experiences of strategies employed by themselves and their colleagues during the implementation of the WSBoW approach. The extent to which they mirror the strategies described above will be further discussed in Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.

2.6.1 Moderation practices and consistent teacher judgements
When giving feedback and planning for instruction based on formative assessment, teachers make judgements about student writing (Cumming, Wyatt-Smith, Elkins, & Neville, 2006;
Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski, 2008). In Wyatt-Smith and Castleton’s (2005) Australian study of
teacher judgement of student writing, conducted over a three year period, teacher talk was
analysed to discover what led them to arrive at their judgements. More explicitly, the study
asked the question of whether judgement by teachers of their own students can be consistent
in comparison to the same teachers judging the writing of unknown students from other
schools. Of relevance to this thesis, is the fact that the researchers examined “the impact of
official evaluative frameworks and scoring procedures” (Wyatt-Smith & Castleton, 2005, p. 131)
on teacher judgement. The study found that teachers intertwined the official assessment
procedures and documents with their own knowledge of the students and of writing
development, in a way that was personal to each teacher. As in the WSBoW approach, the
ability of teachers to consistently judge the writing performance of students, known and
unknown, is a complex issue.

In another Australian study, Wyatt-Smith and Klenowski (2013) express concern about an over-
emphasis on defined, explicit criteria when teachers make judgements about student
achievement. They claim that “this has resulted in criteria compliance in the use of defined
standards to validate judgements and improve reliability and consistency” (Wyatt-Smith &
Klenowski, 2013, p. 1). The study by these Australian authors investigates teacher judgement
as a three-pronged phenomenon of standards-referenced assessment systems. These three
categories of criteria are “wholly interrelated and interdependent” (Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski,
2013, p. 1) and are drawn from the work of Sadler (1985).

The three different types of criteria are: 1. explicit or prescribed criteria; 2. latent or previously
unspecified criteria which a teacher calls up during the process of judging, and 3. meta-criteria
or the rules for use and non-use of both explicit and latent criteria. (Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski,
2013, pp. 5-6)

This complex view of teacher judgement as derived from the relationship between these three
criteria categories raises many questions when applied to a whole-school benchmarking model
for teaching writing. Wyatt-Smith and Klenowski (2013) note that “This opens the space for
considering how teachers’ professional judgement may be determined by their knowledge of
the published criteria, as well as by their understanding of, and willingness and confidence to
use both latent and meta-criteria” (p. 6). As teachers become more involved in criterion-
referenced assessments, the tension between what is included in those criteria and what is left
out becomes an area for attention. Much of what teachers bring to the assessment process is
unstated and often unrecognised. The more experience the teacher has, of both the subject
matter and the student, the more latent criteria will be available to them (Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski, 2013).

In the same study, Wyatt-Smith and Klenowski (2013) state that, no matter which forms of moderation and standardised criteria are used, teachers engaging in collaborative marking report many benefits for their own professional learning and, in turn, their ability to help their students. Including forms of moderation where experts guide less experienced markers in marking regimes “enables teachers to learn from each other with expert facilitation as they examine student work according to standards-based criteria” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 91). This study describes how the case study school’s teachers’ use of the shared rubric in the WSBoW approach addressed the issues of consistency of teacher judgement and the ways in which teachers supported each other in the process of applying marking criteria to student work samples.

2.7 Summary of the literature review
This section serves to summarise the key concepts emerging from the literature.

2.7.1 Benchmarking as a tool for school improvement
Benchmarking of student achievement data against national and international student achievement data is a tool used extensively by governments and education authorities in Australia and internationally in the drive for continuous school improvement (Brady, 2013; Donnelly et al., 2005; Lingard & Sellar, 2013; MCEETYA, 2008). The TIMSS and PISA assessments are examples of large-scale international assessments used by the Australian government for educational benchmarking purposes whilst NAPLAN is the major national assessment tool in Australia. The publication of NAPLAN data on the My School website has been identified as adding an extra layer of accountability for schools and teachers.

2.7.2 The continuous school improvement agenda and its impact on school culture and climate
The continuous school improvement agenda, on a global, national, state and system level, was a catalyst for the development of the WSBoW approach at the case study school and as such, is an important background element for this research. Intended and unintended consequences of the use of high-stakes testing to drive continuous school improvement have had a significant effect on school culture and climate (Au, 2007; Polesel et al., 2012; Senate Standing
Committee on Education and Employment, 2014; Thompson, 2012). The academic literature (Crowther, 2011; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hattie, 2009) supports the idea that continuous school improvement is significantly enabled by the establishment of a collaborative, data-informed professional learning culture, such as that which had been developing at the case study school. The key role of school leadership in developing school culture and school improvement is described in the educational leadership literature (Au, 2007; Dinham & Crowther, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2010; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011; Masters, 2012; Neumerski, 2013; Polesel et al., 2012; Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2014; Thompson, 2012) as centred on creating cultures where there are high expectations for every student’s achievement and a commitment to change across the school community.

2.7.3 Student assessment data and quality teaching and learning
The academic literature shows that school improvement is most likely to be sustainable and successful when supported by a school system that demonstrates commitment to the success of every child, in every class, in every school within that system (Blanc et al., 2010; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Masters, 2014; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). “Intelligent interpretation” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, p. 39) of student assessment data by all teachers for all students has been proven to have a marked impact on student achievement and quality teaching and learning practices (Halverson, 2010; Hattie, 2012; Klenowski, 2011; Masters, 2014).

2.7.4 The increasingly collaborative nature of teaching practice
As expectations for continuous school improvement increase, greater collaboration between teachers provides opportunities for shared responsibility and pedagogical development (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Kohm & Nance, 2009). Professional learning communities have become a powerful mechanism for developing collaborative cultures in the international educational context (DuFour et al., 2008; Scribner et al., 2007; Stoll et al., 2006; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). Implicit in the development of effective professional learning communities is the deprivatisation of teaching, which leads teachers to work together to improve their own and others’ pedagogy (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Lingard et al., 2000).

2.7.5 The teaching of writing in schools
Effective teaching of writing in schools has been found to make a significant contribution to student learning and personal development (Boscolo, 2008; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hattie,
2009; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). A complex issue for any whole-school approach to writing such as the WSBoW approach, is maintaining consistency of teacher judgement when assessing student writing samples using standardised marking rubrics. Despite the inherent difficulties in this approach, teachers engaging in collaborative assessment centred on standardised criteria, report many benefits for their own professional learning and, in turn, their ability to help their students develop writing skills (Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski, 2013).

This concludes the review of literature relevant to this study. The next chapter describes the research design in detail.
Chapter 3  Design of the Research

3.1 Introduction and overview

The previous chapter, Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature, has provided context for this study within the available literature and identified key concepts underpinning this research. This chapter begins with an outline of the theoretical framework of the study, followed by a detailed description of the methodological approaches used in the study, including important considerations regarding the positioning of the researcher within the study.

This research is a qualitative short-term interpretive case study (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 1990). The epistemological framework is social constructivism which aligns with an interpretive stance (Creswell, 2009; Willis, 2007). The research is an ethnographic case study (Creswell, 2009; Flick, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Merriam, 1998) because the purpose is to understand the experiences of the teachers as they engage in a whole-school improvement innovation aimed at increasing their ability to personalise student learning in writing. This is discussed further below.

The research design was underpinned by the following theoretical framework.

3.2 Theoretical framework overview

Considering that the purpose of this study was to describe, explore and analyse the teachers’ experiences, an interpretive case study approach has been adopted. An interpretive approach is appropriate for this study as the aim is to provide a rich, full understanding (Willis, 2007) of the self-reported experiences of the teachers of this school-based initiative within the wider context of a global, national, state and system agenda of continuous school improvement. The study describes, explores and analyses these experiences in detail, focusing on the personal meaning that these teachers have interpreted from their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The philosophical worldview, or epistemology, that underpins this study is one of social constructivism (Creswell, 2009) which aligns with the interpretivist approach (Willis, 2007). This worldview honours the complexity of meanings that individuals construct from their experiences. Subjective meanings are created by individuals within a social context and are shaped by social, cultural and historical norms. As such, the context in which participants live and work is important in social constructivist research (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). The context for
this study (Morgan, 2001) includes the case study school but also includes the wider educational environment of system, state, national and global factors that influence the work of the teachers in the school.

Individual factors such as teachers’ prior experiences will have added to the construction of knowledge about the research problem (Morgan, 2001; Patton, 1990). Acknowledging the application of this constructivist perspective to this study, it is understood that each of the teachers participating in the study will have formed their own system of meaning around the approach to teaching writing across the school (Bassey, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As elaborated by Neumann (2011), a great deal of social interaction will have shaped each individual’s construction of meaning. This is especially so because, at this school, collaboration and communication had become normalised parts of the teachers’ pedagogy and practice. It is the complexity and rich detail that each of these individuals brought to the study that assisted this researcher to reveal a set of meanings about the participants’ self-stated experiences when engaged with the WSBoW approach. It is however acknowledged, in true post-structural style (Giddens, 1987; Raulet, 1983) that these understandings can never be fully known or understood, that they are transient and ever-changing. Thus, this research report remains a ‘snapshot in time’ account that has analysed the data from that moment in time.

3.3 Methodological approaches
The following paragraphs outline and justify the researcher’s methodological decisions against the current research literature. The section concludes with an overview of the steps taken to improve trustworthiness and validity of the data.

3.3.1 Case study strategy
An ethnographic case study strategy was employed, with the case being the teachers who were engaged in the writing program at the case study school. A case study is “an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” as described by Merriam (1998, p. 9). According to Willis (2007), the case study method links well to an interpretivist framework because it provides an authentic opportunity to generate rich data within the particular context being examined without the need for a predetermined or progressively developed theory or hypothesis. The study is ethnographic in that it takes into consideration the culture of the specific case being studied (Patton, 1990). This research is not ethnographic in the sense of longevity of the data-gathering period, rather
focussing on the expectation of garnering meaning about the culture in which these teachers are working, and taking account of the larger educational context. However, as Burns (1996, p. 365) “the case study is the preferred strategy ... when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context”. In this instance, the real life context is the school situation and the phenomenon is the implementation of the Whole School Benchmarking of Writing (WSBoW) initiative.

The case study school is a large (650+ students), regional Catholic primary school in New South Wales, Australia. A change in school culture was the focus of the case study school’s 2009-2013 Strategic Plan, Personalising Learning – Pursuing Excellence (Case Study School, 2008). The case study school had focused teachers’ attention on examining student assessment data in order to improve all students’ educational outcomes. The demands of national, state and system education authorities for continuous school improvement had provided impetus to this focus. Benchmarking of writing at the case study school, through implementation of the WSBoW approach, was a key step in the teacher renewal process and was part of the continuous school improvement process. The WSBoW approach was centred on the classroom teachers’ use of a standardised marking rubric for pre- and post-testing in each of the four school terms. The teachers’ engagement in the WSBoW approach was seen as an element connected to the wider global, national, state, system and school-based factors, which all influenced the experience of the teachers. The purpose of this research in seeking information about these teachers’ experiences situated within a broader educational context further affirms the appropriateness of the use of a case study method to investigate the experiences of this particular group of teachers.

3.3.2 Identifying the sample

All teachers teaching writing at the case study school who were engaged with the WSBoW approach at the time of the study, were invited to participate in the research by way of a Participant Information Letter (see Appendix One). This potential pool of participants comprised 24 teachers, working in six Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) with each team responsible for one cohort of students. Cohorts of students at the school were organised in age-based school year levels, that is, Kindergarten to Year Six. The Kindergarten teachers were not formally involved in using the WSBOW approach marking rubric to assess student achievement and thus the experiences of these teachers were not seen as directly relevant to the research. Participation in the study was encouraged to ensure there was a broad scope in
the participants’ age, teaching experience and gender. However, participation was completely voluntary to comply with ethical considerations, thus determining the pool of participants. Twelve participants completed the consent form and demographic survey. All twelve participants were interviewed. No sampling decisions were necessary as the demographic survey indicated a coverage of gender, year level, age and teaching experience across the twelve participants. This was important in order to gain the greatest insights possible from the data (Flick, 2009).

There is no claim that the teachers in this sample are typical of teachers in other settings. As a case study, the field and participants were selected because of their engagement in the WSBoW approach in their daily work with students. The aim of the research, guided by the research questions, was to describe, examine and analyse the self-stated experiences and influences of the individual teachers at the case study school as they engaged with this approach. Ethical considerations relating to participation in the study are further described in Section 3.2.3: Ethical considerations.

3.3.3 Ethical considerations
Ethical approval was sought and granted for the research from the school principal, the Director of Schools of the local Catholic Schools Office and the SCU Ethics Committee (SCU approval number ECN-14-129).

As previously stated, it was made clear to all potential participants that participation was completely voluntary and that participants were free to withdraw at any time with all data collected relating to that participant to be withdrawn from the study and destroyed. This situation did not eventuate during this research. As a commitment to keeping all data safe and secure, the following processes were adhered to throughout the study: back up all electronic data on external hard drive; photocopy and store separately written journals and transcriptions (Yin, 2010). Further steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of the data are described in Section 3.3.10: Ensuring trustworthiness of the data.

The insider status of this researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) is a significant aspect of the study. Strategies employed to minimise concerns of perceived coercion and potential bias are addressed in detail in the following Section 3.2.4: Issues of researcher bias, reliability and validity and also in Section 3.2.5: Reflexivity of the researcher.
3.3.4  Issues of researcher bias, reliability and validity

A limitation of the research which has required careful attention is the potential for researcher bias due to this researcher’s teaching and leadership roles within the case study school. Conversely, this factor had the potential to increase the validity of the research due to tacit knowledge of the context gained by being an insider. As research carried out with an ‘emic’ or insider perspective, as opposed to an ‘etic’ or outsider perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the subjective nature of the insider perspective enabled greater access to the setting. Gaining entry to the research setting and maintaining rapport with participants (Willis, 2007) was made easier by this insider status and eliminated the need for lengthy introductions, explanations and establishing of relationships.

As a full-time teaching member and leadership team member of the staff at the case study school, this researcher had automatic entry to the site. For the purposes of this research, however, the position of researcher, not participant, was assumed. Therefore, gaining entry and maintaining rapport with the participants (Willis, 2007) needed to be done in light of this change of role. Key to this was clear, open and honest communication with the participants about each step of the research process. This was done through the Participant Information Letter (see Appendix One) and by the researcher being personally available and open to answer questions or address concerns from potential participants. Most importantly, teachers’ concerns about aspects such as confidentiality, use of data and publication details were addressed in the Participant Information Letter before the data collection process began and reiterated at the start of each interview. As already stated, informed consent was gained in written form from each participant along with the guarantee that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The staff had been kept informed of the case study school’s overarching partnership with Southern Cross University, within which this study nests. Prior to the gathering of data, all aspects of the study had ethics approval (SCU approval number ECN-14-129), in accordance with University protocol and had consent from the Principal and the Director of Schools of the local Catholic Schools Office.

The position of this researcher within the study was wholly from an insider’s perspective. As described by Chavez (2008), this position constantly shifts, depending on the content of the interview and the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. Such relational aspects include friendship status, professional history and age differences. The researcher in
this case study had worked closely with some of the participants, as co-members of PLTs, in the four years prior to the interviews being conducted, including engaging with the WSBoW approach as a teacher of writing. This researcher did not have this relationship with all participants in the study. The length of time the interviewer and each participant had known each other also varied. The researcher’s leadership role within the school community was acknowledged by the researcher as a possible barrier to open, honest communication in the interviews. A conscious effort was made by the researcher to downplay these complex aspects of relationship when establishing rapport and setting the scene for each interview. A low-key, informal approach to interviewing was adopted which put the focus on the interviewee and minimised input from the interviewer (Kvale, 1996). The researcher’s leadership role within the school was minimal in terms of actual and perceived power over participants, a factor which could be seen to alleviate the possibility of perceived coercion.

Measures were taken to ensure confidentiality during all stages of the research, as described in Section 3.3.5: Data collection. The reflective journal described in Section 3.3.7: Data analysis, was a tool employed by the researcher to maintain awareness of possible bias. As this is a snapshot of the self-described experiences of the participants at a particular time, the relationships, experience and position of the researcher within the context of the study became an integral part of the findings, which must be openly acknowledged.

3.3.5 Data collection

Data was collected through a simple demographic survey, which was included with the Informed Consent Forms (see Appendix Two), and twelve individual semi-structured interviews. The Informed Consent Form, including the demographic survey, was administered in paper form.

With permission of the principal, Participant Information Letters were placed in each teacher’s pigeonhole, inviting them to participate in the study. Interested participants were requested to complete the attached Informed Consent Form and attached demographic survey (see Appendix Two). Once the forms had been returned to the researcher, participants were then approached by the researcher to arrange a time for the semi-structured interview. The demographic survey was conducted to provide background information about the participants in order to guide the selection process to provide coverage of gender, current year level being taught, age and teaching experience across the twelve participants. This information also
provided another layer of detail to the description and analysis of each teacher’s experiences, specifically their personal historical experiences of teaching and the interaction between these experiences.

Thus, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher as the primary method of data collection. The interviews were audio-recorded using digital technology and transcribed by the researcher. Interview notes were also taken by the researcher to add depth to the data. The twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted over a three week period at the beginning of a school term, halfway through the third year of the implementation of the WSBoW approach. All interviews were conducted by the researcher, on the school premises either before or after school hours, at a time convenient to the participant. A quiet setting for each interview was arranged, where the chance of interruption was minimised. A maximum of two interviews were conducted per day to keep the researcher’s attention focused during each interview and to allow time for the researcher to complete the transcription of each interview as soon as possible after the conduction of the interview. This timeframe allowed the researcher reflection time between interviews, both to begin looking for initial patterns and themes which were then “member-checked” (Janesick, 2000) to ensure the researcher’s assumptions were ‘real’ for participants; and to undergo self-reflection through use of a journal. The use of the self-reflective journaling process by the researcher acknowledges an element of vulnerability of this researcher as an inexperienced researcher with a deep involvement in the setting and a strong identification with the research, as described by Punch (2013). By use of the journal and of this self-awareness, this insider and apprentice status became an added research instrument adding depth to the data-gathering and analysis process. This is further discussed in Section 3.3.9: Reflexivity of the researcher.

The data comprised hard copies of the basic demographic data from the twelve participants and the transcription of each of the twelve interviews. Three to five pages of transcription were typed from each of the twelve interviews, each approximately 30 minutes in duration, resulting in a total of 56 pages of interview transcripts. To ensure confidentiality, the twelve participants were assigned gender neutral names beginning with the first twelve letters of the alphabet. These names were Ashley, Bailey, Chris, Dallas, Eden, Finlay, Gabby, Harper, Izzy, Jesse, Kim and Leigh. The audio recordings and transcripts were held securely and strict confidentiality was maintained at all phases of the study.
The interview schedule (see Appendix Four: Semi-structured Interview Question Guide) was designed using information garnered from the review of the academic literature, tempered with an understanding of the contexts of the school and generic information about the implementation of the WSBoW approach. The interviews were digitally audio-recorded, then transcribed by the researcher, with the support of the researcher’s supervisor. A qualitative analysis of the interview data was undertaken, and is described in detail in Section 3.3.7: Data analysis. Findings were informally checked with participants for validation purposes as a form of member checking (Janesick, 2000). The final phase of the study comprised a further analysis of the total data set in order to derive answers to the research questions. The final write-up concluded the study.

### 3.3.6 Justification of the use of semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a data gathering tool. Interviews provide rich and potentially powerful data that seek the deeper understandings, drawn from tailored conversations, about participants’ life worlds, and the meanings they assign to their experiences (Kvale, 1996). The semi-structured interview can provide a balance between the scheduled interview questions devised by the researcher and the responses and concerns of the participants that can have arisen in the interview (Bloor & Wood, 2006; Kvale, 1996). To increase validity, “the interviewer sacrifices standardization and repeatability between interviews in order to grasp more fully the social meanings of the respondent's world” (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 105). Semi-structured interviews maximised the flexibility of the researcher to probe areas of particular interest to both the interviewee and the interviewer. This flexibility also maximised the inquirer and respondent relationship so valuable in ethnographic inquiry, where “the inquirer and the ‘object’ of the inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are inseparable” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 94). This interactivity enabled richer, thicker descriptive detail to be gathered through the interview.

Examples of prompts that were used by this researcher to extend the two major research questions included:

1. What have been the experiences of the teachers following the implementation of the WSBoW approach at the case study school?
   a. How did you feel about...?
   b. How did you deal with that?
   c. How do you, as a team, look at that?
d. I’m interested in your personal successes and challenges...

e. What do you think are the strengths and limitations of the WSBoW approach?

2. How has the WSBoW approach influenced teachers at the case study school?

a. What do you do with the student assessment data?

b. Could you just talk a bit about the benchmarking approach and what you understand by that?

c. Is there anything else that you’d like to share about the process, what it’s meant for you and how it’s affected you as a teacher?

These prompts are examples only and varied in response to the conversation unfolding in each of the interview situations. The examples are included here to give the reader an understanding of how this researcher anticipated the interviews to proceed. See also Appendix Ten: Sample Interview Transcript for how that interview played out.

The single source of data, namely individual semi-structured interviews, is justified, given the nature of the study and Kvale’s (1996, p244) assertion that triangulation of information is as important as triangulation of data sources. Merriam (1998, p. 204) also noted that triangulation of data sources may provide contradictory or inconsistent results. Thus, a single source of data was deemed to provide the study with both validity and consistency.

At the conclusion of the data collection phase, a qualitative analysis of the data was conducted. The next section outlines that process.

3.3.7 Data analysis

Based on the research questions the data, consisting of 56 pages of transcribed interviews, was analysed using a qualitative analysis method. The qualitative data analysis method described in this section supports an ethnographic study because it:

is within the interactive tradition and is ongoing in the form of preliminary data analysis, [...] in combination with thematic analysis so that each set of data informs the next providing feedback in a looped process of building up and confirming the holistic view of the ‘culture’ under examination. (Grbich, 2013, p42)

The analysis of the qualitative interview data began with initial data coding. Coding qualitative data is “a process of identifying bits and pieces of information and linking these to concepts
and themes around which the final report is presented” (Padgett, 1998, p. 77). The first level, or preliminary, analysis began with the researcher listening to the recordings and transcribing them into Word format. From there, several readings of the printed transcripts were conducted, noting patterns of responses that were evident in the transcripts. During the interview and preliminary analysis phase, an informal, reflective journal was kept by the researcher, in which impressions, questions and observations were noted. Some examples of these journal entries were:

- “Insider status at this stage is a great asset, I think. Rapport is established. PA (Ashley) and PB (Bailey) appeared very comfortable and willing to share honestly. It will be interesting to see if it’s different for younger teachers.” 26 July 2014
- “Am I ‘leading the witness’ in certain directions too much?” 26 July 2014
- “How do teachers make a mandated program their own? Subversive or overt actions?” 24 August 2014
- “There is a strong sense of responsibility for student learning on the part of teachers.” 13 September 2014

These observations assisted this researcher when making decisions about the themes emerging from the data and showed an awareness of the researcher’s positioning within the study.

After several close readings, this researcher highlighted comments under the following categories, using a different coloured highlighter pen for each category. Categories 1-4 were linked to Research Question One, about the participants’ experiences, and categories 5-8 were linked to Research Question Two, about the self-reported influences on the participants’ teaching practice.

