ADOLESCENT LITERACY JOURNEYS

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Abstract:

Utilizing qualitative research methods, this multiple case study investigates factors influencing adolescents’ perceptions of their literacy capacities. These factors are identified as either personal or institutional, depending on whether they stem from the students’ personal or academic contexts. Green's Literacy in 3D Model is used extensively as an analytical lens to identify and categorize factors impacting students' perceptions at a pivotal time of their high school education. Identification of factors influencing students’ perceptions about their literacy capacities is relevant to educators and educational institutions alike, because it can assist optimal use of instructional approaches and provide learning opportunities and environments that facilitate student constructions of positive perceptions. This qualitative study is based on the assumption that a resilient sense of self-efficacy in the context of literacy is an essential component of academic success. The research provides a glimpse into the students’ literacy journeys and gives their voices a forum so they could influence instructional approaches and school programs.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

I. This thesis consists of only my original work towards the Master of Education (Research).
II. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other materials used.
III. The thesis is less than 30 000 words in length, exclusive of appendices and references.

Michaela (Michelle) Nowak
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction:

I became interested in students’ beliefs about their literacy capacities in 2012 in the context of my work as a teacher and a Literacy Leader. Presently I still lead and monitor programs designed to support high school students with their reading, writing and speaking capacities. Although I tracked students’ literacy progress via various support programs in their early years of secondary schooling, such as in years seven and eight, I focused on older high school students, particularly year tens, because of the feedback I received from them and from their classroom teachers, who noticed the positive impact several literacy programs were having on their English studies. My subsequent conversations with students, teachers and school administrators inspired me to question traditional literacy intervention approaches and led me to think more deeply about the importance of student voices.

Many reading and writing conferences with students revealed that perceptions played a key role in their academic learning. These conferences gave the students a chance to have their voices heard and thus I began tracing the sources of the students’ perceptions about their literacy capacities. I wanted to see how they were influenced by the literacy programs under my leadership and how these connected to different instructional approaches students experienced in their classes. At the time this project was undertaken, these support programs were directly connected to the subject of English. Since then, I’ve had the opportunity to expand these programs to encompass literacy support in the context of other learning areas, such as science and humanities. I opted to invite English teachers to help me reference students’ perceptions because student conferencing was an entrenched practice in that learning area and as such students would be more comfortable elaborating on their experiences in this context. Moreover, to some extent logistical practicalities also motivated this choice since all students in year ten take English as a compulsory course and thus I had a broader pool of teachers to solicit for the participation of this study. Since students’ perceptions of their literacy capacities played a key role in their learning, I wondered what factors accounted for these perceptions, and whether their sources stemmed from students’ personal or institutional contexts. I felt that if I gained a clear understanding of these factors, I would be better equipped to design and lead literacy programs.
I realised student voices were of great importance, but curiously they were absent within academic discussions about literacy. As the literature review chapter of this paper shows, explorations of pedagogical approaches to the teaching of literacy skills have been richly represented in academic research through a wide variety of disciplines. Much of this research is conducted not only by educational theoreticians, but also by experienced, field practitioners. Pedagogical approaches that build students’ literacy capacities are quite well documented and analysed in relation to early primary to middle years of high school learning. This is particularly evident in the areas of operational literacy, which relate to instruction and remediation of reading skills in early primary-school children (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Gee, 2002; Cunningham & Allington, 2007; Meiers, 2013). However, research inquiring about adolescent perceptions pertaining to their literacy capacities has not been prolific. Thus, I felt this investigation has the potential to illuminate a relatively unknown area of adolescent learning. I began looking for studies in the area of student perceptions and realised that within educational psychology, student voices were given a forum. Moreover, it became clear this student platform had significant history (Bandura, 1986, 1995, 1997, 1998; Elliot & Dweck, 2007; Dweck, 2008, 2012). However, these types of discourses pertained to students’ beliefs and perceptions about their general capacities and did not focus specifically on literacy. This silence provided me with the insight that factors influencing student perceptions required investigation and that student voices needed to be heard, recorded and analysed in the context of literacy.

**Aims of the Research:**

This research aims to investigate factors that influence adolescent perceptions of their literacy capacities in the context of their academic and personal lives. Despite the recent focus on literacy acquisition and new approaches to program delivery, there is relatively little research about factors influencing student perceptions of their capacities. It is well established that these perceptions have an enormous impact on the students themselves, yet often their voices are not being heard. This research aims to fill the silence with meaningful discourse that has implications for the wider educational community. In this thesis, literacy is understood as a social practice that extends beyond individual and important capacities of reading and writing skills (Green & Beavis, 2012; Moffett, Wagner, & Moffett, 1992).
The definition taken up in this thesis includes the way people engage in social interactions in specific contexts that necessitate them to communicate in particular modes that are relevant to their objectives (Halliday, 1978 & 1979).