1. Feelings, emotions, personal reactions of the participant
2. Strengths of the WSBoW as perceived by the participant
3. Limitations of the WSBoW as perceived by the participant
4. Innovations to the WSBoW described by the participant
5. Influences on teaching practice as described by the participant
6. References to the benchmarking aspects of the WSBoW
7. Concerns and comments about consistent teacher judgement and moderation in the WSBoW approach
8. Examples of collaboration within and between PLTs as described by the participant
These highlighted comments were then cut and pasted by word processor, into separate documents labelled with the participants’ assigned gender neutral name and the category linked to the research questions. Pages of comments related to each category were then printed and stapled together for comparison and further analysis. This process increased validity but care was taken to avoid decontextualising data or to restrict openness to new ideas (Bloor & Wood, 2006).

At this stage of the analysis process, the researcher met with a supervisor who had read the interview transcripts independently and provided some initial impressions of her own. This meeting contributed to a level of transparency as these impressions were integrated into the second level of analysis. This was done to add validity to the analysis.

The second-level analysis began with the researcher using the word processor’s comment function to record observations and commonalities arising from and between the participants’ responses in each category. These were summarised in the researcher’s own words in paragraph form on the same document. A sample of the first and second level analysis document for one of the participants is included as Appendix Eight: Sample of First and Second Level Analysis for verification purposes.

Because of the interpretive perspective of this research, as described by Neumann (2011), it was important to maintain the integrity of each participant’s self-stated experiences and influences. Hence, the summaries from each category were combined into one summary for each participant and re-examined beside the original transcript of each interview, in order to establish a thick description (Spradley, 1979) of what each participant was saying. Once again, the guidance of a trusted supervisor provided a form of moderation at this level of analysis.

Following this iterative process, this researcher returned to the research questions to guide the next step in the analysis, specifically trying to make meaning from the interview conversations about how these teachers experienced the process (self-stated) and what influence they reported the WSBoW approach having on their teaching practice. As previously stated, the research questions chosen to guide the study were:

- Research Question One

What have been the teachers’ self-stated experiences following the implementation of the WSBoW approach at the case study school?
• Research Question Two

How has the WSBoW approach influenced teachers’ self-reported teaching practice at the case study school?

The eight categories that were discerned from the first level of analysis (see above) had been organised according to their relevance to the two research questions. Key ideas were then used to summarise these categories and to organise participants’ responses in order to answer the research questions. Using a word processor, responses from interview transcripts were cut and pasted into six tables. These six tables provided the summary of the findings from the analysis and are elaborated, described and discussed in Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.

3.3.8 Quality control issues

The quality of this research study is enhanced by the following considerations taken from Mays and Pope (1995):

• The theoretical framework and data collection methods are clearly outlined. This research is an interpretive study using individual semi-structured interviews to collect data.

• The context is clearly described. In this thesis it is provided in the introductory chapter.

• The sampling strategy is justified by relating it to the research aim of describing, examining and analysing the experiences and influences of the teachers at the school. The sampling strategy in this study aimed to provide a wide sample of gender, current year level being taught, age and teaching experience.

• The detailed research notes are available for independent inspection if necessary. This aligns with usual ethical considerations of anonymity. In this thesis, a sample of raw data is included in the appendices in the form of a transcript.

• Guidance for designing and pretesting interview schedules has been found in the literature (Flick, 2007, 2009; Hermanns, 2004; Spradley, 1979; Strauss & Corbin, 1997; Willis, 2007) and in this study, consultation with experienced and senior researchers has been conducted to ensure efficacy of research design.

The potential for researcher bias due to this researcher’s teaching and leadership roles within the case study school has been addressed in Section 3.3.3 Ethical considerations, Section 3.3.4
Issues of researcher bias, reliability and validity and will be further examined in the following Section 3.3.9: Reflexivity of the researcher.

3.3.9 Reflexivity of the researcher

The importance of reducing, as much as possible, the imposition of the researcher’s interpretation of the situation onto the participants’ interpretations was recognised (Yin, 2010) in this study. This was done whilst acknowledging the benefits of insider knowledge to this researcher. By seeking feedback from participants throughout the data gathering and analysis phases of the study, before publishing the results, this researcher aimed to ensure that the findings resonated with them and were a true reflection of their experiences. Member checking (Janesick, 2000) summaries of participants’ interview data with the participant ensured that the researcher’s assumptions were an accurate representation of the participant’s interview responses. Member checking (Janesick, 2000) was also done on an informal basis through conversations enabled by the insider status of the researcher. Because of this insider status, extra care was taken to avoid imposing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences of the researcher onto those reported by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1979). This occurred through active listening during the interview process and self-reflection on the part of the researcher through journaling during the transcription and analysis phases of the research. The researcher also remained mindful of possible power imbalances caused by the researcher/participant relationship, but this was ameliorated by the researcher reiterating the confidentiality of the interview process and taking care to respond in a non-judgemental way during each interview. Further steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of the data are described in the next section.

3.3.10 Ensuring trustworthiness of the data

Yin (2010) describes three main ways to build trustworthiness of the data which this researcher endeavoured to follow:

1. Transparency involves the accessibility of the findings to anyone who wishes to engage with them. In this study, at the point of completion of the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix Two), participants were given the opportunity to request a summary of the findings following the conclusion of the study.

2. “Methodic-ness” (Yin, 2010, p. 19) involves following specified procedures, avoiding deliberate misinformation and attention to detail and accuracy. This researcher kept a journal to record the “experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs,
and problems that arise” (Spradley, 1979, p. 76). Regular consultation with experienced supervisors assisted this researcher to follow appropriate procedures.

3. “Adherence to data” (Yin, 2010, p. 20) implies that the conclusions drawn from the study need to stem directly from an analysis of the data. Adherence to data was ensured through accurate transcription and systematic coding and analysis of the interview data by the researcher, guided by experienced supervisors.

*Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion* provides further information about the “thick description” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 124), analysis and more discussion of the self-stated experiences of the twelve participating teachers. To aid readability and de-identification of participants, the feminine forms of the personal pronouns have been used for all participants. The actual ratio of males to females in the set of participants was two males to ten females. While it was anticipated that gender may have some bearing on the findings, on analysis this did not become evident. The only demographic factors found to have a significant influence on the experiences of the participants was years of teaching experience. References to ‘the leadership team’ in the discussion refer mainly to the Principal, Assistant Principal and Leader of Pedagogy, supported by other executive members of staff.

This concludes the explanation of the research design. Chapter 4 provides a description of the findings, followed by detailed discussion of these findings.
Chapter 4  Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction
The overarching aim of this research project was to investigate the experiences of teachers following the implementation of the WSBoW approach at the case study school. More specifically, the research has explored, analysed and described the teachers’ self-stated experiences as a result of their engagement with the WSBoW approach. Previous chapters outlined the context of the research within the continuous school improvement agenda and the current literature relevant to this agenda. Two research questions emerged from the literature review and guided this investigation:

- Research Question One
  What have been the teachers’ self-stated experiences following the implementation of the WSBoW approach at the case study school?
- Research Question Two
  How has the WSBoW approach influenced teachers’ self-reported teaching practice at the case study school?

The study has focused on the beliefs, values and attitudes of the participants as they engaged with the WSBoW approach. The findings do not provide an evaluation of the WSBoW approach but rather a description and investigation of the beliefs, values and attitudes that structure the behaviour of the teachers engaged in the shift to an evidence-based paradigm.

Demographic surveys and semi-structured interviews with twelve individual participants were used to gather data for this research, allowing for open-ended questioning techniques to be used. The analysis of the data resulted in participants’ responses being organised into six tables. Table 1 collated participants’ demographic data. Tables 2, 3 and 4 collated participants’ responses organised into key ideas related to Research Question One. Tables 5 and 6 collated participants’ responses organised into key ideas related to Research Question Two. Table 1 in its entirety, and the headings from Tables 2-6, are included here to provide context for the discussion.
# Table 1 Participants’ demographic data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years in teaching</th>
<th>Age bracket</th>
<th>Stages taught 2011-2014</th>
<th>Stages taught: career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>16-23</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>ES1-S1; S2</td>
<td>ES1-S1; S2; S3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailey</td>
<td>24-30</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>ES1-S1</td>
<td>ES1-S1; S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>ES1-S1</td>
<td>ES1-S1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eden</td>
<td>16-23</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>ES1-S1; S2</td>
<td>ES1-S1; S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finlay</td>
<td>8-15</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>ES1-S1; S2</td>
<td>ES1-S1; S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabby</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harper</td>
<td>24-30</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>S2; S3</td>
<td>All stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izzy</td>
<td>4-7</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>S2; S3</td>
<td>S2; S3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>24-30</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>S2; S3</td>
<td>S2; S3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>31+</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>S3</td>
<td>S2; S3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leigh</td>
<td>8-15</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>ES1-S1; S2</td>
<td>ES1-S1; S2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Table 2 Participants’ self-stated experiences of the WSBoW approach: Teaching experience, time and sense of professional achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Participant’s teaching experience</th>
<th>Participant’s teaching experience comments</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Sense of professional achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) teaching experience - years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) stages taught 2011-2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) stages taught during career</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Table 3 Participants’ self-stated experiences of the WSBoW approach: Teacher stress, student stress, teacher collegiality and collaboration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Teacher stress</th>
<th>Student stress</th>
<th>Teacher collegiality and collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

# Table 4 Strengths and limitations of the WSBoW approach: Teacher perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Evidence-informed teaching practice</th>
<th>Professional development for teachers</th>
<th>Consistency of teacher judgement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

# Table 5 Benchmarking of writing as a tool for continuous school improvement: Teacher perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Participant’s understanding of benchmarking</th>
<th>Participant’s evaluation of the WSBoW approach as a benchmarking tool</th>
<th>Participant’s suggestions to improve benchmarking aspect of the WSBoW approach</th>
<th>Participant’s attitude to benchmarking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

# Table 6 WSBoW approach: Self-stated influences on teachers’ pedagogy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Providing feedback to students</th>
<th>Student goal-setting</th>
<th>More personalised learning</th>
<th>Reporting on students’ writing achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The following presentation of the research findings is outlined under the two research questions.
4.2 Findings and discussion for Research Question One

What follows is a presentation of the findings and discussion about those findings based on each of the two research questions. The first research question used to guide the semi-structured interviews was:

- Research Question One: What have been the teachers’ self-stated experiences following the implementation of the WSBoW approach at the case study school?

The participants were asked to begin by describing their personal experiences of the WSBoW approach.

4.2.1 Participants’ experiences of the WSBoW approach

The data analysis revealed that the self-described experiences of the twelve participants related to six categories. These six categories were:

1. Participants’ teaching experience
2. Time
3. Sense of professional achievement
4. Teacher stress
5. Student stress
6. Teacher collegiality and collaboration

A summary and discussion of what the data reveals about these teachers’ self-described experiences in relation to each of these six categories now follows.

Participants’ teaching experience

The data demonstrated that nine of the twelve participants had experienced the WSBoW approach from its instigation almost three years prior to the interviews being conducted. Three other participants had come in at the second year. One of these participants had returned to classroom teaching after a long stint as a specialist physical education teacher in the case study school, one had come from another school and one was a beginning teacher in her second year at the case study school. The participants’ prior teaching experience ranged from two years to 31+ years. Prior teaching experience became a part of the commentary of many of the participants as they described their experiences of the WSBoW approach. The actual age of the participants did not seem to feature in the interviews at all, but their prior teaching experience became an integral part of the commentary of many of the participants, indicating the importance of what teachers bring to the change initiative. This range of
teaching experience and the participants’ commentary on this experience is exemplified by the following responses:

So when I started in 2012, that was I think the first year that he [the principal] initiated the whole-school writing with the benchmarking. So I haven’t, I don’t really know anything different at this stage. However, I think it’s a great idea because it ensures that you’re really teaching strategies and the writing concepts needed for the students to perform in that text (Dallas, 0-3 years teaching experience, p1).

I think the program’s probably good for less experienced teachers. When you are more experienced, you can look at a piece of writing and gather a lot of data from it. And even more experienced teachers going through the process was really good (Bailey, 24-30 years teaching experience, p3).

I’m finding that [the WSBoW approach] more beneficial than I thought it would be, to be honest. I thought it would be just another thing to do because I’ve seen that happen over a number of times and we don’t do a lot with it (Kim, 31+ years teaching experience, p1).

As illustrated by these comments, the specific nature of the data gained from the WSBoW approach about student writing achievement was seen by the participants as useful and practical for teachers with a wide range of teaching experience.

Similarly, the teachers’ experience of the WSBoW approach varied depending on the grade level of the students they were teaching. Teachers who had worked with Stage Two and Stage Three students typically reported a greater teacher engagement with the WSBoW approach than those who taught Stage One. Teachers of the younger students described concerns about the suitability of the assessment process and the marking criteria for assessing beginning writers, as exemplified by Ashley in her comment, “I wasn’t entirely convinced it was the right thing to be doing for Year One” (p1). However, the following comment typifies the view of the participants who had experienced the WSBoW approach across stages and could see the whole-school perspective of student writing development:

It’s really guided my teaching in that sense. More so in the higher grades when I was doing Year Four and Year Five, I found that I got a better understanding of what I could teach the students and how to teach them too. In the younger grades I still, I’ve come with the mindset that this is what the older grades struggle with and I’ve seen the same struggles with the younger grades, so hopefully the more we do it with them [Stage One students], and it becomes more regular.
then we can see that, by the time they get to the higher grades, we won’t have as many issues in the higher grades with paragraphing and all that (Chris, p1).

The sense of a whole-school focus was evident across the participants’ experiences of using the WSBoW approach with different grade levels. Participants, regardless of the extent of their teaching experience, acknowledged that they valued the fact they were not just doing things on their own. Data analysis showed that this made teachers more willing to comply with aspects of the WSBoW approach, even if they did not fully agree with its implementation. An example of this was the way teachers who taught younger grades questioned the suitability of the approach for beginning writers. Despite feeling that the focus on persuasive text types at the beginning of Year One was not ideal, the teachers “just did it” (Ashley, p1) because that was what was expected of them as part of the whole-school team. In saying this, the Year One PLT consequently enacted whole-school change to the WSBoW approach by communicating their “distress” (Ashley, p1) to the leadership team. This ability of the teachers to enact change will be further examined in Section 4.5.1: Leadership.

One of the twelve participants, Finlay (8-15 years teaching experience), expressed a dissenting view as to the usefulness of the WSBoW approach. She described drawing on her existing knowledge and experience of teaching writing to be able to assess students’ needs using other methods, as illustrated by this quote:

I don’t know that I necessarily need it because I can get that evidence anyway from their writing samples that they do with me in the first few weeks and you know, anecdotal stuff that you do as you go on. (Finlay, p1)

On analysis of other comments made by Finlay throughout the interview, she only complied with the WSBoW approach because it was mandated by the leadership team. She described how, if given the choice, she would have used self-devised checklists and marking grids in a more informal manner to assess her students’ writing achievement.

Bailey described having experienced the WSBoW approach with Stage Two and Stage Three students and spoke of how different these experiences had been because she had students of “different [achievement] levels so I’ve had a higher group and I’ve had a lower group” (Bailey, p1). With both groups, Bailey used the student assessment data to set an “overall goal and an individual goal” (Bailey, p1) with each student. Bailey found the experience with the Year Six group “much more challenging” because “the Year Three group was far more learning specific, this Year Six group is far more motivational and pride and giving them a bit of self-esteem about their writing and ownership and power with their writing” (Bailey, p1). This process of
goal-setting with students was one of the major influences on pedagogy as reported by participants and will be examined in detail in Section 4.3: Findings and discussion for Research Question Two.

Whilst the participants’ teaching experience ranged from two years to 31+ years, the data shows that the whole-school focus and specific nature of the WSBoW approach was valued by all but one of the twelve participants. This indicated that the approach was sufficiently complex to support a wide variety of teachers’ needs in the teaching of writing.

In summary, from the analysis, the data has shown:

- There was no real differentiation between teachers based on their age
- The teachers’ prior teaching experience had some bearing on how they perceived the WSBoW approach
- Teachers gained a greater appreciation of the need for a whole-school approach to writing when they had engaged with the WSBoW approach with a range of school year levels and had experienced the importance of sequential learning of writing skills to student achievement.
- Greater engagement with the WSBoW approach was evident from the teachers in the higher school year levels than from those teaching Years One and Two.

The participants’ self-stated experiences and observations regarding the investment of time required to implement such a complex approach will now be discussed.

**Time**

A significant aspect of the teachers’ self-stated experience was the time involved in assessing the writing samples twice per term using the NAPLAN marking rubric. This aspect was mentioned by nine of the twelve participants. Ashley noted that the higher the year level taught, the longer it took to mark the writing samples. Finlay and Jesse questioned the value of the time spent on lengthy assessment processes. They asserted that the time could be better spent on addressing the errors that were being identified through the assessment process with good planning for effective teaching strategies, as described by Jesse in this comment:

> There was a lot of data in there that I also thought was hard to differentiate without spending hours going through the criteria. And I thought, and still think, that some of the time taken to do that could be spent better on other areas [such as] your planning of good writing lessons. That might address the things, you know, the problems and things that are coming up all the
time. But we're not addressing, not necessarily addressing that with good planning. We're spending time marking (Jesse, p1).

The time taken to mark each writing sample meant that teachers were marking in their own time, at home and on the weekends. Harper mentioned on three occasions, her preference for marking work samples with the students so they could get immediate feedback, stating that “it’s very hard to get back to them and discuss” (Harper, p4). Marking the writing sample with students as a form of more immediate feedback to students was seen as impossible for the participants to do because of the time taken to mark each work sample according to the ten criteria on the NAPLAN rubric.

Despite the acknowledgment that the time taken to mark work samples had a significant impact on the personal and professional lives of teachers, ten of the twelve participants saw that there was significant value in the time spent. Typical responses were: “I think the value is there at the end of the day” (Izzy, p1); “It [marking student writing samples] does take time but I think it’s important” (Gabby, p1); and “As long as we think it’s useful then we’re very happy to do it” (Ashley, p4). This indicates a professional conflict for these teachers. They are willing to spend the extra time to get the professional benefits, with the ultimate goal of improving student learning outcomes, but find that personal and family time is significantly eroded. Professional time for other teaching-related tasks is also reduced. The following detailed and honest description by Bailey summarises the experience of participants regarding the frequency and timing of the assessment tasks:

I think that sometimes the pressure of getting it marked and in the middle of writing reports and parent-teacher interviews is very difficult and very stressful. I think especially those ones at the end of term whilst you’re in the middle of interviews. Because they take hours and hours and hours to mark, so if you don’t have those hours before school and after school because you’ve got two weeks of interviews, it takes up five or six hours of your weekend time. As well as fixing up your interviews and planning your work because you didn’t get to do that. Whilst no-one’s afraid of hard work it is quite an extra (Bailey, p3).

It is important to note that, earlier in the interview, Bailey clearly acknowledged the value of the data obtained from the process, despite its time-consuming nature. Additionally, five of the twelve participants described an increasing familiarity with the marking criteria which had led to a reduction of the time taken to mark student writing samples.

The self-described experiences of the participants illustrated the constant pressures on teachers’ time, both during and out of work hours. This resulted in a significant conflict for
teachers in establishing a work/life balance. Data analysis showed that these teachers were willing to commit extensive amounts of time to a process if they saw value in it but were acutely aware of other demands on their time and critically reflective of the best way that their time should be used. Data analysis also demonstrated the twelve teachers’ rapid adaptation to new programs and their ability to integrate new skills quickly into their professional repertoire. The next section describes other ways in which the participants, as professionals, responded to the WSBoW approach.

**Sense of professional achievement**
The goal of the teachers in the WSBoW approach, as stated in Appendix Five: The Whole School Benchmarking of Writing approach (WSBoW approach), was to facilitate improvement in the students’ writing scores from the pre-assessment or first writing task early in each term, to the post-assessment or second writing task approximately six weeks later. Participants valued the feedback this process gave them as teachers, telling them how successful they had been in facilitating improvement in the students’ writing scores. Dallas, a beginning teacher of 0-3 years teaching experience, spoke of “a really good sense of accomplishment” (Dallas, p2) from the process. An experienced teacher from the 24-30 years teaching bracket, Harper, spoke of the sense of professional achievement that she experienced when working with a particular group of students prior to their first NAPLAN test in Year Three. She attributed the students’ achievement in NAPLAN writing to her “concentrated teaching” (Harper, p1) which she defined as where “the data is used to direct my teaching, where I need to focus” (Harper, p1). This experience highlighted the direct relationship some of the participants made between NAPLAN results and the WSBoW approach, as described by Harper:

In 2012, I found that the pre-test and then the post-test did inform my teaching. It told me personally, how successful I had been with that particular group...and I think that their results in the NAPLAN were a testament to themselves. They all did very well. (Harper, p2)

In response to a probing question about whether Harper felt that her response to the data from pre- and post-tests had influenced the students’ results on NAPLAN, Harper responded:

And I felt that had a good result for the Year Three, particularly the top group. The results, the data that we got from that Year Three group that year, seemed to indicate that more children were moving into the top bands, from Band 5 into Band 6 (Harper, p2).

The literature about continuous school improvement in Australia reflects the pressure on schools, teachers and students to show ongoing improvement in NAPLAN results (Au, 2007; Brady, 2013; Thompson, 2013). The My School website (ACARA, 2014) was launched in 2010
and is administered by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). This website provides members of the public with the opportunity to compare NAPLAN data for students in Years Three, Five, Seven and Nine (ACARA, 2014). The pressure this puts on teachers and schools to continuously improve results is one of the identified consequences of publishing NAPLAN results in such a public fashion (Brady, 2013; Polesel et al., 2012; Thompson, 2013). Harper’s comments reflected her awareness of the pressure to improve NAPLAN results and she made a direct link with the teaching of writing within the WSBoW approach and the goal of improving NAPLAN writing results. In her case, the WSBoW approach was a helpful tool in this endeavour.

As mentioned earlier, teachers working with lower-achieving groups in their year level found the WSBoW approach more challenging than those working with higher-performing groups of students. One challenge described by participants was that progress was reported by participants as being much slower and less consistent for the lower-achieving students when it came to the numerical data from the marking rubric. Whilst this is a challenge regularly faced by teachers, data analysis indicated that this was more confronting because the data was more visible and available to a wider audience. A comment that typifies this experience came from Ashley:

I think probably the challenge is that some of the students that I work with particularly, is that their growth isn’t outstanding or even worse, is that their growth in that particular type of text may come along…but then the next pre-test that we do, they don’t retain those points. (Ashley, p3)

Current educational literature (Crowther, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Halverson, 2010; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Hattie, 2009; Masters, 2012; Mokhtari, Thoma, & Edwards, 2009) clearly makes the case that collective responsibility and accountability for all students within the school community is precisely what is needed to ensure that all students are provided with quality educational experiences that meet their individual needs and ensure adequate progress each year. Despite the challenges that the WSBoW approach set up for these teachers, nine of the twelve participants described a sense of professional achievement when they reflected on student progress evidenced by the data collected through the WSBoW approach. These teachers were able to draw direct correlations between their own teaching and the students’ achievements. Data analysis revealed that the WSBoW approach challenged teachers to have high expectations for all
students in their care but that this was confronting for them. This leads to a discussion of teacher stress that resulted from the implementation of the WSBoW approach.

**Teacher stress**
Teacher stress is one of the unintended consequences identified as a result of the emphasis on high-stakes testing in the current educational setting in Australia (Brady, 2013; Thompson, 2012, 2013). Other unintended consequences, identified in the literature (Gable & Lingard, 2013; Polesel et al., 2012; Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2014; Thompson, 2013) are a narrowing of the curriculum and pedagogical limitations such as teaching to the test. These consequences were, to some extent, mirrored in these teachers’ experiences of the WSBoW approach.

Five of the twelve participants described various ways in which the implementation of the WSBoW approach at the case study school had caused a level of stress for teachers. The main causes of teacher stress described by participants were:

1. the expectation that teachers would facilitate an effect size of 0.4 for each student each term.
2. the feeling that teachers would be criticised if their students didn’t achieve the expected growth each term.
3. the publication of student achievement data to all staff.
4. the time pressures described and discussed previously in this section.
5. a perceived lack of professional development relating to implementation of the WSBoW approach, which will be described and discussed in Section 4.2.2: Strengths and limitations of the WSBoW: Teacher perceptions.
6. a feeling of being overwhelmed by the detailed data generated by the assessment tasks.

These causes of teacher stress are interrelated and will be discussed as such in the following analysis. Ashley reported feeling a level of distress around the first cause listed above. Ashley noted the impact of the necessity to achieve a 0.4 effect size for each student in this quote:

> And then there was the expectation of the Hattie’s (is it Hattie?) point four. And when we first started it was very much they must have jumped this point four to see any real growth so I think yeah at the beginning there was a lot of pressure around it. (Ashley, p1)

There are two main points to look at in this description. Firstly, the most significant cause of Ashley’s distress seemed to have been the pressure to achieve an identified level of
improvement for each student each term. The level of distress referred to here by Ashley led to the principal ceasing the publication of effect size data to staff in the first year of the WSBoW approach. Whilst this seems to have diminished the stress caused by this aspect of the approach, as no other participants have referred specifically to effect size, it did lead some participants to question the efficacy of the WSBoW approach as a whole-school benchmarking program. Izzy, a teacher who came to the case study school one year after the WSBoW approach was introduced, expressed an interest in knowing what happened to the effect size data. “I’ve heard they [the data] go to [the principal] but I’m not sure what happens from there, whether the school uses it or whether it’s just there” (Izzy, p3). For Finlay, this decision to stop publishing the longitudinal school-wide data to teachers caused its own level of distress. When describing the time-consuming nature of the marking process, Finlay stated that “I kind of don’t understand that tracking. As a teacher, I’m not seeing where the tracking is happening” (Finlay, p1). A significant level of confusion and uncertainty was evident across the twelve participants as to the purpose and use of the whole-school data.

As mentioned earlier in this discussion, the year level being taught significantly influenced the way teachers engaged with the WSBoW approach, as they critically evaluated its usefulness based on the needs of their students. Ashley found the prescriptive nature of the WSBoW approach in its early stages caused difficulties for Stage One teachers. Communicating this distress to the leadership team led to change where “cohorts could choose the text type they thought best” (Ashley, p1). The term ‘cohorts’ is used at the case study school to define the team of teachers working with each year level, in this case Year One. The experiences of Stage One teachers of the WSBoW approach will be further described in Section 4.2.2 Strengths and limitations of the WSBoW approach: Teacher perceptions.

The data analysis indicated that the implementation of the WSBoW approach was a cause of significant stress for teachers at the case study school. It appeared that a lack of professional development and insufficient communication between the leadership team and the staff during the implementation phase of the WSBoW approach, contributed to the teachers’ stress. Professional development for teachers will be further discussed in Section 4.2.2 Strengths and limitations of the WSBoW approach: Teacher perceptions. This discussion will focus specifically on two aspects of professional development, namely on the relationship between the lack of initial professional development prior to implementation of the WSBoW approach and ongoing professional development teachers reported as a consequence of engagement with the
WSBoW approach. Indirectly, these teachers noted that the style of leadership at the case study school allowed the teachers themselves to make changes to the WSBoW approach that helped to alleviate some causes of teacher stress. This gave teachers a measure of control over their work, despite the fact that the WSBoW approach had been implemented as a top-down approach with minimal consultation with teachers. Leadership is a key theme emanating from this research and will be further examined in Section 4.5.1: Leadership. The highly visible nature of the data generated through the WSBoW approach was another significant cause of stress for some teachers but was also seen as a strength of the WSBoW approach in engendering a sense of professional achievement. The next section deals with the stress that teachers indicated could be evidenced in students.

**Student stress**

Stress experienced by students is another unintended consequence of high-stakes testing identified in the literature (Brady, 2013; Polesel et al., 2012; Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2014; Thompson, 2013). As the WSBoW approach’s method of assessment mirrors the way NAPLAN writing tests are administered, it is not surprising that some participants described a level of student stress associated with the frequency, timing and structure of the assessment tasks in the WSBoW approach. Gabby described the experience of one of her students who found the time limit meant that he could not adequately demonstrate his writing ability:

> I know I’ve got one student. He can write; he’s got great sentence structure. He’s a really good writer but when it comes to a time frame he just falls; he just can’t get it done. So what gets done is great work but it’s so short it affects his overall total. (Gabby, pp3-4)

This finding could best be summed up by the comment of another participant that “it’s not always a valid piece of data. Especially with my little ones [lower achieving Stage 3 students] who take a while to get stuff done” (Chris, p2). Reliance on one form of assessment, as in the WSBoW approach, could be seen as a pedagogical limitation and an example of teaching to the test.

The discussion now moves to ways in which the collaborative culture of the school influenced the participants’ experiences of the WSBoW approach.

**Teacher collegiality and collaboration**

The implementation of the WSBoW approach was characterised by collaboration in and between professional learning teams (PLTs). The data from the participants in this study
described ways that the teachers experienced the collaborative nature of the WSBoW approach as being supportive in the process of whole-school cultural change towards a more targeted, collaborative way of teaching writing. All participants clearly identified as members of teaching teams (PLTs) but the degree to which they personally identified with the team varied from one participant to another.

Bailey reported a high level of shared responsibility for the whole cohort of students in her PLT. Eden reflected that collegial support and shared responsibility for student progress was very valuable to her. At the time of interview, she reflected that this collegial support had decreased in that current year as the PLT had made a decision to work with their own home class for writing, rather than to group students across the cohort according to achievement levels and to differentiate for the needs of students within that class. She missed the discussion and collaboration that arose when the teachers worked with students across the cohort. This was despite the fact that, whilst the teachers taught their own home class for writing, assessment and programming had remained collaborative, and resources were shared.

The discussion about how to group students for instruction across the cohort was an important one and PLTs seemed to be constantly searching for the best way. Some PLTs appeared to have inflexible grouping structures based on spelling data rather than on the data from the WSBoW approach. These were inflexible in that students tended to stay in the same group all year rather than move in and out of groups depending on data from each of the four pre-tests. Bailey justified this grouping strategy for her PLT and described ways that differentiation based on data occurred within these groups:

And I think moving children around too much, jumping them here and there depending on this, depending on that, someone needs to keep an eye on them and know that child well and um you know, know their nuances and what makes them tick. (Bailey, p6)

In the interviews, there was evidence that often individual teachers were not happy with a decision about student grouping made by the PLT but accepted it as the group’s decision in a spirit of cooperation. Analysis of the data about how PLTs cooperated indicated the value placed on the collaborative culture of the school by the participants.

The case study school had been in the process of moving towards a more collaborative school culture as a key component of the case study school’s 2009-2013 Strategic Plan, Personalising Learning – Pursuing Excellence (Case Study School, 2008). The rationale of the WSBoW approach (see Appendix Five: The Whole-school Benchmarking of Writing Approach) explicitly
stated that working collaboratively in PLTs is a key strategy used at the case study school and which supported the implementation of the WSBoW approach. Teachers’ self-stated experiences of this collaborative culture was evident in the data collected for this study. Forms of collaboration mentioned by participants included:

- the PLT team choosing a shared text type for the term’s teaching focus across the cohort;
- teachers sharing resources;
- teachers sharing expertise;
- teachers sharing responsibility for the learning of individuals and groups of students across the cohort;
- shared decision making about grouping students for learning based on evidence.

There is evidence that all twelve participants saw themselves as collaborative members of both the whole-school team and the PLTs. The pronoun ‘we’ was used extensively by all participants when describing their experiences of the WSBoW approach. All participants explicitly referred to “PLT”, “cohort” or “team” throughout the interview when describing their experiences of the WSBoW approach.

The discussion now moves to the findings about the teachers’ perceptions of the strengths and limitations of the WSBoW approach.

4.2.2 Strengths and limitations of the WSBoW approach: teacher perceptions

The data analysis showed three main concepts about these teachers’ perceptions of the strengths and limitations of the WSBoW approach. The twelve participants’ responses which illustrated both strengths and limitations of the WSBoW approach are presented under the following three headings:

1. Evidence-informed teaching practice
2. Professional development for teachers
3. Consistency of teacher judgement

These will be discussed in order.

Evidence-informed teaching practice

A significant concept emanating from the data was the development of evidence-informed, as opposed to data-driven, teaching practice amongst staff. This concept will be further discussed in Section 4.3.1: Influences on teachers’ pedagogy. A commonly reported strength of the
WSBoW approach was the use of student achievement data in writing to guide programming decisions. Eight of the twelve participants specifically mentioned using the pre- and post-test data to guide planning. Typical responses included using the data to make “a good plan for ten weeks” (Dallas, p1) and “specifically planning for individual needs” (Kim, p1).

This ability to program based on the data was closely linked to another reported strength of the WSBoW approach, that is, the teachers’ increased knowledge of their students’ achievement levels in writing at any given time during the year. This strength was described by nine of the twelve participants in ways such as having a “comprehensive” knowledge of student achievement (Ashley, p3), the ability to see “patterns within the group and within the child” (Bailey, p1) and the opinion that “I think it’s helped me understand the students better” (Chris, p2). One quarter of participants reported this increased knowledge as very useful to them when grading and reporting on student achievement in writing. Three teachers specifically described in detail how they used this evidence to group students according to learning needs. Hence, a key finding of the study was that the WSBoW approach was useful for teachers when grouping students for instruction, grading for summative assessment purposes and reporting on student achievement.

Professional development for teachers
Another significant concept emerging from the data was professional development for teachers. This idea had both positive and negative aspects for the participants. As discussed in Section 4.2.1: Participants’ experiences of the WSBoW approach, participants experienced stress during the early implementation phase of the WSBoW approach due to a perceived lack of formal professional development related to the application of the marking criteria in the marking rubric. As participants engaged with the WSBoW approach, one of the main strengths to emerge, according to nine of the twelve participants, was its use as a tool for professional development. This professional development mainly centred on the way the approach provided teachers with specific marking criteria, as well as focusing on the text as a whole. These marking criteria included assessing things like audience, vocabulary and cohesion. Jesse described how marking using the NAPLAN rubric assisted her to improve her teaching of writing:

I know I’ve been more targeted on I suppose, structure and audience. I think that was one thing I didn’t really have a big focus on in my teaching. So getting the kids to realise there was a purpose and an audience to these different texts. Because I was always good at the
Jesse’s description typified the attitude of eleven of the twelve participants that the WSBoW approach was a form of ‘on the job’ professional development in the area of teaching writing.

Participants spoke of the ways in which using the approach led to many discussions with students and teachers about what good writing looks like and the specific skills necessary to achieve this. This was typified by the comment of a beginning teacher: “It’s a lot easier than trying to pull it out of the air when you don’t know [what to focus on]” (Dallas, p4).

The marking rubrics, based on NAPLAN marking rubrics, were seen to provide some level of whole-school consistency, especially for teachers with less experience in marking and teaching writing. Nine of the twelve participants commented on the value of the marking rubrics in building this level of consistency across a staff with a wide range of prior professional development and experience in teaching and assessing writing. This variance in prior professional development and experience was commented on by six of the twelve participants. Harper’s comment summarises these views:

> The thing that does worry me is that some teachers have had a lot more formal training in using this benchmarking whereas other teachers haven’t. But they still mark according to what they think I suppose…we never seem to get time to sit and mark certain ones together which I think is a bit of a shortfall to make sure we’re all on the same wavelength. (Harper, p5)

Chris pointed out a link between consistency of teacher judgement and adequate professional development to support the marking of writing samples using the marking rubric:

> If there was a clear, little bit of professional development on it, it would probably make it a lot easier, especially for new teachers coming into the school who aren’t used to it. I guess that comes down to that consistent approach about what we see when we’re using that rubric and how we’re matching it up with a piece of writing. (Chris, p4)

So, while the rubric was seen to provide a level of consistency of teacher judgement across the school, there were also concerns expressed about the existence of variations in the application of the criteria used in the WSBoW approach, as discussed in the next section.

**Consistency of teacher judgement**

Seven of the twelve participants made comment that consistency of teacher judgement was not guaranteed by the use of the NAPLAN rubric. Typically, these teachers felt that the criteria were open to personal interpretation by teachers and that the level of understanding of the criteria varied from teacher to teacher. As Dallas described, “everyone interprets things
differently. It would be fairly consistent but I wouldn’t say it’s completely consistent every time” (Dallas, p4). Another example of this view was explained by Gabby and leads into the self-described need of the participants for a more formal process of moderation to improve consistency of teacher judgement:

> Hopefully, when it’s a rubric it should be even but different people’s interpretation sometimes...Like some people mark harder, some people mark easier. I know there’s a rubric but there’s still, it’s personal I guess, open to personal interpretation. Which is hard, like I don’t know how you could really move around that unless you’re moderating all the time. (Gabby, p2)

Whilst no formal process of moderation was embedded in the WSBoW approach, ten of the twelve participants described a process of informal moderation occurring within their PLTs. Typically, this involved two types of moderation. Firstly, teachers would check with members of their PLT if they were unsure of how to score a criterion with a particular child. Secondly, and most commonly, discussion within PLT meetings centred on the range of achievement in the cohort as evidenced by student scores. Moderation in PLTs was seen by some to compensate for a lack of formal training in marking writing using the NAPLAN rubric. The following quotes summarised these ideas about informal moderation in PLTs and ways in which teachers learnt from each other in an informal way:

> I think initially it was pretty daunting for people who hadn’t had any of the training. I was one of those. But it made us work pretty closely with others to cross check how we were marking too. So I thought that was good. (Jesse, p1)

> We marked it in class lots and then discussed those results as a cohort [of teachers] in our PLT time. So we made sure that, not that we were saying that this child can or can’t do it, but to see if we were consistent with what we were marking and how we were marking it. And some we just realised that we were on the same path. I think it’s um yeah, with that we had the same ideas. Someone might say something and you might go, “Oh well, I didn’t think of that and I can see that clarification.” Working with people that have done the NAPLAN marking professional development in the past really helped. Because I found that in the beginning I was marking really harshly and when they came in and put their input in I realised that, “Yeah this child is doing that.” It’s great to have those conversations. I think there needs to be more of it. (Chris, p2)

Three participants explicitly articulated the need for a more formalised moderation process to improve consistency of teacher judgement and to capitalise on this opportunity for professional development. Seven participants indicated that there was a need for more formal
training in the interpretation of the NAPLAN marking rubric criteria. Some teachers had taken part in this when it was offered prior to the introduction of the WSBoW approach but it was not specifically linked to the approach. Some experienced teachers had taken part in similar training opportunities throughout their career. Teachers who had not received this training expressed the need for further support in this area and some who had participated in this type of training expressed the need for regular refresher courses.

4.2.3 Benchmarking of writing as a tool for continuous school improvement: teacher perceptions

Participants were asked to describe their understanding of benchmarking as an educational tool in the area of writing. Analysis of the data related to participants’ responses about benchmarking related to three main ideas about benchmarking as an educational tool:

1. Participants’ knowledge about benchmarking.
2. Participants’ attitudes to benchmarking.
3. Participants’ informal evaluation of benchmarking in the WSBoW approach.

These ideas are discussed in the next section, with reference to the literature on educational benchmarking.

Participants’ knowledge about benchmarking

The data revealed that the participants had a sound understanding of what benchmarking was in their school and how it could be applied to their teaching practice. The participants’ self-stated definitions of educational benchmarking are summarised by the following assertions by participants. They indicated that they were aware that benchmarking involved:

1. Moving students along a clear progression of learning.
2. Marking against a set of criteria with a clearly defined standard expected for each year level.
3. A clear indication of student achievement levels and what they need to work on.
4. Defining achievement levels expected of students at particular points in time.
5. A method of tracking individual student achievement.

There was a common understanding of benchmarking as a clearly defined standard, which is directly related to school year levels and the age of students. Links to NAPLAN and syllabus documents were also made by some participants as a reference point for the benchmarking process. Kim spoke of “a minimum standard that they should achieve in their writing” (Kim, p4) and Jesse described “a baseline level that we expect kids to be” (Jesse, p2). Izzy explicitly made
the link to NAPLAN, with her view that “It’s probably something where we want to establish where the students are at in accordance to the NAPLAN. That’s why we use the ten-point NAPLAN scale” (Izzy, pp2-3).

Harper made explicit the link to the syllabus outcomes rather than NAPLAN:

  Well, benchmarking to me is ensuring the children meet the requirements of the outcomes. That benchmarking requirement, the outcomes for that particular stage. Yes and the expectations that come for that stage. Keeping in mind though, some children are ready to move beyond that. (Harper, p5)

The common understanding is that there are definite expectations for students at clearly delineated stages of their schooling, as described by Gabby:

  I think it is trying to get an overall view or idea of how the children are going with their writing. And I guess there are certain levels for each cohort or each stage is trying to meet in terms of their writing outcomes. So I guess it’s making a kind of standard for each level or each stage. And also to kind of track them to see if they’re improving on, if it’s a certain area, like punctuation. (Gabby, p3)

Some teachers spoke of using benchmarking as a way of setting learning goals with and for students. The benchmarks, for these teachers, provided a clear learning progression to assist teachers and students to achieve continuous improvement in student writing achievement. This idea is typified in the following responses. “It gives a great indication of where the kids are actually at and I feel where they’re... what they need to work on” (Eden, p1). This was described in a different way by Ashley. “OK well to me a benchmark is a bit like a chart where you move along, I guess. It’s where you’re always looking further up, so where you fall on that benchmark” (Ashley, p3). Two other participants’ responses add further depth to this understanding of educational benchmarking:

  So, when you’re benchmarking someone you are marking them against a set of criteria to try to get them to an end goal. Um so really before I’ve really only known benchmarking of reading. So now benchmarking is using the rubric to try to get them to a set of goals in the writing tasks. So the bench set is the criteria that we try to achieve within their writing. (Dallas, p4)
And I can see the possibilities of grouping students from the information we get from those rubrics as setting their goal. This is what they need to achieve to move up. So giving them a clear definition of what they need to work on. (Chris, p2)

Seven of the twelve participants made direct comparisons with the benchmarking of reading that had been a part of the school’s assessment program for some time. Analysis of the data indicates this familiarity with the process of benchmarking eased the transition to the WSBoW approach at the case study school, highlighting the way that teachers constantly integrate new programs and approaches with existing practices. This adaptability was evident in the twelve participants’ descriptions of their engagement with the WSBoW approach and leads to a discussion of the participants’ attitudes to educational benchmarking.

**Participants’ attitudes to benchmarking**

Two participants said that benchmarking puts students under pressure if they are not achieving to the expected standard for their year level. This pressure to achieve at a specified level by a certain stage of schooling had been particularly evident at the case study school for reading levels. Making reading achievement data visible to students had resulted in negative experiences for some lower-achieving students, especially if it was made visible that the student was performing below the age-appropriate benchmark. Participants reflected that setting and achieving specific learning goals with lower-achieving students, related to the criteria in the writing marking rubric, was far more beneficial than making visible to them where they fell in regards to the benchmark. An example of this view is described by Ashley:

> I think in the lower grades the levelling does put children under pressure and you know, knowing they’ve got to get to this thirty [reading level]. And parents are... I would hate to see that become part of our writing as well. I don’t think that the kids would even need to see that benchmark to be honest but then that probably goes against what [the principal] would think, or Hattie or someone else. (Ashley, p4)

Hattie (2012) provides the following advice on effective feedback which provides support for the specific nature of the benchmarking process used in the WSBoW approach, when it is shared appropriately with students to set learning goals:

> To make feedback effective, therefore, teachers must have a good understanding of where the students are, and where they are meant to be – and the more transparent they make this status for the students, the more students can help to get themselves from the points at which they are to the success points, and thus enjoy the fruits of feedback. Feedback serves various purposes in reducing this gap: it can provide cues that capture a person’s attention and helps him or her to focus on succeeding with the task; it can provide information about ideas that
have been misunderstood; and it can be motivational so that students invest more effort or skill in the task (Hattie, 2012, p. 115).

Hattie goes on to assert the importance of effective feedback for all learners, regardless of current achievement levels, not just for lower-achieving students: “Error is the difference between what we know and can do, and what we aim to know and do – and this applies to all (struggling and talented; students and teachers). Knowing this error is fundamental to moving towards success” (Hattie, 2012, p. 115). Chris was an example of a teacher who could see this link between benchmarking and effective feedback: “I think that it [benchmarking] is a great idea. And I think it might help guide what students need to be focusing on” (Chris, p3). Jesse made the point that individual personalities and learning styles come into play when giving effective feedback: “There are some kids that find that negative, that benchmarking negative. And others, they just go for it because they want to keep, they can see something that they’re striving for” (Jesse, p3).

Analysis of the data indicated that teachers of older students found it easier to provide effective feedback to students based on writing benchmarks than teachers of younger students. How the WSBoW approach facilitated benchmarking of student writing achievement was informally evaluated by participants in the study and is described in the next section.

Participants’ informal evaluation of the WSBoW approach as a benchmarking tool.
There was evidence in the data of the ways in which these teachers were informally evaluating the WSBoW approach as a tool for benchmarking students’ writing achievement. Two of the twelve participants spoke of a need for more explicit communication of the benchmarks for each year level in the WSBoW approach. Three participants saw the WSBoW approach as an effective benchmarking system. They valued the tracking aspect which showed which children were in need of assistance in specific areas of their writing. This was described by Jesse: “But the writing, we haven’t really had, because it’s that open-ended benchmarking, there’s no real [level], other than the kids setting their own personal goals, there’s no number for the kids to aim for” (Jesse, p2).

Benchmarking of writing at the case study school was a key step in the teacher renewal process that both enhanced the quality of the teaching and learning experiences and was part of the continuous school improvement process. The next section moves to an analysis of the ways in which participants described being influenced by their engagement with the WSBoW.
4.3 Findings and Discussion for Research Question Two

The second research question used to guide this study was:

- Research Question 2: How has the WSBoW approach influenced teachers’ self-reported teaching practice at the case study school?

The data analysis for this second question builds on the previous section’s descriptions of teachers’ self-stated experiences of the WSBoW approach at the case study school.

4.3.1 Influences on teachers’ pedagogy

After describing their experiences, participants were then asked to discuss the ways in which the WSBoW approach had influenced them in their teaching of writing. The major theme that emerged from this data was that of teachers changing their pedagogy to make learning visible for students in the way they:

1. provided feedback to students;
2. set learning goals with students;
3. personalised learning; and
4. reported on student writing achievement.

These pedagogical changes, as described by participants, will be discussed in order of appearance.