**Research Question:**
What are the influential factors in year ten students’ perceptions of their literacy capacities?

**Linking Students’ Perceptions to Self-Efficacy:**

High school students often have a well-developed capacity for metacognition, which is a great asset for this research (Fox & Riconscente, 2008). They frequently hold strong beliefs about their own literacy abilities and thus they make ideal subjects for analysis of any factors that may be influencing their perceptions. Beliefs about one’s own ability and self-agency have been defined as ‘self-efficacy’. Efficacy has been explained as a personal judgement of capability and it is distinguished from self-esteem as a judgement of self-worth (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is constructed from an individual’s perceived capability and this perception is often a stronger determining factor in the attainment of goals than an individual’s actual capability. For these reasons, I opted to focus this study on factors influencing student perceptions about their literacy capacities and not the capacities themselves.

**Assumptions:**
Since this research project involves the investigation of any compelling factors influencing students’ perceptions about their literacy capacities, its underlying assumption is grounded in the belief that ‘self-efficacy’ is as important as the students’ actual skills themselves (Bandura, 1998; Scott, 1996; Wilson, 2012).

**Study Framework - Literacy in 3D:**
In this investigation, Green’s framework will underpin much of the discussion pertaining to factors influencing students’ perceptions about their literacy capacities due to the holistic account it takes of literacy via its three interconnected dimensions and due to its flexibility as it accounts for newly emerging modes of literacy (Green, 1988; Green & Beavis, 2012). In this study literacy is intended to be understood according to
Bill Green conceptualisation which describes it as a phenomenon of language tied to the ‘more significant and problematical levels of verbalisation and conceptualisation’ (Green & Beavis, 2012 p. 3). This definition includes cognitive processes such as critical thinking as well as the full use of language in different modes, such as speaking, listening, writing and reading (Green & Beavis, 2012). The 3-D model has a wide scope and this is especially relevant to this project because contemporary students need to possess strong literacy capacities they can utilise in multi-modal contexts. The model serves as a useful lens through which factors influencing students’ perceptions of their capacities can be scrutinised, characterised and organized.

**Significance of Factors:**
Fifteen or sixteen-year-old high school students are at cross-roads of their education. For example, year ten involves course selection that will determine students’ future career pathways. In the process of having to make such important choices, year ten students often base their course selections on their perceptions of their academic or non-academic abilities, which comprise of their literacy capacities to great extent. Individuals in this age group are generally able to reflect on their capabilities and to articulate them in some depth. Moreover, the students’ high school setting is ideal for the discussion of literacy capacities because these adolescents are constantly engaged in their use, either formally and consciously, via their academic subjects, such as English, or informally, via their various social networks. For the purpose of this study any factors that can be sourced from the students’ academic contexts will be referred to as ‘Institutional Factors’. Factors stemming from outside their school environments will be referred to as ‘Personal Factors’. Identifying and understanding institutional and personal factors influencing students’ self-efficacy, in the area of literacy, can have a tremendous impact on future instructional approaches and student outcomes.

**Methodology and Method:**
To realise this study I chose qualitative methodology by conducting five individual case studies, which focused on year ten students of varying learning profiles. In order to gain insight into the students’ perceptions about their literacy capacities, I utilised a semi-structured interview format because this approach enabled me to obtain answers in a conversational setting.
**Student Learning Context:**
Relevant to the context of this research are the academic demands required of the student participants. Specifically, it is essential for students to master literacy skills such as oral communication in formal and informal settings. Year ten students are frequently expected to actively participate in class discussions that are facilitated by a teacher or to present formal oral reports on diverse subjects as part of their assessments in different contexts. In the state of Victoria (Australia), senior students are asked to construct genre-specific, responses, most often essays, to different texts under time constraints as part of their regular School Assessed Coursework (SACs) for English. Additionally, students must be able to comprehend and communicate complex ideas in varied formats, such as in digital modes or in printed texts of diverse genres.