Providing feedback to students

Providing feedback to students was a significant way in which seven of the twelve participants described being influenced by the WSBoW approach. For these teachers, feedback to students had become more focused on specific aspects of writing, such as punctuation, purpose, audience and sentence structure. Ashley described this approach to feedback that included an acknowledgement of student response to feedback and touched on the importance of parents in the feedback cycle:

I think the best thing for students and parents at the bottom of their piece of writing, whether you’ve worked them out, or they’ve worked them out or together you’ve worked them out, is a couple of goals. Rather than a score, to me giving them 26 out of 100 and you say you’ve got a long way to go isn’t effective. But saying, here’s three goals and we’ll just work on it little bit by little bit, that to me is more effective. (Ashley, p5)

As hinted at in Ashley’s comment, participants touched on the importance of being sensitive in the way feedback was communicated to students, in order to protect self-esteem and promote a positive attitude to writing rather than a sense of being left behind in comparison to their peers. Comments by Stage Three teachers included: “They’re very well aware of their
position in the class” (Bailey, p6) and “we make a conscious effort not to do anything or say anything that puts a brand on it” (Kim, p2). Three participants made particular comment on the importance of this sensitivity to student wellbeing. The WSBoW approach was instigated as a benchmarking program for the school. The explicit nature of such a benchmarking program appears from the data to have influenced teachers to be even more aware of their students’ self-esteem as writers than previously.

Student goal-setting
Seven of the twelve participants described ways in which the WSBoW approach influenced the way they facilitated goal-setting with students. Gabby was an early career teacher with experience only of Stage Two. This beginning teacher described using the data from the marking process using the marking rubric, to help set writing goals with the students. When prompted, Gabby explained that this was done using a modified rubric based on four or five of the criteria. Self-reflection and self-assessment was developed with the students in this process to enable them to set their own learning goals. The process described by Gabby was similar to the other participants who taught Stage Two and Stage Three students. Gabby typified these participants’ opinions that the WSBoW approach led to a more rigorous focus on specific criteria and greater accountability for each student’s needs, rather than ‘common themes’ and a whole-group focus:

They’re [the students] getting better [at self-reflection and self-assessment]. I think it takes a little time. We can’t expect them to be able to self-reflect at the first time but they’re getting better at it. And then I say, “Yeah that’s where I put you too.” Or “You didn’t have this so I had to put you here.” From that we choose, usually two areas. I say, write two writing goals. And then, after that I can base my teaching on, if there was a lot of kids who had this punctuation error or there’s a lot of kids that had text structure errors. So I try to focus lessons around those things, just try to take a snapshot of the whole. (Gabby, p1)

Notably, teachers of Stage One students interviewed for this study, did not report this individual and small-group goal-setting strategy, but rather focused on whole-group goal setting and focused teaching on areas that the majority of the group needed, based on the data obtained through the WSBoW approach. These Stage One groups were already differentiated based on student literacy achievement levels.

More personalised learning
The third of the four of these impacts on pedagogy that were noted by teachers related to a deeper focus on personalised learning. Teachers’ movement towards more personalised learning was commented on by seven participants. Largely, this was defined as varying the use
of scaffolds, exemplar texts, joint construction and teacher modelling according to the learning needs of the students. It was evident from the interview data that planning for individual needs, talking to students individually and setting goals with students had increased for these teachers since the introduction of the WSBoW approach at the case study school. Leigh described this change in her pedagogy as “giving them the eyes and the voice to see where they need to go forward, rather than just teaching whole lessons” (Leigh, p1) and “making sure they know where they are at and making personal goals on their writing” (Leigh pp2-3).

Kim, the most experienced of the participants being in the 31+ years teaching bracket, spoke of being “able to specifically plan for individual needs” (Kim, p1) and mentioned that “when I was teaching before, we didn’t do that” in reference to using the structured pre- and post-assessment process each term. On the other hand Finlay, a teacher from the 8-15 years teaching bracket, didn’t appreciate the need for the complex marking process. This teacher had experienced frustration with the time spent marking, believing the data could be gained in a much simpler fashion, “doing anecdotal notes and from the writing samples” (Finlay, p1). When probed on what response would be made to the data gathered from this informal approach, Finlay described a similar approach to goal-setting as the other participants.

**Reporting on students’ writing achievement**

The fourth and final of the noted impacts on teachers’ pedagogy involved the ways in which these teachers reported on their students’ writing achievements. The data revealed that evidence gained from the assessment tasks in the WSBoW approach influenced the way that teachers reported student achievement in the biannual formal reporting cycle. This involves reporting to parents in June and December using the five-point A-E grading scale as is mandatory in Australian schools. A copy of this report is kept in the student’s school file. Each student is assigned an A-E grade for English, based on a compilation of assessments relating to reading, writing, talking and listening. Each PLT at the case study school collaboratively devised a set of criteria based on the assessment tasks that would assign an A-E grade for English. Teachers then applied this when compiling the formal report. Seven of the twelve participants described ways in which PLTs made decisions about A-E grading of students. Student grading of writing was based on what PLTs had decided was the benchmark for that year level. Leigh, as a typical example, spoke of “getting rid of personal expectations” (Leigh, p2) when making decisions about student achievement. Harper described using the ten criteria used in the marking rubric in discussions with parents. She felt this helped the parents to “make sense” (Harper, p7) of the student’s achievements. Several teachers pointed out the importance of
remembering that the data from the WSBoW approach was “not the only piece of evidence, but another piece of evidence” (Gabby, p4) in making judgements about student achievement.

4.4 Summary of key findings
While these two sets of findings are listed as ‘experiences’ and ‘influences’, they are not entirely discrete in that in some cases, the influence related to the experience and at other times, the experience resulted in an influence. Thus it means that, in some cases, these influences and experiences are interrelated.

4.4.1 Summary of key findings for Research Question One
The analysis of the data from the participants at the case study school has led to the following six key findings about the self-stated experiences of the participants:

1. Collaboration and change: The data from the participants indicated that for all of these teachers, the collaborative nature of the WSBoW approach was seen as a constructive enhancement to their teaching during this period of whole-school change.

2. Two constraints: From the analysis of the interview data, two main constraints were evident that made the implementation of the WSBoW approach more challenging for teachers than it may otherwise have been.
   a. Nine participants made reference to a lack of specific professional development for all teachers in how to mark student writing samples using the NAPLAN marking criteria.
   b. There was a reported impact on teachers’ professional and private lives due to the frequency and timing of the assessment tasks and the complexity of the marking process. This impact, commented on by ten participants, related to the amount of time and effort required by the teachers and the perceived value to the teachers and students for that additional effort.

3. Unintended consequences: Many of the experiences reported by the participants had reflected what the literature indicates are the intended and unintended consequences of standardised testing regimes in Australia and internationally, as discussed at length in Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature. Participants reported the following unintended consequences of the WSBoW approach for their teaching of writing:
a) narrowing of the writing focus to text type – reported by seven participants.
b) loss of creativity and fun in writing lessons – reported by two participants.
c) teacher stress – reported by six participants.
d) student stress – reported by two participants.
e) validity of assessment format i.e. time constrained, removed from the teaching and learning cycle – reported by four participants.

4. Teacher experience: Teachers’ prior and present experience with students in various stages of schooling influenced their experiences of the WSBoW approach significantly. Two participants expressed the opinion that the WSBoW approach was not as suitable to the needs of Stage One students as to the older students because the NAPLAN-based marking rubrics were not constructed to show growth in early writing development, being developed for use with students in Years Three to Nine. The implications of this finding will be discussed in Chapter 5: Conclusions.

5. Consistency of teacher judgement: Eleven of the twelve participants made comment about issues with the consistency of teacher judgement when using the marking rubric to assess students’ writing samples. There was a significant amount of commentary on consistency of teacher judgement that pointed to perceived problems with the criteria themselves, in that they are too open to interpretation by individual teachers, and to the need for more professional development for teachers in applying the criteria consistently across all writing samples and school year levels.

6. Quality teaching of writing: Teachers acknowledged and articulated the need to focus on producing and sustaining high-quality writing skills with a focus on rich, purposeful writing, rather than on writing to a formula aimed at short-term, unsustained gain on test scores. Nine participants specifically commented on this aspect of the WSBoW approach as implemented in their PLT.

4.4.2 Summary of key findings for Research Question Two
The analysis of the data from the participants at the case study school has led to the following four key findings about the self-reported influences of the WSBoW approach on the participants’ teaching practice:
1. A supportive tool: Eleven of the twelve teachers in this study perceived the WSBoW approach as a supportive tool for them in the whole-school move towards pedagogical improvement, particularly in using student assessment data to provide quality teaching and learning experiences for all students in the area of writing.

2. Use of data: The nature of the way the data was gathered, used and communicated in the WSBoW approach resulted in the learning becoming more visible to students, teachers and parents. This influenced teachers to be sensitive to the needs of their students, including that of protecting their self-esteem.

3. Feedback: The key role of providing quality feedback to students as teachers endeavoured to achieve a minimum of 0.4 effect size achievement for all students, as a goal established by the case study school.

4. Student goal setting: Teachers of Stage Two and Three students had been supported by the WSBoW approach to use effective feedback about student achievement in writing to assist students to set and achieve learning goals.

4.5 Synthesis of findings
This chapter has presented the findings from the data collected in the semi-structured interviews with the twelve participants. This section synthesises these findings and summarises the key themes emanating from the findings. Chapter 5 will then present the conclusions drawn from these findings.

4.5.1 Leadership
The teachers indicated that the process of implementation of the WSBoW approach evolved and changed as a result of teacher feedback to the leadership team and through innovations created by the teachers themselves. This suggested that the type of leadership at the school created an environment where teachers were able to be agents of change within a framework of instructional leadership centred on the leadership team. PLTs were central to this process at the case study school. This concept of distributed leadership is described by Leithwood et al. (2004):

…it is helpful for some leadership functions to be performed at every level in the organisation; for example, stimulating people to think differently about their work. On the other hand, it is
important for other functions to be carried out at a particular level. For example, it seems critical that leaders in formal positions of authority retain responsibility for building a shared vision for their organisations. (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 7)

This view is supported by research on the role of leadership styles in improving teacher practice through stimulating teachers’ motivation and professional learning (Thoonen et al., 2011).

Seven of the twelve participants described innovations created by the teachers themselves which, while true to the practices outlined in the document *The Whole-school Benchmarking of Writing (WSBoW) Approach* (Appendix Five), added depth and veracity to its implementation. These changes came about as a result of teacher feedback to the leadership team, as teachers responded to the implementation of the NSW Syllabuses for the Australian Curriculum and through innovations created by the teachers themselves. This teacher-enacted change showed the importance of the enactment of the collaborative culture of the school and of the teachers gradually developing ownership of the WSBoW approach as they worked with their students in the area of writing. Finally, it illustrated the awareness and willingness of teachers to continually adapt pedagogical practice to accommodate state-mandated curriculum change. This critical review and adaptation of the WSBoW approach by teachers was admirable.

The participants described a range of PLT decisions that were made to modify the WSBoW approach to suit the needs of teachers and students. Initially, the whole school focused on the same text type at the same time. Teachers gave feedback to the leadership team that this was not, in their opinion, in the best interests of the younger students. This feedback led to whole-school change where PLTs could choose the text type focus each term, to better meet the needs of their students and to fit in with the wider learning program.

After the pre-test had been administered each term, PLTs made decisions about learning and teaching, based on data, on which the whole cohort could focus. These focus areas were then differentiated for groups and individual students. This appears to be an area where leadership within the PLT heavily influenced how this was done. Individual teachers had freedom to innovate in their own ways with their students, for example in how they gave feedback and set goals with students. Within PLTs the data was used for grading students and contributed to the formal reporting cycle each semester. Once again, how this happened was largely controlled by each PLT. In some PLTs, discussion about students seemed limited to scores rather than
drilling down to individual skills and needs. Collaboration within and between PLTs was a key feature of the experiences of and influences on teachers throughout the implementation of the WSBoW approach.

The discussion will now further examine the collaborative nature of the WSBoW approach, in order to shed light on the relationship between the changing culture of the school and the implementation of the WSBoW approach.

### 4.5.2 Collaboration

Deprivatisation of teaching was part of the whole-school shift described in *Appendix Six: Case Study School’s Collaborative Learning Model*. Examples of deprivatisation evident in the data included the way PLTs shared ideas and passed on resources in an informal way, the shared responsibility for students described in the previous paragraph and the centralised collection of data for use by the leadership team, which was shared with all teachers in the PLT. Participants clearly valued this aspect of the WSBoW approach and called for more opportunities to work openly and cooperatively as a way of improving their own practice. The picture that emerged from the teachers’ descriptions of their work in PLTs, in the context of the WSBoW approach, was that of an emerging collaborative culture based on “interactive professionalism”, as described by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, pp. 43-44) where teachers were able to find support, professional learning and collegial conversation about their students’ writing development.

It was evident from the data analysis that the WSBoW approach was supporting teachers to engage in professional learning conversations and collaborative teaching practice in the area of writing. As an instrument of continuous school improvement, the WSBoW approach provided a scaffold for teachers to work together to improve their practice and for more experienced teachers to support their less experienced colleagues. Conversely, because the teaching staff, except Early Stage One teachers, was embarking on this new approach together, it gave all teachers, no matter their experience or background knowledge, a shared language and procedure to engage in the whole-school renewal process in the area of writing.

Professional development and training was an issue of interest for participants in relation to the WSBoW approach. A lack of formal training in marking writing samples using the NAPLAN rubric was experienced by most participants. Teachers indicated that they appreciated the
direct link to NAPLAN as providing legitimacy to the criteria. The collaborative, whole-school approach provided valued support within this framework, with the participants open to sharing ideas within and between PLTs in an informal and more formal way. As discussed, the WSBoW approach provided much needed support to teachers at all career stages in the area of writing instruction through a specific, data-informed process based on the WSBoW approach marking rubric.

4.5.3 A supportive tool for pedagogical improvement

The WSBoW approach was seen as a supportive tool for teachers in the whole-school move towards pedagogical improvement in the teaching of writing. Specifically, eleven of the twelve participants in this study reported that the WSBoW approach provided support to teachers of writing in various ways, such as:

a. By generating up-to-date data on student achievement in specific aspects of writing for all students in Years One to Six, to be used for planning, teaching and reporting purposes.

b. By giving teachers a framework outlining a learning progression for writing development which teachers perceived could assist them in providing effective, timely instruction for each of their students.

c. To assist in decision-making about grouping students for instruction instead of using whole-class lesson delivery.

d. By providing a more focused, whole-school approach to teaching writing, with increased accountability of teachers, keeping them ‘on track’.

e. By helping teachers to empower their students through effective feedback, goal setting and student reflection.

The WSBoW approach was introduced by the leadership team at the case study school to support an increasingly evidence-based approach to learning, as described in Appendix Five: The Whole-school Benchmarking of Writing Approach. Ten of the twelve participants saw the assessment process used in the WSBoW approach as a supportive assessment tool giving accurate, timely information about the level the students were working at in writing, assisting
them to group students for targeted teaching. Ten of the twelve (not exactly the same ten) participants reported using this student achievement data to guide programming and instruction in writing. Five of the twelve participants reported using the data gathered in the WSBoW approach to help them make decisions about grading and reporting of student progress in writing. Overall, each of the twelve participants, in some way indicated that their engagement in the WSBoW approach assisted them to employ an evidence-based approach to their key tasks of programming, teaching, assessing and reporting in the area of student writing.

The WSBoW approach was embedded in the Case Study School’s Collaborative Learning Model (see Appendix Six). In this document, the preferred method of grouping students for targeted instruction was outlined as “flexible grouping practice that signals targeted or differentiated instruction and student grouping for cooperative learning. Instruction is targeted to small groups rather than the traditional whole class” (Madden, 2013, p. 2). All of the participants reported using some level of targeted instruction in writing as a result of their implementation of the WSBoW approach. On analysis however, some participants were specific about targeting learning for individuals and groups based on the data while others were more focused on what the data told them about the whole group or class. It seemed that the teachers of Stage Two (Years Three and Four) and Stage Three (Years Five and Six) students found it easier to achieve targeted instruction in writing than did the teachers of lower year levels, which suggested that the WSBoW approach did not support teachers of Stage One students (Years One and Two) as well as it did those of higher grades. As NAPLAN is administered for the first time in Year Three, then every second year until Year Nine, the marking rubrics are usually applied to assessing student achievement above Year Two. Three participants made comment that the WSBoW approach required adjustments to improve its suitability for use with Stage One students, such as having a stage specific rubric to capture more effectively the achievement and improvement of the students over the year.

Half of the participants indicated that they valued the accountability the WSBoW approach had provided. They could see the benefits for students and teachers. Use of the words “rigorously” and “responsible” were used with the pronouns “us” and “we”. The use of these pronouns suggested that the approach made sure everyone committed to the whole-school approach and emphasised the value of the highly structured approach in improving pedagogy across the school through high expectations for teachers and students.
The specific nature of the criteria in the marking rubrics used in the WSBoW approach was valued by teachers, assisting them to complete key responsibilities such as programming, assessing and reporting. Teachers from all career stages reported this appreciation of the specific guidelines for teaching writing provided by the WSBoW approach. The pedagogy relating to how to teach writing provided another challenge for teachers, especially dealing with the personalisation of learning that was needed to respond to the rich data generated through the pre-testing process.

In addition to flexible grouping practices for targeted instruction, the WSBoW approach supported another of the key features of the Case Study School’s Collaborative Learning Model (see Appendix Six). This was to “maximise individual student learning by engaging them in a stimulating environment based on a process of goal setting and reflection” (Madden, 2013, p. 4). Participants clearly expressed the belief that the WSBoW approach had assisted them to empower students through effective feedback, shared goal-setting practices and targeted learning programs.

Being able to track improvement, or lack of it, in each student’s writing was described as a positive aspect of their experience by two-thirds of the participants. This tracking of achievement data was shared with students in a variety of ways. Half of the participants reported using a modified version of the rubric and marking rubric to provide feedback to students after the pre- and post-assessment tasks. All of these teachers worked with students in Stages Two and Three.

Furthermore, some teachers used this feedback to promote student self-reflection and goal setting, which is, as Hattie (2009, 2012) notes, a powerful pedagogical strategy. This adaptation was influenced by collaborations within PLTs and was reported more by the teachers working in the higher grades than in the early years. This focus on student reflection and goal setting directly evidenced the whole-school vision of targeted, collaborative learning and indicated that this process was embedded in the school, at least to some degree. Another pedagogical development described by participants was a more holistic approach to teaching writing, as opposed to a focus on particular text types. This change was influenced by the changing syllabus requirements associated with the implementation of the NSW English Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum (Board of Studies NSW, 2012) in 2014.
4.5.4 Focus on quality writing skills rather than text types

Emerging through the data analysis was the sense that PLTs were moving away from a rigid adherence to text types and focusing on the generic skills students need to be good writers. This more holistic view of teaching writing suggests that, as the teachers in PLTs became more comfortable with the WSBoW approach, they appeared to be more confident to move away from being overly restricted by the text type or teaching to the test. Innovations in this vein included allowing students more time to write freely and focusing on poetry and personal writing that may not fit into the formal NAPLAN marking rubric. The introduction, in 2014, of the *NSW English Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum* (Board of Studies NSW, 2012) provided an external stimulus for further change to the WSBoW approach. It was evident from the data analysis that teachers were questioning how the WSBoW approach needed to be adapted to fit in with state-mandated curriculum change.

This chapter has presented a rich, thick description of the participants’ experiences of the WSBoW approach, and the self-described influences on their pedagogy, as outlined by the two research questions used to guide this study. The final chapter presents the conclusions drawn from these findings.
Chapter 5  Conclusions

5.1 Introduction
This final chapter summarises the key findings and outlines the implications of these findings for research and school leaders, followed by recommendations for further research.

The implementation of the WSBoW approach at the case study school was a positive one for the majority of the participants in this study, primarily in their self-stated improvements in pedagogy when teaching writing. From the data analysis, it was clear from participants’ descriptions that the implementation of the WSBoW approach had significantly changed the way writing was taught at the case study school from 2012-2014. This teacher-reported change was part of a much larger whole-school focus on changing school culture in response to international, national and systemic influences, as described in Chapter 1: Identifying the Research Problem and Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature. The case study school, as part of its 2009-2013 strategic plan Personalising learning – pursuing excellence (Case Study School, 2008) had made significant moves towards developing a collaborative school culture focused on continuous school improvement, where teachers employed deprivatised and data-evidenced pedagogical practices. This change in culture began prior to the introduction of the WSBoW approach and continued during the three years of the implementation of the WSBoW approach examined in this study. The WSBoW approach was created and introduced into the school by the leadership team without specific consultation with staff, but because it was presented as part of wider whole-school change process, it appeared to have been accepted by teachers. Moreover, it was adapted in an organic way by teachers through a process of collaboration and distributed leadership. Substantive changes to the WSBoW approach over time resulted from this culture of collaboration and distributed leadership.

The WSBoW approach was implemented at the case study school as a response to the national, state and system focus on standardised testing to drive continuous school improvement. The school had committed to addressing this external pressure through collaborative, data-evidenced quality teaching practice (See Appendix Six: Case Study School Collaborative Learning Model.) It was decided by the leadership team to directly link the WSBoW approach to NAPLAN by requiring teachers to mark student writing samples using the NAPLAN marking rubrics for narrative and persuasive texts and a school-developed marking rubric based on the aforementioned NAPLAN guides, adapted for informative texts (see Appendix Seven). It was envisaged that, by the end of 2014, all rubrics and marking rubrics
used in the WSBoW approach would indicate agreed benchmarks for proficiency for each school year level, aligned with the NSW English Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum (Board of Studies NSW, 2012). At the time of analysis for this research, this was in the process of being completed. Nevertheless, the use of the same criteria descriptors as those used in NAPLAN provided a link to the standardised testing regime being used across Australia in Years Three, Five, Seven and Nine. This link was clearly recognised and valued by participants as they strove to develop collaborative, data-evidenced quality teaching practice within their PLTs.

Many of the experiences reported by the participants reflected what the literature indicates are the unintended consequences of high-stakes standardised testing regimes in Australia and internationally (Au, 2007; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Polesel et al., 2012; Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2014; Thompson, 2013). A positive and intended consequence of NAPLAN is that “it provides a focus or guide on literacy and numeracy learning” (Thompson, 2013, p. 70). The WSBoW approach was clearly seen by participants as a supportive pedagogical tool in their quest for improved writing achievement for all students. The specific nature of the WSBoW approach supported a wide range of teaching experience and self-reported skills in teaching writing.

Unintended consequences of standardised testing often quoted in the literature include a narrowing of the curriculum, a lack of deep, meaningful learning, and increased stress for teachers and students (Au, 2007; Brady, 2013; Gable & Lingard, 2013; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Polesel et al., 2012; Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2014; Thompson, 2013; Thompson & Cook, 2014). These three unintended consequences were clearly reflected in the findings of this study.

Firstly, participants’ criticisms of the WSBoW showed that the focus on one text type per term in the WSBoW approach, or even one type of text as in the new syllabus, narrowed the types of writing with which the students were gaining experience. This is also an artificial way to look at writing in terms of text types rather than writing for a purpose, a specific audience and tailoring the format of the text to suit this purpose. A student-centred learning approach, as espoused by the case study school in the Case Study School’s Collaborative Learning Model (Appendix Six), focuses on situating learning in a real-life context. It has been noted in the literature (Au, 2007; Thompson, 2013) that an over-emphasis on standardised testing regimes, such as NAPLAN, impact on teachers’ ability to provide rich, student-centred learning
experiences. The data analysis reflected this as an unintended consequence of the WSBoW approach and one which individual teachers and PLTs took measures to address outside the WSBoW approach guidelines.