**School Context:**
Direction of this study was inspired by instructional approaches implemented in a high school context (Years 7 – 12) that has various programs designed to support the development of students’ literacy capacities. The school in question is situated in the north-western region of Melbourne, Victoria. In this educational setting students are offered literacy support in different forms, such as individual or small group tutorials that target specific reading and writing capabilities. These literacy tutorials also supplement course content and provide student-forums for discussion of curriculum. Furthermore, students who are not reading or writing at expected standards are placed in classes that have additional teaching staff, who have been trained to offer literacy support in the context of regular course-work.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction:

The intention of this study is to illuminate an area of academic literacy that directly links to students’ cognitive as well as emotional states hence it links with two academic domains – educational and psychological. These two disciplines often relate and profoundly influence one another. For example, in order to positively affect students’ learning outcomes, educators need to be skilled at developing their students’ academic capacities and to be well-versed in how to positively maintain and build up their motivation and self-efficacy. Motivation and self-efficacy belong in the realm of psychology and effective instruction fits within pedagogy. Students’ perceptions are sourced from their beliefs and their academic capacities are influenced by their teachers. For this reason, this literature review encompasses both disciplines and examines theories of literacy experts, educational psychologists and works of other, relevant social theorists.

Linguistic Approaches to Literacy Instruction:

The multitude of teaching approaches to literacy instruction necessitates the categorization of literacy according to its theoretical foundation. Examination of theoretical underpinnings of diverse instructional approaches to literacy is relevant to this research, because participants’ perceptions about their literacy capacities may have been influenced by the different approaches their teachers may have utilised over the course of their primary and secondary education.

In literacy instruction, many linguistic approaches are underpinned by structuralist theory that is often grouped with positivism and functionalism, both of which claim that all authoritative knowledge comes from logical, mathematical and sensory experiences (Blackburn, 2008). Most importantly, structuralism relies heavily on deductive reasoning and the corroboration of hypothesis through the empirical collection of data. In an educational context this data is derived from quantitative methods, associated with large-scale studies and numerical amalgamation of data sourced from national and state testing. Data stemming from government-controlled sources is seen as authoritative
because structuralist theorists believe that all parts of human nature must be understood in terms of their relationship to a larger overarching system or structure (Ibid, 2008).

Structural Linguistics

In linguistics, structuralist philosophy manifests itself not just through its name ‘structural linguistics’, but through the process of breaking language into smaller units so they can be systematically reassembled into a whole that can be understood. For example, from a letter to a syllable, to a word, then to a phrase and finally to a sentence, until a given student is capable of independently decoding an entire page of text. In this approach students are taught to associate a sound (phoneme) with a letter (grapheme) and with a great deal of repetition this enables them to construct whole words from their respective units, eventually deriving meaning from a whole passage of text. Structural linguistic principles were fundamental to pedagogical approaches from early to mid-twentieth century and today they frame many of the ‘back-to-basics’ educational initiatives that garner a great deal of attention in contemporary media, particularly in the United States.

At the start of the twentieth century, structural linguists originated from Ferdinand de Saussure, who stressed examination of language as a static system of interconnected units that were collected into a body of sounds that were classified into phonemes, morphemes, lexical categories, noun phrases, verb phrases and sentence types. Phonemes were described as the smallest unit of sound in a language and these in turn combine to form smallest units of meaningful language – morphemes. Saussure organized his theory into syntactic and lexical units that became known as structural linguistics, which are now considered outdated and have been superseded by ‘Functional Linguistic’ and ‘Cognitive Linguistic’ theories.

Cognitive Linguistics:

Cognitively based reading acknowledges readers as active participants in the reading progress, intellectually interacting with a given text and accepting or rejecting its ideas as they process the text (Dole, 1991). Readers intentionally use their thinking strategies in a flexible manner according to the requirements of each specific text-type they encounter. Therefore, the quality of knowledge readers bring to text combined with the strategies they use in order to grasp and integrate its meaning is paramount to
cognitively based literacy approaches, and is connected to many disciplines within the realm of social science, including cognitive linguistics. In the last thirty years, cognitive linguistics, which is distinct from psycholinguistics, has become its own discreet science (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Evans & 2007; Evans & Green, 2006; Spanish Cognitive Linguistics Association., 2003).

Cognitive linguistics differs from other approaches to the study of language and literacy. It is relevant to this research because of its connection to individual perceptions about literacy and its implications to literacy pedagogy. This theoretical paradigm assumes that language is not an autonomous cognitive faculty or an instinct, as advocated by other linguists such as Stephen Pinker (Pinker, 1994), but rather it is situated in a specific environment. In this paradigm language that is contextual to a specific environment is a product of human cognition shaped by aspects of the human body as a whole, not just its brain (Valenzuela, 2009).

Cognitive linguists study how context affects individual thinking and the way thought and language connect. Simply stated, cognitive linguistics helps to explain the relationship between language and the thinking processes within the human brain. Of course, other disciplines such as neuroscience, cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, philosophy and certain areas of anthropology also investigate the link between language, thought and experience and to a far greater extent than even a decade ago. However, cognitive linguistics takes this connectedness further and explains it as the blending of mind and body and does not separate the physical from the intellectual (Valenzuela, 2009). Valenzuela defines this theory as ‘embodied cognition’ and goes on to explain that cognitive linguistics has done a great deal to refute traditional ideas of language. This is consistent with the views of other prominent cognitive linguists, who describe their endeavours as an exploration of situated language use and context which, when emphasised, yields new theories of human language and challenges traditional and formal theories of language (Croft & Cruse, 2004). The focus upon challenging traditional views of human language acquisition and the need to contextualize to specific individual situations may prove to be relevant to this study in terms of the students’ personal and academic contexts and it may influence their perceptions about their literacy capacities.
Similar to genre theory, cognitive linguistics is closely associated with semantics and often focuses on the relation between symbolic denotation and its connection to words and phrases. Due to the networks this discipline creates between psychology, physiology and language acquisition and the challenges it poses to formal theories of language, it may prove to be a valuable reference point to the data collected for this research and thus its main precepts have been included in this literature review.

**Social Theories and Literacy Instruction:**

It is vital to investigate a wide variety of social theories related to literacy instruction because students’ perceptions of their capacities may be linked to the instructional approaches their teachers utilised during the course of their education. Whole language, functional linguist and genre theorists hold diverse and often opposing views about literacy. These diverse theories have profoundly influenced pedagogy. They are investigated and briefly described in this review because of their impact on instructional approaches in educational settings, specifically in relation to literacy. This will ensure any impact stemming from these theories is recognized in case it manifests as a factor in students’ perceptions about their literacy capacities.

**Whole Language Pedagogy:**

Whole Language Pedagogy was established in the early 1980s and it can be described as a socially based approach used by teachers to develop student literacy. It involves teacher reliance on students’ prior oral knowledge and awareness of written language and then building on this knowledge with personally interesting and meaningful texts that align and fit in with their own environmental contexts. Whole Language approaches reject basal reading texts and their structural linguistic underpinnings that typically manifest themselves in teacher manuals mandated by government authorities. In the early eighties whole language approaches changed the role of the teacher from an authoritarian figure and centre of all knowledge to a knowledge facilitator or a guide of students’ quest for content and skill development (Goodman, 1998).

This method of teaching can be characterized as a revolution that originated in North America and swept its way through that continent and to other western countries, such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia. Over the last half of a century this pedagogical paradigm has been a source of a great deal of controversy within the...
western educational world due to its powerful impact on education, specifically literacy instruction. Whole Language approach stems from a wide variety of intellectual disciplines, such as psycholinguistics, literary theory and constructivist psychology just to name a few. This approach has found a way of combining diverse and often polarized fields. Consequently, it has revolutionized pedagogy and at the same time threatened established systems that preceded this movement (Brinkley, 1999; Edelsky, 2006; Edelsky, Altwerger, & Flores, 1991; Goodman, 1998).

In the context of literacy, a major feature of a whole language approach involves students making their own choices about what books they read and the allocation of regular intervals of school time for the purpose of silent, independent reading. Moreover, in the early primary years, the method relies on students to recognize whole words as they read, rather than breaking them down into syllables, whilst decoding their phonemic sounds (Weaver, Stephens, & Vance, 1990). Given its reliance on a wide diversity of student selected texts, whole language pedagogy has substantively affected book sales and the use of educational infrastructures, such as school libraries. As a result of its significant economic impact, this pedagogical method has become politicized as it became a major subject of national educational discourses, research and scrutiny, from its inception by renowned, educational reformers such as Maria Montessori as well as John Dewey to its most recent, illustrious supporters in the twenty first century, such as Noam Chomsky and Kenneth S. Goodman.

In the late eighties, powerful lobby groups situated on the right of the political spectrum, joined forces with religious activists in the United States, specifically in California, Utah and Texas to force schools to desist from using whole language methodology in favour of more traditional approaches that focused heavily on the explicit teaching of phonics (Weaver & Henke, 1992). In the United States this movement had a significant impact on educational policy and acquired its own term as ‘back-to-the-basics’ pedagogy and eventually through the utilisation of powerful lobby group coalitions it culminated with ‘The No Child Left Behind Act’ (NCLB) of 2002. The NCLB Act dates back to 1965 federal legislation pertaining to funding of K-12 schooling titled ‘The Elementary and Secondary Education Act’ (New America Foundation, 2014). The crux of the NCLB legislation relies on state mandated testing of essential skills, such as literacy and numeracy. Schools are funded based on the results
achieved on these tests, despite the fact that the mandate of the original, 1965 legislation was to provide extra moneys to needy schools in order to even out the funding inequity between wealthy and socio-economically disadvantaged school districts.