The second unintended consequence of standardised testing, also offered by participants as a criticism of the WSBoW approach, is the lack of deep learning by students. This is supported by the problematic assertion that short-term learning is not retained once the test situation is over. This may indicate the need to look at student learning data over a significant length of time, for instance, a semester, rather than just five or six weeks, in order to make accurate judgements about deep, lasting learning. Related to lack of retention of students’ writing skills was the concern that little or no observable growth was achieved by some students. This leads into the aspect of the WSBoW approach that was initially a key part of the approach but was adjusted due to negative teacher reaction, namely the calculation of effect size in order to measure student growth and teacher influence on learning. Initially, data-evidenced teaching was a major goal of the WSBoW approach. Hattie’s (2009) point four coefficient was put forward to teachers as a benchmark of effective teaching. In response to a great deal of angst from teachers, this aspect of the WSBoW approach was removed from teachers’ view but continued to be collected and collated. The use of this data fell outside the parameters of this study. Suffice to say it remained in use as part of the larger whole-school improvement project but teachers were not involved in this.

The third unintended consequence listed above is that of increased teacher and student stress. The frequency and timing of the pre- and post-assessment tasks was a reported cause of stress for teachers and students. Teachers in this study reported a significant impact on their professional and private lives due to the time needed to mark the writing samples. Some participants described students being stressed by the frequency and the time-limited nature of the assessment tasks. Another cause of teacher stress was the difficulty of managing and acting upon the large amount of data generated through the WSBoW approach.

Benchmarking as a tool for school and teacher improvement was examined extensively in light of the current literature in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. The benchmarks for the WSBoW approach were not explicit, visually advertised or even completely decided upon. The potential for the WSBoW approach to be a more effective benchmarking program was obvious to participants who suggested small additions to the approach to improve benchmarking
capabilities in writing. Whilst benchmarking was valued by participants as a tool for teachers, there was considerable concern over its effect on student wellbeing. This was particularly aimed at students who may fall below the benchmark for their year level. Many participants’ comments related to how teachers should communicate information to students about their achievement in writing. Benchmarking was seen as a tool to assist teachers and students to set learning goals, which was identified as a positive strategy. Goal setting within the WSBoW approach implementation appeared, from the data gathered in this study, to be heavily teacher driven and based on the NAPLAN rubric.

5.2 Implications of key findings
The WSBoW approach was one part of a much larger, whole-school cultural shift, aimed at developing data-evidenced, quality teaching practices in a collaborative, deprivatised educational setting. This cultural shift had begun three years prior to the implementation of the WSBoW approach in the case study school, as part of the school’s 2009-2013 Strategic Plan Personalising learning – pursuing excellence (Case Study Primary School, 2008). Hence, the teachers were already engaged in collaborative, deprivatised teaching practices where PLTs worked together to plan for, teach, assess and report on student learning outcomes. On analysis, this cultural climate greatly supported teachers as they engaged with the WSBoW approach in the case study school. The teachers spoke of this school culture in ways that indicated the value they placed on teamwork, collaboration and sharing of ideas and resources. They also exhibited a shared language and cultural norms around this type of practice.

The WSBoW approach was one of the case study school’s responses to the national, state, systemic and international imperative for continuous school improvement. The global focus on standardised testing as a driver of continuous school improvement was one factor that led to the school’s development of the WSBoW approach. The use of marking rubrics based on the NAPLAN marking rubrics to assess student writing made an explicit link between national standardised testing and the WSBoW approach. Teachers reported that this link added legitimacy, structure and purpose to their engagement with the whole-school approach but it seemed this also led to the mirroring of some of the unintended consequences of standardised testing evident in the literature.
Because of the distributive (Leithwood et al., 2004) and transformational (Thoonen et al., 2011) leadership style at the case study school, the perceived negative and unintended consequences of the WSBoW approach had already begun to be addressed and it showed signs of continually evolving in the future. Despite a change of principal at the time of compiling this dissertation, the collaborative team-focused nature of the case study school indicated that the benefits of the WSBoW approach would continue to support data-evidenced, targeted teaching and learning in the area of writing. The implementation of the WSBoW approach as a sustained school-wide pedagogy points to the influence of school culture and leadership as keys to its success.

5.3 Recommendations for school leaders
For schools aiming to introduce a similar whole-school approach to evidence-based teaching, school culture would be an important factor to consider as a starting point. Schools are complex communities of stake-holders. Each school has its own identity and cultural norms. Programs such as the WSBoW approach do not exist in a cultural or pedagogical vacuum but are affected by, and in turn have an influence on, other programs and systems at work in the school. This study illustrates the ways in which the culture of the case study school had been deliberately developed to support data-evidenced, quality pedagogy in a collaborative, deprivatised educational setting. As described by participants in this study, such a culture is highly supportive of whole-school pedagogical change.

Participants in this study found the WSBoW approach to be a supportive tool in their teaching of writing. Use of NAPLAN marking rubrics in the WSBoW approach added a sense of legitimacy and rigour to the process for teachers. The assessment process was directly linked to the teaching and learning cycle by most participants in this study. For Australian schools, NAPLAN is a key indicator of school achievement for students, parents and teachers. Deliberately linking school-based assessment of writing to NAPLAN marking rubrics is one way to support school leaders and teachers to respond to the continuous school improvement agenda in the Australian educational context. Adequate and appropriate professional development in the use of assessment and data is an important aspect to consider for school leaders if using externally developed marking rubrics such as the NAPLAN examples.

School leaders need to be mindful of balancing the drive for improved learning achievement indicators for each student with the professional judgement of teachers regarding the learning
needs of students in their care (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2010; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). Standardised assessment procedures in this study were linked by participants to a sense of failure for students who were not achieving to an established benchmark for their school year level. Teachers in this study questioned whether the WSBoW approach adequately provided for these students or whether it only added to the stress of teachers and students in this situation. Pressure to consistently achieve growth of 0.4 effect size on each assessment cycle was an underlying cause of stress for some teachers in this study.

Teachers using the WSBoW approach reported a sense of constraint of their teaching in writing, especially an over-emphasis on teaching to a formula for each text type. The NSW English Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum (Board of Studies NSW, 2012) mandates a more general focus on the purpose of texts in three main areas: persuasive, imaginative and informative. School leaders implementing a whole-school approach to writing would need to consider this focus according to their own educational context. Teachers in this study searched for creative ways to enrich their writing programs within the WSBoW approach guidelines.

The leadership styles of the principal and leadership team at the case study school enabled the WSBoW approach to evolve and improve. Flexibility and adaptability were essential at all levels of the staff to allow this to happen.

5.4 Implications for further research
As with any research, other questions arose that deserve additional research. These are summarised here:

- What effect has the WSBoW approach had on (long term) student learning outcomes in writing at the case study school?

It became obvious during the research that the bigger question of the impact of the WSBoW approach on student learning outcomes had not been addressed in the research focus. While outside the parameters of the existing study, data could be gathered to show the impact of this approach in the learning outcomes of the school’s students in the area of writing. This data could be mapped over time, giving a more longitudinal picture of the veracity and validity of the WSBoW approach.
• What are the implications of state-mandated curriculum change on the WSBoW approach to teaching writing at the case study school?

In the context of changing curricula documentation, specifically the *NSW English Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum (Board of Studies NSW, 2012)*, there were changes in the ways in which teachers were teaching and assessing literacy learning. Whether these changes added depth and strength or exposed flaws in the efficacy of the WSBoW approach could be an area for further research.

• What place does benchmarking of student achievement have in other curriculum areas?

Given that this research has focused on the teaching of writing, just one component of a complex curriculum, it could be assumed that benchmarking could be applied to other curriculum areas. This then raised questions about how that could be done and again, whether there could be positive impacts for students and teachers in that process.

• What would be the outcomes for students and teachers if the WSBoW approach was applied to another school context?

The WSBoW approach was introduced by the leadership team at the case study school to support an increasingly evidence-based approach to learning, as described in Appendix Five: *The Whole-school Benchmarking of Writing Approach*. The outcomes of the approach at the case study school were found to have been influenced by the collaborative, deprivatised professional culture of the school, established through a particular style of leadership. Given the importance of school context to the outcome of the implementation of the approach, further research could be centred on the outcomes for students and teachers if the approach was applied to another school context.
References


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Appendices

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Appendix One: Participant Information Letter

Title of project: An investigation of the use of the Whole-School Benchmarking of Writing (WSBoW) approach in a primary school: Outcomes for teachers

Introduction
My name is Stephanie George, and I am conducting a research project as part of my Masters of Education degree at Southern Cross University under the supervision of Professor David Lynch and Dr Jenny Johnston. My research will investigate the outcomes for teachers when a whole-school teaching renewal process, the WSBoW approach, was introduced into a primary school (the case study school). More specifically, the research will explore, analyse and describe the teachers’ self-stated experiences as a result of their engagement with the WSBoW approach. I am inviting all teaching staff who teach writing at the case study school to participate in this study.

What this research involves
There are two phases to the data gathering process. In Phase One, all teaching staff who teach writing will be invited to provide simple demographic data and to indicate willingness to participate in an individual semi-structured interview via the Informed Consent Form. This form should take 5 minutes to complete. In Phase Two, 12 teachers will be invited to participate in semi-structured individual interviews. Interviews will be conducted individually and should take 40 minutes each. Interviewees will be invited to review my initial interpretations of the interviews in a one-page summary and to elaborate on the original statements. This checking process should take no more than 20 minutes.

Possible discomforts and risks
This study is considered to have minimal risk, and no discomfort is predicted to arise from your participation. However, if any distress or discomfort is experienced you are free to withdraw from the study with no negative consequences to yourself or questions asked. Your data will be removed from the data set.

Responsibilities of the researcher
Any personal information collected will be confidential and protected. Your name and any other identifying information will be removed for the reporting of this research. Semi-structured individual interviews will be conducted and digitally audio-recorded, then de-identified and transcribed before further analysis.

The data obtained will be used in a written research report (thesis), in accordance with the requirements of the Masters course. Data may also be published in a peer-reviewed academic journal. However, you and your school will not be able to be identified in the reporting of this data. All information and data collected will be held securely and confidentially by the researcher for a period of seven years.
Responsibilities of the participant
Your participation is entirely voluntary. It is anticipated that you will complete an online survey of approximately 20 minutes time and potentially engage in an individual interview about your engagement with the WSBoW approach to teaching writing. Should you wish to withdraw, you will be free to do so at any time. If you are feeling uncomfortable or wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so, and your data will be removed from the data set. Confidentiality of participants will be paramount with no direct reference to the individuals or the school in the reporting of data, results or in future publications. All data will be stored securely.

Consent
If you decide to participate in this study you will be asked to give informed consent by completing and signing the Informed Consent Form.

Inquiries
Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the following people:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Researcher</td>
<td>Stephanie George</td>
<td><a href="mailto:stgeorge@lism.catholic.edu.au">stgeorge@lism.catholic.edu.au</a></td>
<td>0481 586 577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Supervisor</td>
<td>Prof. David Lynch</td>
<td><a href="mailto:david.lynch@scu.edu.au">david.lynch@scu.edu.au</a></td>
<td>(02) 6659 3300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Dr Jenny Johnston</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jenny.johnston@scu.edu.au">jenny.johnston@scu.edu.au</a></td>
<td>(02) 6659 3067</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feedback
If you would like to receive feedback regarding the results of this study, please provide your email address in the feedback section of the Consent Form.

Ethical conduct
This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethic Committee at Southern Cross University. The approval number is ECN-14-129. Approval has also been granted by the Director of Schools, CSO Lismore.

If you have concerns about the ethical conduct of this research or the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Complaint Officer with the following contact details:
The Ethics Complaints Officer
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore NSW 2480
Email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated.

Yours sincerely,
Stephanie George

Professor David Lynch

Student Researcher

Principal Supervisor
Appendix Two: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Title of research project: An investigation of the use of the Whole-School Benchmarking of Writing (WSBoW) approach in a primary school: Outcomes for teachers.

Researcher: Stephanie George

Participants Name: (Please PRINT)

Please tick the boxes that apply, sign and date this form, and return to the researcher’s pigeonhole within one week of receiving it.

I agree to take part in the Southern Cross University research project specified above.  
Yes □ No □

I understand the information about my participation in the research project, provided to me by the researcher, and that it will require between 5 to 60 minutes of my time.  
Yes □ No □

I agree to answer questions asking me to provide my age, gender and teaching experience.  
Yes □ No □

I agree to complete an interview about my engagement with the WSBoW approach to teaching writing.  
Yes □ No □

I consent to digital audio-recording of the interview, which will remain confidential.  
Yes □ No □

I understand that my participation is voluntary.  
Yes □ No □

I understand that I can cease my participation at any time without negative consequences to me.  
Yes □ No □

I understand that any information that may identify me will be removed from my results at the time of analysis of any data.  
Yes □ No □

I understand that no identifying information will be disclosed or published.  
Yes □ No □

I understand that all information gathered in this research is confidential. It will be kept securely for seven years.  
Yes □ No □
I am aware that I can contact the researchers at any time with any queries. Their contact details are provided to me.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that this research project has been approved by the SCU Human Research Ethics Committee Approval number ECN-14-129.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant’s Name: ______________________

Participant’s Signature: ______________________  Date: _____________

☐ Please tick this box and provide your email or mailing address if you wish to receive a summary of the research results:

________________________________________________________________________

Demographic Data
Please complete the following questions

Years in teaching: 0-3 ☐ 4-7 ☐ 8-15 ☐ 16-23 ☐ 24-30 ☐ 31+ ☐

Your Age bracket: 20-24 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55+ ☐

Stages taught 2011-2014: ES1 – S1 ☐ S2 ☐ S3 ☐

Stages taught throughout teaching career: ES1 – S1 ☐ S2 ☐
Appendix Three: Ethics Approval Notification

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC)
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS SUB-COMMITTEE (HRESC)

NOTIFICATION

To: Professor David Lynch/Stephanie George/Jenny Johnston
School of Education
david.lynch@scu.edu.au; s.george.12@student.scu.edu.au; jenny.johnston@scu.edu.au

From: Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
Division of Research, R. Block

Date: 6 June 2014

Project name: An investigation of the use of the Whole-School Benchmarking of Writing (WSBoW) approach in a primary school: Outcomes for teachers.

Approval Number ECN-14-129

The Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee has established, in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research – Section 5/Processes of Research Governance and Ethical Review, a procedure for expedited review and ratification by a delegated authority of the HREC.

Thank you for your expedited ethics application, dated the 19 May. This has been considered by the Chair, HREC and will be approved once the following query has been answered.

Thank you for the clarification regarding the specific school - St Augustine’s Primary School in Coffs Harbour, and the email confirmation from the Principal of that school.

All ethics approvals are subject to mandatory conditions of approval. These must be noted by researchers as there is compliance and monitoring advice included in these conditions.

Ms Sue Kelly
HREC Administration
T: (02) 6626 9139
E: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

Professor Bill Boyd
Chair, HREC
E: william.boyd@scu.edu.au
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC)
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS SUB-COMMITTEE (HRESC)

STANDARD CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL FOR ALL ETHICALLY APPROVED RESEARCH PROJECTS

The following standard conditions of approval are mandatory for all research projects which have been approved by the HREC or a HRESC and have received an ethics approval number.

All reporting is to be submitted through the Human Research Ethics Office, either at Lismore, Coffs Harbour or Gold Coast. The email addresses are:

ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au
ethics.goldcoast@scu.edu.au
ethics.coffs@scu.edu.au

Forms for annual reports, renewals, completions and changes of protocol are available at the website:

Standard Conditions in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Statement) (NS).

1. Monitoring

NS 5.5.1 – 5.5.10

Responsibility for ensuring that research is reliably monitored lies with the institution under which the research is conducted. Mechanisms for monitoring can include:

(a) reports from researchers;
(b) reports from independent agencies (such as a data and safety monitoring board);
(c) review of adverse event reports;
(d) random inspections of research sites, data, or consent documentation; and
(e) interviews with research participants or other forms of feedback from them.

2. Approvals

(a) All ethics approvals are valid for 12 months unless specified otherwise. If research is continuing after 12 months, then the ethics approval MUST be renewed. Complete the Annual Report/Renewal form and send
to the ethics office.

(b) NS 5.5.5
The researcher's will **provide a report every 12 months** on the progress to date or outcome in the case of completed research including detail about:

- Maintenance and security of the records.
- Compliance with the approved proposal.
- Compliance with any conditions of approval.
- Changes of protocol to the research.

3. Reporting to the HREC

(c) The researchers will immediately notify the ethics office, on the appropriate form, **any change in protocol**. NS 5.5.3

(d) A **completion report**, on the appropriate form, must be forwarded to the ethics office.

(e) The researchers will immediately notify the ethics office about any circumstance that might affect ethical acceptance of the research protocol. NS 5.5.3

(f) The researchers will immediately notify the ethics office about any adverse events/incidences which have occurred to participants in their research. NS 5.5.3

2. Research conducted overseas
NS 4.8.1 – 4.8.21
Researchers conducting a study in a country other than Australia, need to be aware of any protocols for that country and ensure that they are followed ethically and with appropriate cultural sensitivity.

3. Participant Complaints
NS 5.6.1 – 5.6.7
*General information*
Institutions may receive complaints about researchers or the conduct of research, or about the conduct of a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) or other review body.

Complaints may be made by participants, researchers, staff of institutions, or others. All complaints should be handled promptly and sensitively. **All participants in research conducted by Southern Cross University should be advised of the above procedure and be given a copy of the contact details for the Complaints Officer. They should also be aware of the ethics approval number issued by the Human Research Ethics Committee.**

The following paragraph is to be included in any plain language statements for participants in research.
Complaints about the ethical conduct of this research should be addressed in writing to the following:

Ethics Complaints Officer
HREC
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore, NSW, 2480
Email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

All complaints are investigated fully and according to due process under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and this University. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.

Ms Sue Kelly
HREC Administration
Chair, HREC
T: (02) 6626 9139
E: william.boyd@scu.edu.au
E: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au
Appendix Four: Semi-structured Interview Question Guide

An investigation of the use of the *Whole-School Benchmarking of Writing (WSBoW)* approach in a primary school: outcomes for teachers.

This research will investigate the outcomes for teachers when a whole-school teaching renewal process, the WSBoW approach, was introduced into a primary school (the case study school). More specifically, the research will explore, analyse and describe the teachers’ self-stated experiences as a result of their engagement with the WSBoW approach.

Semi-structured interview questions (These questions are samples of possible questions that could arise after analysis of the survey responses. All questions are guides only as it is a semi-structured interview.)

**Meeting Place: School Meeting Room**

**Individual Interviews**

**Welcome:** Thank interviewee for participating and for agreeing to the recording of the interview.

**Briefly summarise the purpose of the interview and put the interviewee at ease by establishing rapport.**

**Guiding questions:**

1. Please tell me about your experience of the WSBoW approach at this school.

   **Content:**
   - Overall experience
   - Strengths and limitations
   - Personal successes and challenges
   - Intended outcomes of the approach for teachers
   - Perceived achievement of these outcomes for teachers
   - The common assessment rubric: strengths and limitations
   - Consistent teacher judgement

2. Please tell me how the WSBoW has influenced you?

   - Personalisation of student learning in writing
   - Other forms of assessment in writing
   - Understanding of benchmarking
   - Effect on teaching skill development
   - Collaboration in Professional Learning Teams

3. Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences with the WSBoW approach?

   **Thank you for participating in this interview.**
Appendix Five: The Whole-school Benchmarking of Writing (WSBoW) Approach

The Whole School Benchmarking of Writing Approach (WSBoW approach)
School implementation document

Rationale

The whole school benchmarking process developed at St Augustine’s School is a response to the current educational climate of continual school improvement and student-centred teaching and learning.

Building “a performance and development culture in all Australian schools” (AITSL, 2012, p. 2) is a key goal of the Australian Federal Government through the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). The Catholic Schools Office of the Diocese of Lismore has developed its own Contemporary Learning Framework and integrated this with the AITSL standards. St Augustine’s School staff has developed a School Teaching and Learning Framework, including the 8 essential elements of an effective lesson. Hattie (2009) highlights the role of the teacher as the most important school-based influence on student achievement. An essential and topical aspect of this process of teacher professional development is evaluating teaching strategies in light of student achievement data and planning for continual improvement of teaching and learning.

Working collaboratively in Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) where teachers are able to challenge and support each other is a key structure employed at this school. Flexible learning spaces and a team approach to planning, assessment and teaching have assisted in this deprivatisation process. The benchmarking of writing sits within these organisational structures.

Why benchmark writing achievement across the school?

The benchmarking initiative at St Augustine’s was introduced in 2012 and grew from several evidence-based catalysts:

- Data gathered from NAPLAN, school assessments and academic competitions revealed that the quality of student writing across the school was low in relation to state and national benchmarks.
- The principal, school leaders and teachers had observed that the quantity of writing that students were engaged in was also low, particularly substantive, rich writing opportunities which were challenging and engaging.
- It was observed by the principal and school leaders that there was an ‘ad hoc’ approach to data gathering and mapping of student progress in writing across the school.
It is essential that teachers have a clear idea of learning progressions within the content of what is being taught and learned so they can support learners in a meaningful and appropriate way with feedback and targeted learning and teaching. This is the key to personalised learning. It is envisaged that the whole-school benchmarking program will provide this global and sequential view for teachers to tap into.

Formative and summative assessment which generates and uses data to inform teaching and evaluate learning has assumed a central position in the current practice of educators and in the Australian Curriculum. This ‘data informed’ nature of teaching can have profound impacts on teaching practice.

Writing has an integral part to play in literacy and indeed, in holistic intellectual development. Rather than becoming less relevant in 21st Century education, it is through rich, relevant and engaging writing tasks that students will come to reading, talking and a host of other skills. As Sharratt and Fullan so eloquently put it:

As writers ourselves, we know the higher-order and metacognitive skills involved in writing that we are trying to express above in rich authentic tasks, in connecting cross-curricular content, and in emphasizing higher-order thinking skills that students must have to become 21st-century thinkers and problem solvers. At every turn, we model the moral imperative of establishing writing as the hallmark of not only a literate graduate but of a literate society. (Sharratt & Fullan, 2012, Kindle Locations 1920-1923)

**Keys to successful implementation of the benchmarking process**

Visible teaching and visible learning are key to successful learning as outlined in Hattie’s synthesis of meta-analyses (Hattie, 2009). Enabling students to “know what they know and what they do not know” (Hattie, 2009, p. 37) can be particularly motivating when they are also supported by teachers to move on in clearly delineated logical progressions. Appropriate use of benchmarking tools could assist teachers to clearly understand these progressions. Without this understanding, visible teaching is impossible. Students also need to engage with the benchmarking process and the success criteria to obtain maximum learning outcomes.

Another aspect of benchmarking student achievement is that it can lead to a focus on achieving standards in a predetermined timeframe. External pressure can also be brought to bear when this goal is not achieved, for a variety of reasons. When working with standards, it is important to reach benchmarks with a high level of fluency at that level of achievement. This idea impacts on teacher judgement and standards when assessing student work. A high degree of fluency on a topic allows learners to progress
to the next step in their learning. The ability to think deeply about the process of the task and make informed decisions is a sign that the student is approaching 'expert status' (Hattie, 2009, p. 30). This is a warning to educators not to deny learners the time it takes to achieve such fluency, in the race to achieve agreed benchmarks by a certain time. Pressure can be brought to bear on educators from many stakeholders but quality over quantity or speed is essential to deep, enduring learning and consistent progress.