In the U.K. Whole Language Pedagogy became known as ‘the real books approach’, whilst in Australia and New Zealand it has been termed as a ‘progressivist approach’ (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012). Although in these countries Whole Language Pedagogical Approaches and its underpinning constructivist theories did not become a subject of strong political attack in the same manner as in the United States, nevertheless, over the past three decades progressivist versus traditionalist approaches have been an integral part of educational and theoretical discourses and even heated debates (Frankel, 2013). Currently many common-place instructional approaches pertaining to literacy stem from Whole Language or Progressivist Pedagogy. For example, ‘Guided Reading’, ‘Independent Reading & Conferencing’, ‘Student-directed, Inquiry Research’ and ‘Reciprocal Teaching’ are examples of practical applications of whole language approaches in western classrooms (Clay, 1994; DeFord, Lyons, & Pinnell, 1991; Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

The work of Donald Graves, in the area of writing instruction articulates with Whole Language or Progressivist pedagogy and significantly influenced literacy instruction in western classrooms. Today his process-approach to the teaching of writing manifests itself in English classrooms throughout the world. Based on a five-step approach in the teaching of writing, Graves has provided educators with a structured method that guides students through the prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publication stages of writing (Graves, 1991 & 1994). Of particular interest to this study is his accounting of the psychological effect teachers’ behaviours and attitudes towards writing would have on the formation of students’ beliefs about their own writing capacities. Specifically, Graves contended that if students’ teachers were writing practitioners themselves, they would positively influence their pupils’ attitudes towards writing. His scaffolded instruction titled ‘The Writing Process’ would provide the technical means, whilst the teachers’ modelling of this process, combined with the provision of class time and teacher-student collaboration, would facilitate students’ psychological motivation to persist with developing their writing capacities (Graves, 1994).
**Genre Theorists:**
Genre theory emerged at the end of the twentieth century in Australia and established its own revolutionary approaches to literacy instruction, independent to the ‘Whole Language’ methods. In Australia, Genre Theory stems from a group of scholars, known as ‘The Sydney School’, whose ideas were translated into classroom application in the late 1990s with state-wide projects, such as ‘Disadvantaged Schools Program’.

Classroom application of Genre Theory focuses on providing socially disadvantaged students with access to academic genres, defined as ‘genres of power’, and this is achieved through explicit instruction in metalanguage that is linked to the specific features of each genre.

Unlike Whole Language pedagogy, dubbed by Genre Theorists as a key component of ‘Progressivist Pedagogy’ (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012), genre approaches advance the notion that a teacher is an academically authoritative figure rather than a mere knowledge facilitator. In this pedagogical approach students take on a role of apprentices, who participate in a series of sequenced steps that lead to their academic literacy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012). These series of scaffolded steps are best illustrated in a teaching-learning cycle titled ‘Martin Model of Genre’ developed through the ‘Disadvantaged Schools Program’ in Sydney N.S.W. in order to educate marginalised students (Macken, 1989b).

In addition to providing an instructional model for the efficacious teaching of literacy, specifically writing, J. R. Martin delineated six text-types as ‘the genres of power in educational settings’. These text-types comprise reports, explanatory texts, procedural texts, discussions, recounts and narratives (Martin, 1992, pp. 10-12). It should be noted the Australian ‘Martin Model of Genre’ a scaffolded, instructional cycle has an American counterpart, titled ‘The Gradual Release of Responsibility’ instructional model, introduced by P.D. Pearson & M. C. Gallagher in their article titled ‘The Instruction of Reading Comprehension’ (Pearson, 1983).

The ‘Martin Model of Genre’ wheel consists of three stages – ‘modelling’, ‘joint negotiation of text’ and ‘independent construction of text’. Modelling entails the teachers explicitly sharing and showing specific features and schematic stages of one of the six power genres. As authorities on these texts, teachers field student questions and
provide their knowledge and experience of these texts’ functions, purposes and social contexts. The second step, labelled as ‘joint negotiation of text creation’, can be described as a collaborative process during which the teacher explicitly leads the student in practice text construction, and may involve activities such as student observation, research, note-taking, discussion, rehearsal or role play. In the third step students take more control of the learning process, thereby becoming more active in their learning as they construct their versions of the designated genre or text-type. This step also involves students individually editing or reworking their product until it is fit for publishing or assessment. Thus students in this third phase of the scaffolded learning cycle must demonstrate a reasonable degree of competency in the creation of the genre under study. The three steps repeat with each introduction of a new genre and the teachers direct this decision making process (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012; Macken, 1989b).

From a North American Educational perspective, Pearson and Gallagher’s ‘Gradual Release of Responsibility’ instructional cycle, follows a similar trajectory of teacher guided activities as the Martin Model, with the exception that this model is presented linearly, rather than cyclically and it consists of six steps – teacher explanation, teacher modelling, guided practice, collaborative practice, independent practice, and student reflection. As its name suggests the teacher starts off this scaffolded process by explaining and modelling the desired skill and having the most responsibility for instruction, all the while, gradually releasing instructional responsibility as the pupils master a given skill-set. This process was initially designed to teach reading skills, it has since been adapted to involve the teaching of any literacy skill, including reading, writing and public speaking in different disciplinary contexts (Pearson, 1983; Plaut, 2009; Pressley & Allington, 2014).

Although genre theorists have had theoretical counterparts in the USA and U.K alike, educational models and their subsequent pedagogical approaches, devised by Australian Genre Theorists, have recently gained momentum in western educational settings on European, North American as well as Australian continents (Bawarshi, 2003; Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Delpit, 2006; Lemke, 1995). Since Australian Genre Theorists have aimed to devise a method by which all students can successfully engage with academic texts, regardless of their respective literacy skills, it has been described as pedagogy
created for inclusion and empowerment of underserved students (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012; Frankel, 2013).

Systemic Functional Linguistics:

Theoretically, Genre Pedagogy is underpinned by Michael A. K. Halliday’s ‘Systemic Functional Linguistics’, a philosophical framework that argues any ‘text’s interaction with and influence on its environment leads to social action’ and hence it is contextualised within a particular situation (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is not to be confused with structural or cognitive linguistics, each of which is founded in a different epistemological position and advocates a different theoretical model of language. However, the work of Michael Halliday is of particular relevance to this research, because it has substantively influenced Bill Green’s Literacy in 3D Model, particularly the cultural dimension. Since this research draws upon Green’s theoretical framework extensively in order to organize and make sense of the field data collected in the form of student interviews, it was important to investigate the underlying assumptions based on which the three dimensions of literacy were constructed.

Halliday describes SFL as a general theory of language, which is a social semiotic resource and he distinguishes theoretical categories from descriptive in the field of linguistics. In his view language is first and foremost concerned with the acts of meaning and he contends there is an integral connection between language and social structure. In his dissertation “An interpretation of the functional relationship between language and social structure” Halliday states social structure is actively symbolised by linguistic structure and that there is a mutual creativity between these two phenomena (Halliday & Kress, 1976). Essentially, Halliday’s SFL stresses that any text is contextualized within a particular society and that as it interacts with this society, it exerts influence that leads to social action – ergo, language is closely associated with power and individuals are empowered by the degree of their access to language.

Although genre theorists such as Cope, Kalantzis and Martin do not hold the same views on genre components as Halliday, they do share his allegiance to social justice, which is grounded in the belief that explicit instruction of genre is an integral factor of efficacious pedagogy. Halliday perceives genre as part of any text’s register, which he
further breaks down into ‘field’, ‘tenor’ and ‘mode’ (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Kress, 1976; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Along with the genre theorists, he argues that explicit, genre instruction is effective with contemporary students, particularly those who are marginalised due to their socio-economic status, race, or gender, because these approaches empower such students by providing them with necessary linguistic codes for school success.

The New London Group:
In 1996 genre theory gave rise to a theoretical construct known as ‘Multi-Literacies’ through ‘A New London Group’ collaboration that has profoundly influenced literacy discourses in the western world, particularly Australia and United States (New London Group, 1996). Cope, Kalantzis, Gee and Luke are some of the prominent theorists and members of this group. Their research has broadened traditionally narrow definitions of literacy which in the past focused primarily on reading and writing (Kalantzis, Cope, & New London Group., 2000; New London Group. & National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia. Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture., 1995). Multi-literacies theory explains individual literacy as identification, reading and creation of text in all existing types, such as print, electronic and live modes. Semiotics or social sign-recognition plays another central role in this definition and can be explained as the way people create a system of signs and attribute a specific meaning to them. The New London Group further subdivides literacy into visual, audial and linguistic meanings. They further develop the definition of literacy and align it with current global trends and realities. It will be important to analyse students’ statements from the genre theorists’ broadened view of literacy in order to look for any factors that may be affecting students’ perceptions about their literacy capacities.