School culture and climate as described by Hattie is driven by school personnel and leadership teams who create an environment “where teachers can feel safe to learn, re-learn, and explore their own teaching knowledge and understanding” (Hattie, 2009, p. 37). Essential to this process is a school climate of trust and security which values the processes of innovation and struggle. Mistakes and wrong turns are seen as learning opportunities if followed by critical and collaborative reflection based on the key questions. The benchmarks guide the reflection.

Deprivatisation of teaching engages teachers in challenging, demanding work that involves “collaboratively scrutinizing how they apply formal scoring procedures, and how these procedures intersect with other indexes they rely on to make judgements. Integral to the process would be individual teacher’s attempts to confront their own assumptions and values about what constitutes effective judgement in schooling” (Wyatt-Smith & Castleton, 2005, p. 151). This viewpoint on school culture and whole-of-school innovation and change, also has relevance to the moderation process and the challenges of promoting consistent teacher judgement. This is a question that PLTs need to address on a regular basis.

School improvement is most likely to be sustainable and successful when supported by a school system that demonstrates commitment to the success of every child, in every class, in every school within that system. In their work with Canadian and international schools and school systems, Sharratt & Fullan (2012) are driven by the faces of the individual students represented by the data, no matter how small or large the pool of data is. They believe that teachers are more motivated by the emotional attachment to the students in their care than the faceless statistics generated by assessment tools. However, they passionately argue for the essential role of using data effectively to ensure every student achieves to a high standard, particularly in the essential core literacy and numeracy standards.

Hattie’s extensive work aims to identify key influences on student learning and academic achievement. An essential and topical aspect of this process is evaluating the strategies used by individual teachers in light of student achievement data. The major part of this story relates to the power of directed teaching, enhancing what happens next (through feedback and monitoring) to inform the teacher about the success or
failure of their teaching, and to provide a method to evaluate the relative efficacy of different influences that teachers use. (Hattie, 2009, p. 6)

Recently, however, theorists have warned against the obsession for data. Put bluntly, it is important to be “evidence-informed, not data-driven.” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 171) A further shortfall of the relentless use of data walls and spreadsheets is the common focus on a deficit view of education, on who is falling behind. “When data are used to promote progress for all and not only to track those who might be falling behind, this benefits learning and achievement for all students and strengthens feelings of professional success (thereby building yet more professional capital and confidence as well)” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 172).

**Effect size**

Hattie (2009) makes the case that, to be effective as teachers and to see real change in students, educators need to employ strategies that result in an effect size of $d = 0.40$ or greater. He goes on to discuss and elaborate on scores of interventions used in schools, whilst synthesising meta-analyses to come up with an effect size for each type of intervention. An effect size of greater than $d = 0.40$ is considered above average and greater than $d = 0.60$ is excellent. Hence, $d = 0.40$ becomes a benchmarking tool to assess teaching strategies in the learning program. Anything less than this effect size can be considered below par as an effective strategy. It has some effect but there are many more powerful strategies that could be employed. It is these powerful strategies that educators and educational leaders must focus on to strive for excellence.

Hattie’s (2009) synthesis of meta-analyses found an effect size of $d = 0.40$ for writing programs. He summarises the findings of Graham and Perin (2007) who completed the largest study of writing programs to date and reports that:

They recommended that it is powerful to teach strategies for planning, revising, and editing compositions ($d = 0.82$), particularly if the students are struggling writers. Effect sizes for various strategies were: strategies for summarizing reading material ($d = 0.82$), working together to plan, draft, revise, and edit ($d = 0.75$), setting clear and specific goals for what students are to accomplish with their writing product ($d = 0.70$), using word processing ($d = 0.55$), and teaching students strategies to write increasingly complex sentences ($d = 0.50$). The results show the power of teaching students the processes and strategies involved in writing, structuring the teaching of writing by having students work together in an organized fashion, and of setting clear and specific goals, especially as to the purpose of each piece of writing. Hattie (2009, p. 142)

**Developing consistency across the school years to facilitate the gradual release of responsibility from teacher to learner**
A whole-of-school approach to any area of learning, but in particular, literacy and numeracy development, can provide this awareness of progression and deep, ongoing knowledge of each learner. Regular, scaffolded sampling of data is a feature of this approach. Research-based interventions used consistently by all teachers for all students have been proven to have a marked impact on positive student growth in standardised and school-based assessments (Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). A key aim of a successful whole-of-school approach is to facilitate the gradual release of responsibility for learning from the teacher to the learner. By scaffolding for greater consistency across years, teachers and classrooms, this release is more likely to occur as learners are able to draw on routines, habits of mind and content valued throughout their school learning years (Hattie, 2009).

In setting up a whole-school writing program based on cyclic formative and summative assessment such an opportunity for tracking students’ performance over time will likely help to guide the setting of learning goals by students and teachers.

**Overview of the benchmarking program**

Each term, the cohort program focuses on a particular text type. # From 2014, this will change to ‘type of text’ in line with the NSW Syllabuses for the Australian Curriculum. (See below).

Assessment tasks are marked using a rubric based on the NAPLAN rubrics (ACARA). These rubrics are consistent from Years One-Six*. NAPLAN rubrics focus on narrative and persuasive texts only, so minor adjustments are needed to use with other text types (types of text).

*Kindergarten students are not formally assessed using this rubric.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Focus: Persuasive Writing (Exposition)</td>
<td>Focus: Persuasive Writing (Exposition)</td>
<td>Focus: Cohort Choice Yr 1: Yr 2: Yr 3: Persuasive Texts Yr 4: Yr 5: Yr 6:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Focus: Information Report</td>
<td>Focus: Recount</td>
<td>Focus: Cohort Choice Yr 1: Yr 2: Yr 3: Imaginative Texts Yr 4: Yr 5: Yr 6:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Focus: Narrative</td>
<td>Focus: Cohort choice Yr 1: Information report Yr 2: Information report Yr 3: Narrative Yr 4: Narrative</td>
<td>Focus:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Focus: Explanation</td>
<td>Focus: Cohort choice</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yr 5</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Yr 1: Narrative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yr 2: Narrative</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yr 3: Recount</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yr 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yr 4: Explanation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yr 5: Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yr 6: Narrative</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. A pre-assessment task is administered early in the term, before Week 3.
2. The writing samples are marked using the appropriate rubric (see below).
3. The marks are collated on a spreadsheet and handed in to the Office.
4. Whole school data is kept in a central location by the Principal.
5. Differentiated teaching programs are developed to address the specific needs of students. Decisions about program design, feedback to students and student groupings are the responsibility of cohort teaching teams but must be based on the data gathered from the pre-assessment task.
6. A post-assessment task (same text type but different stimulus) is administered in Week 8 of the term.
7. The marks are collated on a spreadsheet and handed in to the Office.

**Additional guidelines**

- By Year Six, students should be taking a significant role in setting, planning for and reflecting on learning goals in their writing. This needs to be a progressive shift throughout the years and will require scaffolding by teachers at all year levels.
- Teachers will usually choose to focus on three or four specific areas of the writing process (guided by the marking rubric) for the term. It is important that students and teachers keep sight of the purpose, audience and format of the writing process as a whole while focusing on specific skills and elements.
- Care needs to be taken to ensure the writing program remains connected to the wider learning program including cross curricular links and that students are given varied and rich opportunities to write and to publish their writing for a variety of audiences.
- By the end of 2014, it is planned that all rubrics and marking rubrics used in the benchmarking program will indicate agreed benchmarks for each Year Level.

**Types of texts**

Classifications according to the particular purposes texts are designed to achieve. These purposes influence the characteristic features the texts employ. In general, texts can be classified as belonging to one of three types (imaginative, informative or persuasive), although it is acknowledged that these distinctions are neither static nor watertight and particular texts can belong to more than one category.
• *Imaginative texts* – texts that represent ideas, feelings and mental images in words or visual images. An imaginative text might use metaphor to translate ideas and feelings into a form that can be communicated effectively to an audience. Imaginative texts also make new connections between established ideas or widely recognised experiences in order to create new ideas and images. Imaginative texts are characterised by originality, freshness and insight. These texts include novels, traditional tales, poetry, stories, plays, fiction for young adults and children, including picture books and multimodal texts such as film.

• *Informative texts* – texts whose primary purpose is to provide information through explanation, description, argument, analysis, ordering and presentation of evidence and procedures. These texts include reports, explanations and descriptions of natural phenomena, recounts of events, instructions and directions, rules and laws, news bulletins and articles, websites and text analyses. They include texts which are valued for their informative content, as a store of knowledge and for their value as part of everyday life.

• *Persuasive texts* – texts whose primary purpose is to put forward a point of view and persuade a reader, viewer or listener. They form a significant part of modern communication in both print and digital environments. Persuasive texts seek to convince the responder of the strength of an argument or point of view through information, judicious use of evidence, construction of argument, critical analysis and the use of rhetorical, figurative and emotive language. They include student essays, debates, arguments, discussions, polemics, advertising, propaganda, influential essays and articles. Persuasive texts may be written, spoken, visual or multimodal.
Appendix Six: Case Study School Collaborative Learning Model

Case Study School Collaborative Learning Model

School Implementation Document

Preamble

We cannot know for sure what knowledge our students will need to best prepare them for the future. What we do know however is that they will need to become life-long learners, able to adapt to the future changes which will inevitably have an impact on their lives. Teaching students how to learn is now more important than teaching them what to learn. Students should be developing thinking processes critical for the information age, which enable them to know how to access the knowledge required, and more importantly, how to evaluate the accuracy of the source and the knowledge itself.

Background

The implementation of the 2009-2013 strategic plan has enabled the school to cater for the needs of the 21st century learner and teachers through a culture of personalized learning enabled through collaborative planning (involving class teachers, learning support teachers, teacher librarian, leadership team members, teacher assistants) and coaching-supported teaching in flexible open plan environments.

Personalised learning enabled through the collaborative teacher planning and support approach in flexible open plan environments is the focus of the school’s innovative learning environment. Student personalised learning is strongly supported by teacher coaching and goal setting.

Prior to the innovation, the school was a fairly traditionally structured school consisting of teachers working in isolation in individual classrooms. While team planning existed, teaching was generally undertaken individually.

Principal led a review of curriculum provision for 21st century learners through extensive professional learning and analysis of school data.

The Case Study School Collaborative Learning Model is based on the belief that improved student learning can be achieved through personalising learning. From the outset this begins with improving contemporary teaching practice. This is influenced by reflective conversation within teacher learning communities and by deprivatised practice. Deprivatised practice is the only professional community domain that influences flexible grouping practice. The findings of the school’s 2011 In-house Inquiry (Thornton, Phelps, & Graham, 2011) indicate:
• the power of collaborative inquiry to change how teachers teach and
• the necessity of collaborative inquiry to move away from the traditional teacher centred practice (Madden, 2010).

A key aspect of the *Case Study School Collaborative Learning Model* focuses on the students’ metacognitive development. If students are to develop as independent learners they must reflect on their own progress and look at what they can learn from what they have accomplished, for reflection is the key to metacognition.

Reflection is being able to stand back, to think about what has been done well, to identify difficulties, and to focus on areas for improvement (Wenrich et al., 2011).

The *Case Study School Collaborative Learning Model* has been developed in response to both research into how children learn in today’s world and the evolution of the internet paradigm (Treadwell, 2008)

The *Case Study School Collaborative Learning Model* was strongly influenced by the work Mark Treadwell (Treadwell, 2011). Reflection encourages students to think about their own thinking. It develops their ability to know how to think, and not simply what to think. Where students are able to reflect on their current strengths and weaknesses, they are in a strong position to set their own future learning goals.

There is an expectation that all students at the school are able to ‘set learning goals and reflect on their progress’ to ensure they become independent learners.

The case study school’s innovation has been to engage students and teachers in renewed roles of what it means to be a learner and what it means to be a teacher. This has involved changes to the ways that students and teachers engage with the processes of schooling.

Instruction at the school is conceptualized in three ways:

1. flexible grouping practice that signals targeted or differentiated instruction and student grouping for cooperative learning. Instruction is targeted to small groups rather than the tradition whole class;

2. standard contemporary practice in which teachers organize instruction around the Case Study School’s “Elements of an effective lesson” strategy in a rich learning environment, and

3. focused instruction which combines teacher guided instruction with opportunities for
students to explore topics of interest, via the school units of inquiry (ie. Learning Modules using the Guided Inquiry framework).

Pre- and post- test designs are widely used for the purpose of comparing groups or measuring change as a result of a specific intervention or teaching strategy. These tests occur regularly to determine the acquisition of learning. From the pre-test students learning needs are identified with regards to a specific concept or skill and planning for the teaching of that concept is undertaken collaboratively by the team of teachers in the cohort.

The school has been strategic in building and empowering autonomous teams of staff in each professional learning team (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010).

The introduced approach to personalised learning, enabled through coaching-supported team teaching in flexible open plan environments at the school, can be described as having passed through the design, transition phases, and consolidation phases and to have entered the sustained phase (Blackmore, Bateman, Loughlin, O’Mara, & Aranda, 2010). This reflects the commitment and capacity of the school community to embed the innovation within the school culture.

Student engagement in learning and catering for 21st century learners was the original motivation for whole school cultural change. This is an ongoing concern with improvement considered a continual and iterative process. Chief strategies within the innovation include promoting student agency through goal setting, monitoring and personalised learning which includes development of self-management and interpersonal skills. These have resulted in a changed role of student. Feedback from students continues to be positive and student achievement continues to track positively. Students have avenues for voicing concerns and mechanisms are in place for tackling student concerns.

The implementation of the Case Study School Collaborative Learning Model has required changes to the role of teacher. Teachers are now learning mentors to students, sharing responsibility for planning and implementation of workshops and student assessment with a team of teachers. They conduct weekly individual student assessments/conferences to discuss and revise learning goals. Teachers are also learners as the Case Study School Collaborative Learning Model is deployed in supporting and developing teachers so that the ethos of personalised learning is enacted and sustained. Within an autonomous, self-managed teaming environment, curriculum coaching, specifically through the role of a leader of pedagogy was put in place to support teachers with change.
Conclusion

The school is a very supportive community committed to personalising learning for students in order to best prepare them for the future. Staff members work to maximise individual student learning by engaging them in a stimulating environment based on a process of goal setting and reflection.

References


Appendix Seven: WSBoW Approach Marking Rubrics

There were three marking rubrics developed for use by teachers in the WSBoW approach. All three were based on the NAPLAN writing marking rubrics for narrative texts (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010) and persuasive texts (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012b). The informative text rubric was adapted from these two documents by the school leadership team.
**Marking rubric - Persuasive texts**

*Persuasive texts* – texts whose primary purpose is to put forward a point of view and persuade a reader, viewer or listener. They form a significant part of modern communication in both print and digital environments. Persuasive texts seek to convince the responder of the strength of an argument or point of view through information, judicious use of evidence, construction of argument, critical analysis and the use of rhetorical, figurative and emotive language. They include student essay, debates, arguments, discussions, polemics, advertising, propaganda, influential essays, and articles. Persuasive texts may be written, spoken, visual or multimodal.

1. **AUDIENCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbols or drawings which have the intention of conveying meaning</td>
<td>Responds to audience needs is limited</td>
<td>Shows basic awareness of audience expectations through attempting to orient the reader</td>
<td>Orients the reader – an internally consistent persuasive text that attempts to support the reader by developing a shared understanding of context</td>
<td>Supports reader understanding AND Begins to engage and persuade reader through language choices</td>
<td>Supports, engages and persuades the reader through deliberate language choices and persuasive techniques</td>
<td>Controls writer/reader relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text contains simple written content</td>
<td>-text is very short OR -a longer text (more than one sentence) where meaning is difficult to access OR -copied stimulus material, including prompt topic</td>
<td>Provides some information to support reader understanding</td>
<td>-text may be short but is easily read -reader may need to fill gaps in information</td>
<td>-contains sufficient information for the reader to follow the text fairly easily</td>
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**Additional Information (for 4, 5, 6 above)**

- Writer’s choices may -create an appropriate relationship with reader (*e.g. polite, formal, social distance, personal connection*)
- reveal values and attitudes
- persuade through control of tenor
- appeal to reason, emotions and/or cultural values
- subvert expectations (*challenge reader’s values*)
- acknowledge wider audience

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### 2. TEXT STRUCTURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>No evidence of any structural components of a persuasive text. - symbols or drawings - inappropriate genre, eg narrative, description, recount, procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Minimal evidence of persuasive structure - structural components not clearly identifiable OR - one component only, eg an introduction or body Text may be - a statement such as an opinion and/or reason (may be followed by recount or description) - a list of statements or beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Text contains two clearly identifiable structural components OR All components are present but weak - introduction or conclusion are clearly differentiated from the body - often presents as a more developed body with underdeveloped introduction and conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Text contains an introduction, a body and conclusion OR Detailed longer text with two developed components and one weaker component - structural components are developed - body is developed with reasons and supporting evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Coherent, controlled and complete argument All components are well developed - introduction with clear position statement AND - body with reasons and detailed supporting evidence AND - conclusion that reinforces the writer’s position - conclusion may reflect on issues raised and/or recommend action</td>
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### 3. IDEAS

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<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>No evidence or insufficient evidence - symbols or drawings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Text contains one idea OR Ideas appear unrelated to each other OR Ideas are unrelated to topic on prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>One idea with simple elaboration OR Ideas are few and related but not elaborated OR Many simple ideas that are related but not elaborated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ideas are supported with some elaboration OR Many unelaborated ideas that relate plausibly to argument (four or more) OR One idea with more developed elaboration - may also contain ineffective or unrelated ideas - may be assertions/opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ideas are elaborated and contribute effectively to the writer’s position Ideas may include - benefits to the whole group (more than just personal) - reflection on the wider world/universal issues Ideas may be elaborated by, e.g. - a range of issues both for and against the stated position - a refutation of other positions or opinions - explaining cause and effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ideas are generated, selected and crafted to be highly persuasive Ideas may include - benefits to the whole group (more than just personal) - reflection on the wider world/universal issues Ideas may be elaborated by, e.g. - a range of issues both for and against the stated position - a refutation of other positions or opinions - explaining cause and effect</td>
</tr>
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### 4. PERSUASIVE DEVICES

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<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No evidence or insufficient evidence</td>
<td>Uses a statement or statements of personal opinion OR Uses one or two instances of persuasive devices (may be same type) -opinion may appear confused or contradictory -uses only simple devices (I think...very, very) -I reckon...should...because forms one instance of a persuasive device</td>
<td>Uses three or more instances of persuasive devices that support the writer’s position (at least two types) May have more devices than required but these are ineffective</td>
<td>Uses some devices that persuade Use is effective but not sustained (may also include some ineffective use)</td>
<td>Sustained and effective use of persuasive devices There are many devices that can be used to persuade a reader -effective devices are appropriate to the style of argument and many appeal to one or more of the reader’s reason, values or emotions</td>
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### 5. VOCABULARY

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbols or drawings</td>
<td>Very short script Few content words</td>
<td>Mostly simple words May include two or three precise words or word groups</td>
<td>Four or more precise words or word groups</td>
<td>Sustained and consistent use of precise words and word groups that enhance the meaning (may be some inappropriate or inaccurate word choices)</td>
<td>A range of precise and effective words and phrases used in a fluent and articulate manner Language choice is well matched to style of argument</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Information (applies to 2 above)
- single nouns: water, award, house, reason, news, people, world
- simple noun groups: a very helpful man, a tin cage, television programs
- single verbs: like, run, look, need, think, played
- simple verb groups: did it the proper way, looked around the room
- adjectives and adverbs: cold, always, really, very, friendly, rich
- simple comparisons: as much as she can, the best teacher I ever had, one of the fastest

Additional Information (applies to 3, 4, and 5 above)
- single precise words: citizen, urge, budget, consider, solution, protect, supportive, research
- modal adjectives and adverbs: Ultimate, certain, extreme, possibly, definitely, rarely
- precise word groups: duty of care, quick-minded person, a positive impact on society
- modal groups: it would seem that, it is unlikely that
- technical: habitat, life expectancy, politician, global warning, financial crisis
- nominalisations: probability, likelihood, short sightedness
- figurative language, e.g. alliteration, metaphor, simile, personification
### 6. COHESION

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbols or drawings</td>
<td>Links are missing or incorrect</td>
<td>Some correct links between sentences (do not penalise for poor punctuation)</td>
<td>Controlled use of cohesive devices supports reader understanding</td>
<td>A range of cohesive devices is used correctly and deliberately to enhance reading and support underlying relationships</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short script</td>
<td>Most referring words are accurate OR Longer text with cohesion controlled only in parts</td>
<td>Meaning is clear on first reading and text flows well in a sustained piece of writing</td>
<td>An extended, highly cohesive piece of writing showing continuity of ideas and tightly linked sections of text</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Often confusing for the reader</td>
<td>Reader may occasionally need to re-read and provide their own links to clarify meaning. May use</td>
<td>May use</td>
<td>-word associations, e.g. synonyms:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-safe haven/habitat/sanctuary/enclosure collocation black market/mistreatment/unethical</td>
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<td>-other connectives: however, although, therefore, additionally, instead, even though, finally, in saying this</td>
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<td></td>
<td>There may be occasional lapses in referring words that track plural nouns, e.g. animals...it</td>
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### 7. PARAGRAPHING

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No correct use of paragraphing.</td>
<td>Writing is organised into paragraphs that are mainly focused on one idea or set of like ideas to assist the reader to digest chunks of text.</td>
<td>All paragraphs are focused on one idea or set of like ideas</td>
<td>Paraphrasing supports argument paragraphs are ordered and cumulatively build argument across text</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-a script may be a block of text -may be random breaks -may be a new line for every sentence (where break is not used to separate ideas)</td>
<td>Contains at least one correct paragraph break -ideas are separated (paragraphs may contain some unrelated ideas) -paragraphs may be used to separate the body from the introduction and/or conclusion (two or three paragraphs)</td>
<td>-paragraphs are deliberately structured to pace and direct the reader’s attention -single sentence may be used as a final comment for emphasis</td>
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<td>At least one paragraph is logically constructed and contains a topic sentence and supporting detail</td>
<td>Paragrapghs are mostly correct -not all topic sentences are successful -body needs at least two paragraphs -may use an extended one-sentence paragraph that contains an elaborated idea</td>
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<td>Paragraphs are ordered and cumulatively build argument across text</td>
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### 8. SENTENCE STRUCTURE

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<tr>
<td>No evidence of sentences - drawings, symbols, a list of words, text fragments</td>
<td>Some correct formation of sentences some meaning can be construed - in general, control is very limited - very short script (one sentence) - most sentences contain the same basic structures - may be overuse of the conversational 'and' or 'then'</td>
<td>Correct sentences are mostly simple and/or compound sentences Meaning is predominantly clear - a short description that consists only of correct complex sentences (where there are no simple sentences) - text may include complex sentences that use one basic structure (two, if one is a projected clause) - two or more correct sentences required</td>
<td>Most simple and compound sentences are correct AND some complex sentences are correct Meaning is predominantly clear - simple sentences may show some extension - experiments with basic structures in complex sentences: requires two or more types (three or more, if one is a projected clause) - four or more correct sentences required</td>
<td>Most simple, compound and complex sentences are correct OR All simple, compound and complex sentences are correct but do not demonstrate variety Meaning is clear. - more routine use and greater control of elaborating clauses and phrases in simple, compound and complex sentences - allow for an occasional minor error - usually requires a sustained piece of writing</td>
<td>Sentences correct (allow for an occasional error in more sophisticated structures) Demonstrates variety meaning is clear and sentences enhance meaning Shows control over a range of different structures (quantity, quality and variety) VARIETY - clause types and patterns (verbless, adjectival, adverbial, multiple, non-finite) - dependent clause position - length and rhythm - increased elaboration and extension - stylistically appropriate choices</td>
<td>All sentences correct (allow for occasional slip, e.g. a missing word) Writing contains controlled and well-developed sentences that express precise meaning and are consistently effective Shows control over a range of different structures (quantity, quality and variety) VARIETY - clause types and patterns (verbless, adjectival, adverbial, multiple, non-finite) - dependent clause position - length and rhythm - increased elaboration and extension - stylistically appropriate choices</td>
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### 9. PUNCTUATION

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<tr>
<td>No evidence of correct punctuation</td>
<td>Correct use of capital letters to start sentences OR full stops to end sentences (at least one correct sentence marker) <em>Punctuation is minimal and of little assistance to the reader.</em></td>
<td>Some correct use of sentence level punctuation (at least two accurately punctuated sentences -beginning and end) OR One correctly punctuated sentence AND some other punctuated correct where it is required (refer to list in additional information) <em>Provides some markers to assist reading</em></td>
<td>Sentence level punctuation mostly correct (minimum of 80% of five sentences punctuated correctly) AND some other correct punctuation(two or more different examples of other punctuation) OR accurate sentence punctuation with correct noun capitalisation and no stray capitals, nothing else used (four or more sentences) <em>Provides adequate markers to assist reading</em></td>
<td>All sentence punctuation correct (no stray capitals) AND Mostly correct use of other punctuation, including noun capitalisation <em>Provides accurate markers to enable smooth and efficient reading.</em></td>
<td>Writing contains accurate use of all applicable punctuation <em>Provides precise markers to pace and control reading of the text</em></td>
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</table>

#### Additional Information (applies to all the above 0-5)

- Sentence punctuation includes:
  - capital letters to begin sentences
  - full stops, question marks and exclamation marks to end sentences

- Other punctuation includes:
  - commas in lists
  - commas to mark clauses/phrases
  - apostrophes for contractions
  - apostrophes to possession
  - capital letters and commas used within quotation marks
  - quotation marks for text extracts, highlighted words and words used with ironic emphasis (‘sneer’ quotes)
  - brackets and dashes
  - colons and semicolons
  - points of ellipsis

- Noun capitalisation includes:
  - first names and surnames; titles: Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms etc.
  - places names: Paris, Italy
  - institution names: Valley High
  - days of week, months of year
  - street names: Ord St
  - book and film titles
  - holidays: Easter, Ramadan; historic events: World War II
## 10. SPELLING

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<tr>
<td>No conventional spelling</td>
<td>Few examples of conventional spelling Limited evidence (less than 20 words written)</td>
<td>Correct spelling of -most simple words -some common words (at least two) errors evident in common words</td>
<td>Correct spelling of -most simple words -most common words (at least 20)</td>
<td>Correct spelling of -simple words -most common words -some difficult words (at least two) Incorrect difficult words do not outnumber correct difficult words</td>
<td>Correct spelling of -simple words -most common words -at least 10 difficult words Incorrect difficult words do not outnumber correct difficult words</td>
<td>Correct spelling of all words AND at least 10 difficult words and some challenging words OR at least 15 difficult words if no challenging words allow for a very occasional minor slip (one or two)</td>
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### Additional Information

#### Simple words
- words with two letters (an, be, it, on, up, my)
- single-syllable words with:
  - short vowel sounds (cat, men, fit, not, fun)
  - consonant digraphs (shop, thin, much, chips)
  - consonant blends (drop, clap, grab, bring, must, help, left)
  - double final consonants (egg, will, less)
  - high frequency (all, day, feet, food, you, park, bird, her, good, for, how, our)
  - high frequency short two-syllable words (into, undo, going)

#### Common words
- Single-syllable words with:
  - Two two-consonant blends and/or digraphs (crack, speech, broom, drift)
  - Three consonant blends (stretch, catch)
  - Common long vowels (sail, again, away, mean, light, fly, shiny, broke, only, close, hurt, use, chair)
  - Multi-syllabic words with even stress patterns (litter, plastic, between)
  - Common homophones (too/two, there/their, write/right, hear/here, brake/break)
  - Suffixes that don’t change the base word (jumped, sadly, adults, happening)
  - Common words with silent letters (know, wrang, comb)
  - Single-syllable words ending in ould, ey, ough
  - Most rule-driven words: drop e, double letter, change y to i (having, spitting, heavier, easily)

#### Difficult words
- Uneven stress patterns in multisyllabic words (chocolate, mineral)
- Uncommon vowel patterns (drought, hygiene)
- Difficult subject-specific content words (disease, habitat, predator)
- Difficult homophones (practice/practise, board/bored)
- Suffixes where base word changes (prefer/preferred, relate/relation)
- Consonant alternation patterns (confident/confidence)
- Many three and four syllable words (invisible, organise, community)
- Multi-syllabic words ending in tion, sion, ture, ible/able, ent/ant, ful, el/al, elly/ally, gle (supervision, furniture, powerful, sentinel, brutally, rectangle)

#### Challenging words
- Unusual consonant patterns (guarantee)
- Longer words with unstressed syllables (responsibility)
- Foreign words (lieutenant, nonchalant)
- Suffixes to words ending in e, c, or l (physically, changeable, mathematician)
**Marking rubric – Imaginative texts**

- *Imaginative texts* – texts that represent ideas, feelings and mental images in words or visual images. An imaginative text might use metaphor to translate ideas and feelings into a form that can be communicated effectively to an audience. Imaginative texts also make new connections between established ideas or widely recognised experiences in order to create new ideas and images. Imaginative texts are characterised by originality, freshness and insight. These texts include novels, traditional tales, poetry, stories, plays, fiction for young adults and children, including picture books and multimodal texts such as film.

1. **AUDIENCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbols or drawings which have the intention of conveying meaning</th>
<th>Contains some simple written content</th>
<th>Shows awareness of basic audience expectations through the use of simple narrative markers</th>
<th>An internally consistent text that attempts to support the reader by developing a shared understanding of context</th>
<th>Supports reader understanding</th>
<th>Attempts to engage the reader</th>
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### 0
- Contains some simple written content
- Shows awareness of basic audience expectations through the use of simple narrative markers
- Simple narrative markers may include:
  - Simple titles
  - Formulaic story opening: *Long, long ago* ...
  - *Once a boy was walking when* ...
  - Description of people or places

### 1
- Contains some simpleWritten content
- Shows awareness of basic audience expectations through the use of simple narrative markers
- Simple narrative markers may include:
  - Simple titles
  - Formulaic story opening: *Long, long ago* ...
  - *Once a boy was walking when* ...
  - Description of people or places

### 2
- Shows awareness of basic audience expectations through the use of simple narrative markers
- Simple narrative markers may include:
  - Simple titles
  - Formulaic story opening: *Long, long ago* ...
  - *Once a boy was walking when* ...
  - Description of people or places

### 3
- An internally consistent text that attempts to support the reader by developing a shared understanding of context
- Contains sufficient information for the reader to follow the story fairly easily
- Narrative devices may include:
  - Fantasy, humour, suspense
  - Sub-genre styles (eg satire, boys' own, chick lit)
  - Intertextual references
  - Language Choice may:
    - Control writer/reader relationship
    - Reveal values and attitudes
    - Establish narrator stance
    - Subvert expectations
    - Evoke an emotional response
    - Encourage reflection
    - Display irony

### 4
- Supports reader understanding
- Attempts to engage the reader
- Narrative devices may include:
  - Fantasy, humour, suspense
  - Sub-genre styles (eg satire, boys' own, chick lit)
  - Intertextual references
  - Language Choice may:
    - Control writer/reader relationship
    - Reveal values and attitudes
    - Establish narrator stance
    - Subvert expectations
    - Evoke an emotional response
    - Encourage reflection
    - Display irony

### 5
- Supports and engages the reader through deliberate choice of language and use of narrative devices
- Narrative devices may include:
  - Fantasy, humour, suspense
  - Sub-genre styles (eg satire, boys' own, chick lit)
  - Intertextual references
  - Language Choice may:
    - Control writer/reader relationship
    - Reveal values and attitudes
    - Establish narrator stance
    - Subvert expectations
    - Evoke an emotional response
    - Encourage reflection
    - Display irony

### 6
- Caters to the anticipated values and expectations of the reader
- Influences or affects the reader through precise and sustained choice of language and use of narrative devices
- Narrative devices may include:
  - Fantasy, humour, suspense
  - Sub-genre styles (eg satire, boys' own, chick lit)
  - Intertextual references
  - Language Choice may:
    - Control writer/reader relationship
    - Reveal values and attitudes
    - Establish narrator stance
    - Subvert expectations
    - Evoke an emotional response
    - Encourage reflection
    - Display irony
### 2. TEXT STRUCTURE

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<tr>
<td>No evidence of any structural components of a time-sequenced text.</td>
<td>Minimal evidence of narrative structure, e.g., a story beginning only or a 'middle' with no orientation.</td>
<td>Contains a beginning and a complication.</td>
<td>Contains orientation, complication and resolution.</td>
<td>Coherent, controlled and complete narrative, employing effective plot devices in an appropriate structure, and including an effective ending.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-symbols or drawings</td>
<td>-inappropriate genre, e.g., a recipe</td>
<td>-A recount of events with no complication</td>
<td>-Where a resolution is present it is weak, contrived or 'tacked on' (e.g., I woke up, I died, they lived happily ever after).</td>
<td>-Sophisticated structures or plot devices include: -foreshadowing/flashback</td>
<td>-Ideas are generated, selected and crafted to explore a recognizable theme.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>-note that not all recounts are factual</td>
<td>-A complication presents a problem to be solved, introduces tension, and requires a response. It drives the story forward and leads to a series of events or responses.</td>
<td>-red herring/cliffhanger -coda/twist -evaluation/reflection -circular/parallel plots</td>
<td>-Ideas may include: -psychological subjects -unexpected topics -mature viewpoints -elements of popular culture -satirical perspectives -extended metaphor -traditional sub-genre subjects: heroic quest; whodunit; good vs evil; overcoming the odds</td>
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### 3. IDEAS

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No evidence or insufficient evidence</td>
<td>Ideas are very few and very simple.</td>
<td>Ideas are few, not elaborated or very predictable.</td>
<td>Ideas show some development or elaboration and includes.</td>
<td>Ideas are substantial and elaborated.</td>
<td>Ideas are generated, selected and crafted to explore a recognizable theme.</td>
<td>Ideas are skilfully used in the service of the story line.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-symbols or drawings</td>
<td>-Ideas appear unrelated.</td>
<td>-All ideas relate coherently to a central story line.</td>
<td>-Some ideas may contain unnecessary elaboration (waffle).</td>
<td>-Ideas effectively contribute to a central story line.</td>
<td>-The story contains a suggestion of an underlying theme.</td>
<td>-Ideas may include: psychological subjects -unexpected topics -mature viewpoints -elements of popular culture -satirical perspectives -extended metaphor -traditional sub-genre subjects: heroic quest; whodunit; good vs evil; overcoming the odds.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### 4. CHARACTER AND SETTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td>No evidence or insufficient evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-symbols or drawings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>Only names characters or gives their roles (eg, father, the teacher, my friend, dinosaur, we, Jim) AND/OR Only names the setting: (eg, school, the place we were at) Setting is vague or confused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Suggestion of characterisation through brief descriptions or speech or feelings, but lacks substance or continuity AND/OR Suggestion of setting though very brief and superficial descriptions of place and/or time Basic dialogue or a few adjectives to describe a character or a place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>Characterisation emerges through descriptions, actions, speech or the attribution of thoughts and feelings to a character AND/OR Setting emerges through description of place, time and atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>Effective characterisation. Details are selected to create distinct characters. AND/OR Maintains a sense of setting throughout. Details are selected to create a sense of place and atmosphere</td>
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### 5. VOCABULARY

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<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td>Symbols or drawings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very short script Few content words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>Mostly simple verbs, adverbs, adjectives or nouns May include two or three precise words Uses some topic-related vocabulary Uses factual and descriptive language. eg tells how it is or happens, e.g., with verbs in the present tense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Precise words or words groups (may be verbs, adverbs, adjectives or nouns) Uses topic-related vocabulary to contribute to audience’s understanding. Explanation Uses task-appropriate language to tell how it is or happens. Some adjectivals and adverbials to give detail and precision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>Sustained and consistent use of precise words and phrases that enhance the meaning Attempts technical and/or specialised language (jargon) Consistently uses precise, descriptive, factual language and verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>A range of precise and effective words and phrases used in a natural and articulate manner Language choice is well matched to genre Consistently uses technical and/or specialised language (jargon) Makes deliberate use of precise, descriptive, factual language,</td>
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### 6. COHESION

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbols or drawings</td>
<td>Links are missing or incorrect</td>
<td>Some correct links between sentences</td>
<td>Cohesive devices are used correctly to support reader understanding</td>
<td>A range of cohesive devices is used correctly and deliberately to enhance reading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often confusing for the reader</td>
<td>Short script</td>
<td>(do not penalise for poor punctuation)</td>
<td>Accurate use of referring words</td>
<td>An extended, highly cohesive piece of writing showing continuity of ideas and tightly linked sections of text</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>May attempt to show cause-and-effect relationships by using links within sentences, e.g., “because”, “so”.</td>
<td>May attempt to show cause-and-effect relationships by using links within sentences, e.g., “because”, “so”.</td>
<td>Attempts to show cause-and-effect relationships by using links within sentences.</td>
<td>Expresses causal relationships through links within sentences and between paragraphs.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows some understanding of pronoun use.</td>
<td>Shows some understanding of pronoun use</td>
<td>Shows cause and effect relationships by using links within and across sentences.</td>
<td>Uses clear, sequential structures and transitions within and between paragraphs.</td>
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### 7. PARAGRAPHING

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No correct use of paragraphing.</td>
<td>Writing is organised into paragraphs that are mainly focused on one idea or set of like ideas to assist the reader to digest chunks of text.</td>
<td>All paragraphs are focused on one idea or set of like ideas.</td>
<td>Paragraphing supports purpose of informative text.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New line for every sentence.</td>
<td>Contains at least one correct paragraph break.</td>
<td>– At least one paragraph is logically constructed and contains a topic sentence and supporting detail.</td>
<td>Paragraphs are logically ordered and cumulatively build understanding across text.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paragraphs are correct but basic.</td>
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### 8. SENTENCE STRUCTURE

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No evidence of sentences</td>
<td>Some correct formation of sentences</td>
<td>Most simple sentences are correct.</td>
<td>Simple and compound sentences correct.</td>
<td>Sentences correct (allow for an occasional typo or missing word).</td>
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<td>Some meaning can be construed</td>
<td>Meaning is predominantly clear.</td>
<td>Most simple and compound sentences are correct.</td>
<td>Most complex sentences are correct.</td>
<td>Demonstrates variety in length, structure and beginnings.</td>
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<td>Some complex sentences are correct.</td>
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<td>Meaning is clear.</td>
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<td>Meaning is predominantly clear.</td>
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<td>Meaning is clear.</td>
<td>Meaning is clear and sentences enhance meaning.</td>
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<td>All sentences correct.</td>
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<td>Writing contains controlled and developed sentences that express precise meaning and are consistently effective.</td>
<td>All sentences correct.</td>
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9. PUNCTUATION

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<tr>
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<td>No evidence of correct punctuation</td>
<td>Some accurate use of capital letters to start sentences OR full stops to end sentences</td>
<td>Some accurately punctuated sentences (beginning and end)</td>
<td>Some correct punctuation across categories (sentences mostly correct with some other punctuation correct) OR accurate sentence punctuation with no stray capitals, nothing else used</td>
<td>All sentence punctuation correct</td>
<td>Mostly correct use of other punctuation</td>
<td>Writing contains accurate use of all applicable punctuation</td>
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10. SPELLING

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<tr>
<td>No conventional spelling</td>
<td>Few examples of conventional spelling</td>
<td>Correct spelling of • most simple words • some common words (errors evident in common words)</td>
<td>Correct spelling of • most simple words • most common words (errors do not outnumber correct spellings)</td>
<td>Correct spelling of • simple words • most common words • some difficult words (errors do not outnumber correct spellings)</td>
<td>Correct spelling of • simple words • most common words • at least 10 difficult words (errors do not outnumber correct spellings)</td>
<td>Correct spelling of • all words • at least 10 difficult words • some challenging words (allowances can be made for very occasional (1or 2) minor errors, which should be disregarded when assigning this category)</td>
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### Marking rubric – Informative texts

**Informative texts**: texts whose primary purpose is to provide information through explanation, description, argument, analysis, ordering and presentation of evidence and procedures. These texts include reports, explanations and descriptions of natural phenomena, recounts of events, instructions and directions, rules and laws, news bulletins and articles, websites and text analyses. They include texts which are valued for their informative content, as a store of knowledge and for their value as part of everyday life. NSW Syllabuses for the Australian Curriculum: English K-10

#### 1. AUDIENCE

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<tr>
<td>Symbols or drawings with the intention of conveying meaning</td>
<td>Contains some simple written content Writer writes primarily for self Attempts to inform the reader about a simple idea or phenomenon Assumes shared knowledge of context with the audience</td>
<td>Shows awareness of basic audience expectations. Writer recognises they are writing for an audience other than self. Some attempt to share information about a simple idea or phenomenon Assumes shared knowledge of context with the audience.</td>
<td>An internally consistent text that attempts to support the reader by developing a shared understanding of context Writer shows some awareness of purpose and audience through choice of content, language, and writing style. Informative text may rely on context and require some audience inference in order to be understood.</td>
<td>Supports reader understanding Attempts to engage the reader Writer shows awareness of purpose and audience through choice of content, language, and writing style.</td>
<td>Supports and engages the reader through deliberate choice of language</td>
<td>Caters to the anticipated expectations of the reader Writer shows awareness of purpose and targets the audience through deliberate choice of content, language, and writing style.</td>
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2. TEXT STRUCTURE

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<tr>
<td>No evidence of any structural component of an informative text.</td>
<td>Minimal evidence of informative text structure (one or two elements of the appropriate text structure) eg Explanation statement of phenomenon only OR one explanatory statement or event</td>
<td>Some evidence of informative text structure eg Explanation Contains a simple statement of phenomenon and a simple series of events (2-3) but no elaboration. OR Contains series of events with some elaboration but no statement of phenomenon.</td>
<td>Clear and complete informative text structure eg Explanation An identifying statement about what is to be explained — this stage is the ‘statement of phenomenon’ a series of events known as the ‘explanation sequence’ — the events may be related according to time or cause or according to both relationships a ‘concluding statement’ (this stage is optional) Report An introductory statement and several logically organised facts.</td>
<td>Coherent, controlled and complete informative text organised to achieve its intended purpose eg Explanation a detailed statement of phenomenon and logically sequenced and detailed series of events with extensive elaboration for each one. Report An accurate and detailed introduction that defines and/or classifies the subject of the report Logically organised and detailed information about the topic. Visual elements such as diagrams, pictures, charts, tables and graphs are integrated into the text (optional but desirable)</td>
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3. IDEAS

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<td>No evidence or insufficient evidence</td>
<td>Ideas are very few and very simple Ideas appear unrelated to the topic and/or to each other Writer offers a simple idea, from a personal perspective, as an explanation, description or report.</td>
<td>Ideas are few and not elaborated eg Explanation Writer identifies the phenomenon or process and gives one or more simple reasons for its occurrence. Report Writer identifies the topic and gives one or more simple facts. May also include irrelevant ideas.</td>
<td>Ideas show some development or elaboration and includes information that is mostly relevant eg Explanation Writer clearly identifies the phenomenon or process and gives reasons for its occurrence. Body of text contains a sequenced account of straightforward aspects or processes, and includes some associated reasons for why/how these occur. Report Writer clearly and simply introduces the topic including some ideas that define, classify and describe features of the topic.</td>
<td>Ideas are substantial and elaborated and the text includes only relevant content eg Explanation Writer clearly identifies the phenomenon or process clearly, and may also include contextualising information. Body of text contains further elaboration and includes associated reasons for why/how aspects or processes occur Report Writer defines, classifies and provides detailed information about the topic.</td>
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<td>Ideas are generated, selected and crafted to explore the topic in depth and detail. Writer presents clear, adequately detailed content, relevant to topic sentences/paragraphs. Provides relevant, accurate details at each stage.</td>
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4. TENSE

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<tr>
<td>Tense is inconsistent throughout the text.</td>
<td>Tense is mainly in the present tense.</td>
<td>Tense is consistent – simple present tense throughout. The timeless present tense, e.g., &quot;evaporates&quot;, &quot;rises&quot; with occasional use of the passive voice for effect (*see glossary English K-10 Syllabus for definition)</td>
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5. VOCABULARY

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbols or drawings</td>
<td>Very short script Few content words Uses mainly high-frequency words Uses some topic-specific language to convey thoughts and ideas. Uses simple, usually factual and descriptive language. Begins to use linking verbs, e.g., &quot;is&quot;, &quot;have&quot;.</td>
<td>Mostly simple verbs, adverbs, adjectives or nouns May include two or three precise words Uses some topic-related vocabulary Uses factual and descriptive language. eg tells how it is or happens, e.g., with verbs in the present tense.</td>
<td>Precise words or words groups (may be verbs, adverbs, adjectives or nouns) Uses topic-related vocabulary to contribute to audience's understanding. Explanation Uses task-appropriate language to tell how it is or happens. Some adjectivals and adverbials to give detail and precision.</td>
<td>Sustained and consistent use of precise words and phrases that enhance the meaning Attempts technical and/or specialised language (jargon) Consistently uses precise, descriptive, factual language and verbs</td>
<td>A range of precise and effective words and phrases used in a natural and articulate manner Language choice is well matched to genre Accurately uses technical and/or specialised language (jargon) Makes deliberate use of precise, descriptive, factual language,</td>
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6. COHESION

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<tr>
<td>Symbols or drawings</td>
<td>Links are missing or incorrect Short script Often confusing for the reader May attempt to show cause-and-effect relationships by using links within sentences, e.g., &quot;because&quot;, &quot;so&quot;. Shows some understanding of pronoun use.</td>
<td>Some correct links between sentences (do not penalise for poor punctuation) Most referring words are accurate Reader may occasionally need to re-read and provide their own links to clarify meaning Attempts to show cause-and-effect relationships by using links within sentences, e.g., &quot;because&quot;, &quot;so&quot;. Shows some understanding of pronoun use.</td>
<td>Cohesive devices are used correctly to support reader understanding Accurate use of referring words Meaning is clear and text flows well in a sustained piece of writing Shows cause and effect relationships by using links within and across sentences. Largely controls pronoun use.</td>
<td>A range of cohesive devices is used correctly and deliberately to enhance reading An extended, highly cohesive piece of writing showing continuity of ideas and tightly linked sections of text Expresses causal relationships through links within sentences and between paragraphs. Uses clear, sequential structures and transitions within and between paragraphs.</td>
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7. PARAGRAPHING

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No correct use of paragraphing. New line for every sentence.</td>
<td>Writing is organised into paragraphs that are mainly focused on one idea or set of like ideas to assist the reader to digest chunks of text. Contains at least one correct paragraph break.</td>
<td>All paragraphs are focused on one idea or set of like ideas. At least one paragraph is logically constructed and contains a topic sentence and supporting detail. Paragraphs are correct but basic.</td>
<td>Paragraghing supports purpose of informative text. Paragraphs are logically ordered and cumulatively build understanding across text.</td>
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8. SENTENCE STRUCTURE

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No evidence of sentences</td>
<td>Some correct formation of sentences Some meaning can be construed</td>
<td>Most simple sentences are correct Meaning is predominantly clear</td>
<td>Most simple and compound sentences are correct Some complex sentences are correct Meaning is predominantly clear</td>
<td>Simple and compound sentences correct Most complex sentences are correct OR All sentences correct but do not demonstrate variety Meaning is clear</td>
<td>Sentences correct (allow for an occasional typo or missing word) Demonstrates variety in length, structure and beginnings Meaning is clear and sentences enhance meaning</td>
<td>All sentences correct Writing contains controlled and developed sentences that express precise meaning and are consistently effective</td>
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9. PUNCTUATION

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<tr>
<td>No evidence of correct punctuation</td>
<td>Some accurate use of capital letters to start sentences OR full stops to end sentences Punctuation is minimal and of little assistance to the reader</td>
<td>Some accurately punctuated sentences (beginning and end) Some noun capitalisation where applicable Provides some markers to assist reading</td>
<td>Some correct punctuation across categories (sentences mostly correct with some other punctuation correct) OR accurate sentence punctuation with no stray capitals, nothing else used Provides some markers to assist reading</td>
<td>All sentence punctuation correct Mostly correct use of other punctuation Provides precise markers to enable smooth and efficient reading</td>
<td>Writing contains accurate use of all applicable punctuation Provides precise markers to pace and control reading of the text Allowance can be made for occasional omission of sentence punctuation at scores 4 and 5</td>
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10. SPELLING

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<td>Few examples of conventional spelling</td>
<td>Correct spelling of • most simple words • some common words (errors evident in common words)</td>
<td>Correct spelling of • most simple words • most common words (errors do not outnumber correct spellings)</td>
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<td>Correct spelling of • all words • at least 10 difficult words • some challenging words (allowances can be made for very occasional (1 or 2) minor errors, which should be disregarded when assigning this category)</td>
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Appendix Eight: Sample of First and Second Level Analysis

Participant Ashley

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in teaching</th>
<th>Age bracket</th>
<th>Stages taught 2011-2014</th>
<th>Stages taught- career</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-23</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>ES1-S1; S2</td>
<td>ES1-S1; S2; S3</td>
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“...at first...I wasn’t entirely convinced it was the right thing to be doing for Year One... we found that a recount or a narrative were their best chance at writing. However we were giving, being given, a text type, for Term One which was quite often persuasive because we wanted our Year Threes and Fives at the time to be um capable at that. So that caused us a little bit of, I guess, distress at the time trying to teach Year One persuasive writing. And then there was the expectation of the Hattie’s (is it Hattie?) point four. And when we first started it was very much they must have jumped this point four to see any real growth so I think yeah at the beginning there was a lot of pressure around it. In saying that, we just did it, I think. We just did what we were to do. But as time’s gone on, we did speak with Leanne and Jake and I think Michelle came into her role then. And we said, this is really quite crazy doing this persuasive with Year One when it’s not benefitting them that much. Sure it might be great doing it in Year three and Year Five at that time but not Year One. So we changed so Leanne, I think they came to the thought that well cohorts could choose the text type they thought best.