Bill Green’s Literacy in 3D Model:
This research makes extensive use of Bill Green’s Literacy in 3D Model, because his theoretical construct corresponds with the work of genre theorists, including The New London Group and serves as a useful tool for analysis of the field data collected in this study. Although Green devised this model in the late 1980s, just at the height of the whole language versus traditionalist pedagogy debates, the model has stood the test of time due to its capacity to evolve and encompass emerging literacies, such as digital-computer literacy. This model is useful for the field data collected because it has not
only amalgamated effective literacy instructional processes, but also organized them in a non-linear fashion, preventing one facet of literacy from eclipsing another (Green, 1988b).

Complementing Bill Green’s Literacy in 3D Model is Luke and Freebody’s ‘Four Resources Model’ which was constructed approximately during the same time frame, but one which targeted the reading component of literacy in the context of primary school settings and did not encompass text creation, which is so vital to high school adolescents (Luke, 1999). The literacy categories of this model describe readers as ‘Code Breakers’, ‘Text Participants’, ‘Text Users’ and ‘Text Analysts’. The ‘Code Breakers’ align with the operational dimension of the Green model, ‘Text Participants & Text Users’ with the cultural and ‘Text Analyst’ with the critical dimension. Although both models articulate literacy in a similar manner, the 3D Model was chosen for this research due to its robustness and applicability to high school settings.

Green’s model is designed to accommodate multi-dimensional complexities associated with contemporary, literacy understandings and attributes equal value to student production and consumption of the written word, regardless of its mode, which is a key feature of high school literacy. Green created this model in response to the vociferous debates stemming from educational theorists, who were deeply aligned with either progressivist, traditionalist or genre paradigms. He also purported to break down some of the dichotomies that emerged around literacy instruction and research through his non-linear literacy construct that has remained relevant and helpful to the present day.

Similarly to Genre Theorists, including The New London Group, the 3D model draws upon the linguistic work of Michael Halliday. However, it also uniquely connects the pedagogical theories of James Moffett, whom Green characterizes as theorists residing ‘in distinct and separate universes of discourse’, but ones who nevertheless share significant ‘affinities’ (Green & Beavis, 2012, p. XV & 28). The 3D Model’s contemporary relevance to diverse manifestations of literacy capacities, including digital modes of text creation, is yet another reason it has been given precedence in this research.
PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

Linking Literacy Capacities with Educational Psychology:
The impact of psychological factors on students’ educational experience has become ubiquitous in most pedagogical fields and literacy is no different. Psychologists and other social scientists assert that students’ positive or negative beliefs about their abilities are directly associated with not only their overall satisfaction with school life, but also with the quality of their learning outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Dweck, 2012; Elliot & Dweck, 2007; Scott, 1996). Given the fact this study is concerned with any factors influencing students’ attitudes about their literacy capacities and that these connect not only to instructional approaches, but also to educational psychology, it is imperative to examine theories that relate to the formation of students’ self-concepts.

The ideas pertaining to how individuals construct specific self-concepts and how these affect their attainment of goals, academic and otherwise, stem from social cognitive theory.

Self-concept Theorists:
Although achievement and motivation have been a focus of research for over a century and date back to the early beginnings of psychology in 1890s, self-concept theorists have yet to develop consistent definitions on individual competence perceptions and to standardise their methodological practices in reference to these competencies (Elliot & Dweck, 2007). The main tenet of social cognitive theory is the view that all individuals are the directors of their own development. Key to this type of personal empowerment is the belief that one has a degree of control over one’s thoughts, feelings and actions (Bandura, 1986).

Self-Efficacy:
One aspect of social cognitive theory pertaining to human agency that has achieved consistent classification, a clear definition and one that has been substantiated by an enormous body of research, has pertained to individual self-efficacy. The parameters of self-efficacy have been clearly delineated by social scientists and distinguished from other self-concepts such as self-esteem and self-worth. Albert Bandura, an educational psychologist, is credited to be the chief contributor to this definition and its subsequent, theoretical construct. From his early research in 1977 to his more recent work,
Bandura’s self-efficacy model and its sources have helped to organize and unify this aspect of human agency so that it can be used reliably as a theoretical lens for research: ‘No single theorist is credited with formulating the construct of self-concept and outlining its basic tenets, as Bandura has done for self-efficacy’ (Elliot & Dweck, 2007, p. 88).