“Ultimately I think I certainly have got a lot more out of teaching because of it.”

“It (benchmarking) puts people under a little bit of pressure too.”

“...that probably goes against what (principal) or Hattie would think.”

“If we know something is worthwhile and it’s working, people are very happy to do it...as long as we think it’s useful then we’re very happy to do it”

Summary

For Ashley, there has been a shift in feelings and thoughts about the WSBoW since its inception. She reports that her team felt “distress” because all students from Year One to Year Six had to do the same text type and that the decision of which text type was guided by the needs of the older students, particularly Years Three & Five because of NAPLAN. This was not perceived by the Year One team to be in the best interests of their students. This feedback was passed on to the leadership team, particularly the Assistant Principal and the Leader of Pedagogy (newly created leadership position initiated in the second year of the WSBoW). Ashley was happy that the program was changed to allow teams to choose the text type most suited to their program for the term.

There seems to be an underlying scepticism (critical mindset) about what ‘the experts’ and the principal espouse as best practice. “...that probably goes against what (principal) or Hattie
would think.” She seems to need to test expert opinion and research experientially to totally accept it.

Whilst Ashley is compliant, “We just did what we were to do”, she is also confident enough to question the wisdom of the change, to reflect on what it means for her students and her team, and to communicate her misgivings and suggestions to the leadership team. The fact that this contributed to change in the WSBoW is evidence that teachers have some power to effect change in this situation.

Ultimately, Ashley reports positive outcomes for herself as a teacher as a result of the WSBoW. (more about this later)

Ashley uses the pronoun ‘we’ consistently and speaks for her team and the staff as a whole at times.
# Appendix Nine: Sample Table: Third Level of Analysis

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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Participants’ teaching experience</th>
<th>Participants’ teaching experience - comments</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Sense of professional achievement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>a) 16-23</td>
<td>Then of course I moved to Year Four and it [the WSBoW approach] changes a little. You can see how it’s a little more, oh a lot more, beneficial.</td>
<td>So I think as long as we think it’s [the WSBoW approach] useful then we’re very happy to do it but I do know it’s a big um time it’s a lot of time and obviously as the grades go up the longer it takes you to mark all those pieces of writing.</td>
<td>Look, I really do think it’s [the WSBoW approach] made us much more responsible in our teaching of writing if that’s the right word. Because we taught writing of course but now we, I’m thinking about those parts rather than about the text, the type of text. I think the successes are that I probably know where the students are at because of the writing samples and the tasks that you get used to doing of course.</td>
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<td>b) ES1-S1; S2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) ES1-S1; S2; S3</td>
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<td>Bailey</td>
<td>a) 24-30</td>
<td>My experiences [of the WSBoW] are in Stage Two and Stage Three. And I have had different levels so I’ve had a higher group and I’ve had a lower group. I think the program’s probably good for less experienced teachers. When you are more experienced, you can look at a piece of writing and gather a lot of data from it. And even more experienced teachers going through the process was really good.</td>
<td>They [student writing samples] take hours and hours and hours to mark; Whilst no-one’s afraid of hard work it is quite an extra. I have to do them [student writing samples] all at once. In a couple of... like I read them first, then leave it for a day, then I go through and mark them and then I come back and read through them again. So it’s a long process.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) All stages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) All stages</td>
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<td>Chris</td>
<td>a) 0-3</td>
<td>More so in the higher grades when I was doing Year Four and Five, I found that I got a better understanding of what I could teach the students and how to teach them too. In the younger grades I still, I’ve come with the mindset that “This is what the older grades struggle with and I’ve seen the same struggles with the younger grades, so hopefully the more we do it with them, and it becomes more regular then we can see that by the time they get to the higher grades we won’t have as many issues in the higher grades with</td>
<td>It’s gotten easier the more I do it. I’m getting faster.</td>
<td>I’ve been here since it was implemented, since it started to come in and I’ve seen it’s really helped my teaching in terms of what I need to teach the students. I could see that they actually learnt because I’d focused on the area that they needed to, so in their writing in Year Five, there were paragraphs and the punctuation was a little bit better. I think it’s helped me understand the students better and make it more individualised to what that group of students need.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) ES1-S1</td>
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<td>c) All stages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dallas</td>
<td>a) 0-3</td>
<td>So when I started in 2012, that was I think the first year that he [the principal] initiated the whole-school writing with the benchmarking. So I haven’t, I don’t really know anything different at this stage.</td>
<td>I think that probably something that holds you back is that it is a lot of work with all marking them all the time. That does take a long time. It’s not a waste of time because you can see with the progress of how they’re going, but I think initially when you’re doing it, you go, Oh I’ve got to mark 25 writing assessments, but once you start you just get through them.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) ES1-S1</td>
<td>Success, I’d say when you see the pre-test and what they [the students] can do. Then within the teaching time, you see the post-test of what they have achieved, I think that’s a big success to see and I know with the group that I’m working on at the moment, for them, what they couldn’t do to start with, they didn’t really have any idea or they didn’t know, to then, what they did in the end, it was quite amazing. It gave you a really good sense of accomplishment.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) ES1-S1</td>
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<td>Eden</td>
<td>a) 16-23</td>
<td>I spent a lot of time in the infants where obviously benchmarking was really important.</td>
<td>It doesn’t take me hours and hours and hours. When originally, I would go through everything, I’ve got a fair idea of each one now. So it’s definitely easier than it was.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) ES1-S1; S2</td>
<td>It doesn’t take me hours and hours and hours. When originally, I would go through everything, I’ve got a fair idea of each one now. So it’s definitely easier than it was.</td>
<td>And it was good for me at the end, when we did our post-testing, because you could see there were some of those things that lots of them had improved in.</td>
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<td>c) ES1-S1; S2</td>
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<td>Finlay</td>
<td>a) 8-15</td>
<td>I was in Kindergarten for many years when I first started. I’d been in Kindergarten for six years so when I actually started doing this it has been running in the school for a little while before I started to do it. Only last year and this year are my first years that I’ve had to do it.</td>
<td>I find it [student writing samples] very time consuming to mark. I do wonder why we spend so much time marking them when I feel like I can get as much information doing anecdotal notes and from the writing samples. I feel like the marking of them takes up enough time as it is, without then having to go and do more and then to fill in a grid that then gets sent away and I never see it again. So I don’t kind of understand why I would need to spend any more time [to moderate marks with other teachers].</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) ES1-S1; S2</td>
<td>I was in Kindergarten for many years when I first started. I’d been in Kindergarten for six years so when I actually started doing this it has been running in the school for a little while before I started to do it. Only last year and this year are my first years that I’ve had to do it.</td>
<td>I don’t know that I necessarily need it because I can get that evidence anyway from their writing samples that they do with me in the first few weeks and you know, anecdotal stuff that you do as you go on. Yes, but I know. I know that [student’s name] can’t write. I don’t need that to tell me. I know that [student’s name] is a great...is fantastic. I don’t need that to tell me. I can see it in the sentence structure, the punctuation, the spelling. They’ve got the structure in place. I can see that without actually...</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) ES1-S1; S2</td>
<td>I was in Kindergarten for many years when I first started. I’d been in Kindergarten for six years so when I actually started doing this it has been running in the school for a little while before I started to do it. Only last year and this year are my first years that I’ve had to do it.</td>
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<td>Gabby</td>
<td>a) 0-3</td>
<td>I’ve been involved in the whole-school benchmarking of writing program for, it’s only really a year and a half now, starting last year.</td>
<td>I think it’s a lot of time to mark and that’s something that I guess, we have to deal with as teachers.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) S2</td>
<td>I’ve been involved in the whole-school benchmarking of writing program for, it’s only really a year and a half now, starting last year.</td>
<td>It [marking student writing samples] does take time but I think it’s important. I think maybe a limitation is probably the time in marking. But I feel like, as I’ve had more experience, I’ve got better at it. I think the first time I ever did it, it was thinking, “Oh my goodness. This is taking days.” It took a long time, but once...and [teacher’s name] had the same thing.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) S2</td>
<td>I’ve been involved in the whole-school benchmarking of writing program for, it’s only really a year and a half now, starting last year.</td>
<td>I think it’s good to see, and you can see how they’ve gone. I find that really valuable</td>
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Harper

| 24-30 | a) 24-30 | The first year I did this was the year I had Year Three in 2012. I wasn’t here last year. So what I’m doing this year is going back to what I used to do when I taught Year One and Year Two, many years ago. So realising that when you’re coming back to Stage One, they’re more in the formative stages of writing than children in Stage Two. Then by the time you get to Stage Three, your expectations go up that little bit higher.

| S2; S3 | b) S2; S3 | Because of the time involved, this means that you tend to be marking the pre-test and the post-test, you’re marking it in your own time. You’re not marking it in the classroom with the children so then it’s very hard to get back to them and discuss.

| c) all stages | c) all stages | I found that the pre-test and the post-test did inform my teaching. It told me personally how successful I had been with that particular group. And I felt that [the WSBoW approach] had a good result for the Year Three, particularly the top group. The results, the data, that we got from that Year Three group that year, seemed to indicate that more children were moving into the top [NAPLAN] bands, from Band 5 into Band 6.

Izzy

| 4-7 | a) 4-7 | It’s very different to the last school that I was at. We didn’t have any of the pre-testing or post-testing. Basically, we could just choose a text type and we usually focused on text types for a shorter period of time.

| S2; S3 | b) S2; S3 | It’s a lot of work to mark the two lots of writing samples using that ten-point criteria. That’s probably the main thing I’ve noticed. But like I said, I think the value is there at the end of the day.

| S2; S3 | c) S2; S3 | The first time, it was all new to me. It took me quite a while but I find I’m getting better and better as I go along.

|  |  | I think it’s sped up a lot since the first lot I marked.

|  |  | I find it great to see the improvement, the growth in the kids as well.

|  |  | I think, teaching-wise, you’re not so restricted. I think the extended focus on it is really beneficial. And linking it with the whole-school approach of the open learning and explicit teaching and that sort of stuff in small groups. I find that very beneficial. You can address the needs a bit more appropriately, I guess, rather than teaching it to more of a whole-class situation.

|  |  | Personally, as teaching, I’ve found it very beneficial and out of the two schools I’ve worked at, personally I’d prefer to use this model because it was just basically, cover the text types across the year. Where I fell the way it’s going a bit more now is that we focus on factual and then non-factual texts or imaginative texts so, and you don’t have to cover every single type. That’s my understanding now. And that’s, yeah, I really enjoy that larger focus. And being able to draw in and integrate other subjects. Yeah, I find it really beneficial.
| Jesse | a) 24-30  
b) S2; S3  
c) S2; S3 | There was a lot of data in there that I also thought was hard to differentiate without spending hours going through the criteria. And I thought, and still think, that some of the time taken to do that could be spent better on other areas [such as] your planning of good writing lessons. That might address the things, you know, the problems and things that are coming up all the time. But we’re not addressing, not necessarily addressing that with good planning. We’re spending time marking. 

The more familiar you became with it, you know, you’re not needing to refer back to it, I don’t think. Because if I did one in Term One and Term Four, I think that would be enough. Like, I’m just thinking all the time spend in the other terms as well. Looking at your work samples through the year I think would give you a better [assessment of writing] than doing that every single term.

Well, I liked the fact that you could see that some kids really grew. It was quite plain.

I know I’ve been more targeted on I suppose, structure and audience. I think that was one thing I didn’t really have a big focus on in my teaching. So getting the kids to realise there was a purpose and an audience to these different texts. Because I was always good at the punctuation, the vocabulary and the mechanics as such. But going to that deeper level, getting that purpose across and the cohesion. I suppose that is all linked. |
|---|---|---|
| Kim | a)31+  
b) S3  
c) S2; S3 | I’m finding that [the WSBoW approach] more beneficial than I thought it would be, to be honest. I thought it would be just another thing to do because I’ve seen that happen over a number of times and we don’t do a lot with it.

When I was teaching before, we didn’t do that [use pre-test and post-test data to inform teaching]. |
| Leigh | a) 8-15  
b) ES1-S1; S2  
c) ES1-S1; S2 | You kind of forget how we’ve emerged and how different it was to begin with.

It is interesting to see you know, us to reflect as well, why did that child improve so much or why did that child not actually improve? |
Appendix Ten: Sample Interview Transcript
Transcript Participant Chris 29 July 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in teaching</th>
<th>Age bracket</th>
<th>Stages taught 2011-2014</th>
<th>Stages taught- career</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>ES1-S1</td>
<td>All stages</td>
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Can you tell me a bit about your experience of the Whole School Benchmarking Approach to Writing in our school?

I’ve been here since it was implemented, since it started to come in and I’ve seen it’s really helped my teaching in terms of what I need to teach the students. To find out what areas they’re missing, in terms of their sentence structure and their paragraphing and punctuation. And what they need to work on. It’s really guided my teaching in that sense. More so in the higher grades when I was doing Year Four and Five, I found that I got a better understanding of what I could teach the students and how to teach them too. In the younger grades I still, I’ve come with the mindset that “This is what the older grades struggle with and I’ve seen the same struggles with the younger grades, so hopefully the more we do it with them, and it becomes more regular then we can see that by the time they get to the higher grades we won’t have as many issues in the higher grades with paragraphing and all that.

Yes, great. So what are the strengths and the limitations do you think of the whole program?

Limitations I think are not having, still trying to find that consistency with, the marking rubrics. And I like the fact that we’ve all gone to the NAPLAN style now which makes it consistent across whatever text type we’re teaching. Um, strengths, you can see clear patterns in where the students are and what they’re doing. I think that that’s the biggest limitation, is the marking rubric. I think this year we’ve finally got it all set now because now, having the recent one that we were sent for information texts makes sense and it’s still on the same guidelines as the persuasive and the narrative creative writing one.

So when you say consistency, did you mean consistency between the three rubrics or consistency between teachers when they’re using the rubric?

I think both. I think the understanding of what, having that clear concise, this is a zero. Zeroes are symbols and drawings. A one is some punctuation. Two is two correctly formed sentences. So for example for the punctuation part, without having that, when we’ve had the other rubrics that just have punctuation, you know, different wording, there’s been confusion in terms of what’s a zero, what’s a one, what’s a two. Everyone comes in with their own mindset of what they’ll see as those sentences too. What’s complex and what’s borderline and confusion. You know does that make sense?

Maybe the grammar course might help with that?

Yes. I’m hoping that clears...we’ve all got the same understandings then and there’ll be a clear concise understanding of what the results are.
I know you’ve got people on the team who’ve done marking before with NAPLAN rubrics. Do you work together at all on that?

In the lower grade that I’m on this year, we haven’t done that as much. We’ve discussed in the first term about the rubric, about what we need to put into it. In previous years, when I was on the higher grades with Year Five last year, I found that we discussed the results. We marked it in class lots and then discussed those results as a cohort in our PLT time. So we made sure that, not that we were saying that this child can or can’t do it, but to see if we were consistent with what we were marking and how we were marking it.

Yes, OK. Did you find that it changed your thinking after those discussions at all?

Some. And some we just realised that we were on the same path. I think it’s um yeah with that we had the same ideas. Someone might say something and you might go, Oh well I didn’t think of that and I can see that clarification. Working with people that have done the NAPLAN marking professional development in the past really helped. Because I found that in the beginning I was marking really harshly and when they came in and put their input in I realised that. Yeah this child is doing that. So they’ll get the one or the two for a certain area. But I was marking too harshly in terms of what I thought it was. I just found it was interesting. It’s great to have those conversations. I think there needs to be more of it.

How would you suggest that happens?

I’d probably say that, especially those people that have had that learning, and I think there’s quite a few people in the school that have had it. Whether it was a staff meeting, whether it was arranged that we get together and mix with them and discuss what we were marking and how we were marking it so that there’s more of a clear definition of what each area is.

As far as how it’s influenced you, you’ve talked about the fact other teachers have influenced you and discussions have influenced you, just even in practice. What about, how has it influenced you in the way that you deal with the kids and their learning?

Well, it’s given me a clearer picture in terms of how I teach them in writing. And I see the writing and I’ve seen more of a connection as we’ve changed our spelling focus, as the spelling coming out in the writing and as a way of teaching those students to become better spellers. So it’s about providing all those areas that are on that, that we look at when we are doing these writing assessments and seeing what can these students do and what can’t they do? For example, I noticed in Year Four that a lot of the students and this was at the beginning of it, could do basic sentence punctuation. They weren’t throwing in extra punctuation. Or they were throwing in exclamation marks or apostrophes all over the place. And they weren’t setting their work out in paragraphs. So that became a big focus for what I had to teach them in terms of getting them to put their information into paragraphs. Then having the opportunity to take those students through into Year Five, I could see those results coming through. I could see that they actually learnt because I’d focused on the area that they needed to, so in their writing in Year Five, there were paragraphs and the punctuation was a little bit better. I think it’s helped me understand the students better and make it more individualised to what that group of students need.
What about benchmarking? What do you understand about benchmarking around this program?

I see benchmarking more reading, about knowing what level a child is at? And I can see the possibilities of grouping students from the information we get from those rubrics as setting their goal. This is what they need to achieve to move up. So giving them a clear definition of what they need to work on. That and I guess to me benchmarking is more like where are they sitting in terms of their reading. To me I mean when someone says benchmarking, I don’t think of writing and I don’t think writing can be a progression as such. Because it depends on what that student has already got as to what they...

So you don’t think we should set students a benchmark in writing like we do in reading?

Oh I think that it’ll be in terms of what’s expected in terms of sentences and punctuation. I think that’s a great idea. And I think it might help guide what students need to be focusing on.

Are there any other forms of assessment that you do in writing that have sort of stemmed from this. Or do you use this as your major assessment?

It’s one of the major assessments we look at in terms of writing. We also get them to do a piece of writing in which they can just go. I find the lack of knowledge when we’re doing information reports or expositions, I find that if the student doesn’t have knowledge on a particular area, they can’t write on it. I suppose that’s one of the limitations I think that if these students don’t have an understanding of you know why school lunches are healthy or why junk food’s a better option. They won’t write if they don’t know those concepts. And that’s something I’ve found with the younger grades. The older grades have been exposed to a variety of things and the younger grades are in their little boxes still and yeah it’s that personalised, that prior knowledge that they bring to it.

That’s really important isn’t it? It’s very hard to set up a successful task.

It is and I like doing... one of the biggest things I started doing when the writing task came out was, it made me realise that students struggle with proofreading and editing. Like, looking back on their own work and that’s also a goal of my teaching, to teach students how to be reflective in their writing and to actually realise when they’ve made a mistake. I find they’ll do writing, they’ll just write generally in class, but they won’t look back on it and they won’t say “Well I’ve missed a capital letter here.” Their focus is just to write and hand it in, not to go back and think, “How do I make this better?”

Yes, so would you suggest that this would be a program that we should keep going, for your own benefit?

I think I’m all for continuing it. And now that we’ve got clarity across the three different types of text and the focus on the rubrics being very similar. I find that, now we’re in the third year I think it is, or is it the fourth?
Fourth year, yeah, sitting down and doing it, I don’t have to refer to the rubric as much. I can look at a piece of writing and go oh yeah they’ve got simple sentences. Just based on what is in the rubric because we’ve got a more consistent rubric. It definitely makes it a lot easier.

Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about your experiences with the writing program?

I just have one more thing to add. I think for teachers who haven’t done this before, I think there needs to be run some other PD or something. Because having a teacher come from Early Stage One up here who hasn’t done it, we forget that not everyone’s doing it. That was an interesting thing because we had to sit down and we had to explain what to do. If there was a clear, little bit of professional development on it, it would probably make it a lot easier.

So almost a transition, uh orientation for new teachers?

Yeah, especially for new teachers coming into the school who aren’t used to it. I guess that comes down to that consistent approach about what we see when we’re using that rubric and how we’re matching it up with a piece of writing.

**********

After the recording was turned off, and we were chatting, Chris continued to speak about the WSBoW. I noted the following comments:

The whole writing approach has defined my teaching...all intertwined...really enjoyed it.

It’s gotten easier the more I do it... getting faster.

(Chris expressed regret that the teachers were no longer given a printout of the results and improvement over the pre and post-test – effect size – as they were at the beginning of the program.)

If students aren’t getting it we need to change our teaching. Some people get defensive – like, “oh they’re going to criticise me”.

...teething problems with the rubrics.