Bandura explains self-efficacy as a personal judgment of capability and distinguishes it from self-esteem as a judgment of self-worth (Bandura, 1997). He argues that even though self-efficacy is constructed from an individual’s perceived capability, this perception is often a stronger determining factor in the attainment of goals than an individual’s actual capability. Of course, Bandura does not claim self-efficacy as the single factor of an individual’s competence or actual achievement outcomes, as each given task requires its own set of unique skills. However, his extensive lines of inquiry have shown that regardless of other factors, self-efficacy profoundly influences individual motivation, activity choice and achievement outcomes. Therefore, in this respect individuals’ positive perceptions of their abilities are of fundamental importance because they fuel motivation and foster psychological well-being, both of which are central to any kind of goal attainment or personal accomplishment.

**Sources of Self-Efficacy**

Bandura credits four sources as originators of a strong sense of self-efficacy in an individual. Firstly, all individuals need to be involved in ‘mastery experiences’, because creating conditions where individuals attain success ‘builds a robust belief in one’s personal efficacy’, whilst ‘failures undermine it, especially if failures occur before a sense of self-efficacy is firmly established’ (Bandura, 1998, p. 2). As individuals engage in tasks and activities, they either interpret them as successful because they have reached a mastery level in that given task or encountered failure because they did not attain a desired level of competence. The mastery experiences raise self-efficacy whilst failures lower it, unless the unsuccessful results are infrequent.

A second source of self-efficacy stems from observation of other people’s experiences, but this factor is not as strong as the individual’s own experience. From an educational perspective the importance of teachers creating positive models for students is obvious. However, Bandura asserts that indirect or observational experiences are very influential
when the individuals associate some aspect of their model’s similarities to their own abilities. Ergo, a significant model in one’s own life can help influence the course and direction that life takes and profoundly influence the type of self-efficacy developed.

The third source of self-efficacy comes from the individual’s society by way of judgments they receive from others. Bandura dubs these opinion givers or persuaders as ‘self-efficacy builders’ because they can affirm and thus strengthen the individual’s perceptions of their abilities. Conversely, persuaders can negate or undermine an individual’s self-efficacy. Importantly, unsubstantiated or false compliments fall into the undermining - persuaders category, though the intentions of the persuaders may have been the opposite (Bandura, 1995, p. 4). Once again, the educational implications of this third source of self-efficacy are clearly evident. For example, teachers and other school personnel are powerful persuaders, who have the privilege and responsibility of being positive, self-efficacy builders for their students and so they need to nurture their beliefs in their capabilities, whilst ensuring their students’ envisioned success is achievable and that their subsequent praise realistically corresponds with this achievement:

‘Successful efficacy builders do more than convey positive appraisals, ... they encourage individuals to measure their success in terms of self-improvement rather than by triumphs over others.’ (Ibid, p.4).

Therefore, Bandura maintains that all school personnel must have the ability to cultivate student development of self-efficacy by creating a positive atmosphere for student attainment of academic achievements regardless of whether they interact with advantaged or disadvantaged students (Bandura, 1995, 1997, 1998).

Finally, the fourth source of self-efficacy is attributed to individuals’ biological and emotional factors, defined as ‘affective processes’, for example individual levels of anxiety, stress, arousal and mood. Figuring in this source is a strong capacity for self-reflection and metacognition, so that people can realistically shape their beliefs based on their experiences, explorations of their thinking and reflection on their own behaviours.
Growth versus Fixed Mindsets:
Carol Dweck’s contemporary research on self-reflection and metacognition strongly corresponds with Bandura’s self-efficacy model. Her subsequent construct defined as individual ‘growth mindset’, which she contrasts with a ‘fixed mindset’ further builds on the notion that it is fundamentally important that individuals possess the capacity to critically self-evaluate performance and to continually reflect and alter behaviour accordingly. Growth mindset is explained as a powerful self-belief that intelligence and personality can be developed and is not a fixed, deep-seated trait. Mindset is officially defined as a ‘habitual or characteristic mental attitude that determines how [individuals] interpret and respond to situations’ (“WordNet: An Electronic Lexical Database, Cambridge,” 1998). Dweck distinguishes a growth mindset from a ‘fixed mindset’. She explains that a fixed mindset stems from the belief that human qualities are permanent attributes that can’t be significantly altered through persistent effort (Dweck, 2008, 2012).

Individuals with growth mindsets use failure as data that can inform subsequent action for improvement, whilst individuals with fixed mindsets associate it with painful, self-defining moments that are permanent sources of trauma. Their goal is to avoid failure in order to maintain a fixed status already attained previously. In contrast, individuals with growth mindsets take more risks and engage in difficult tasks that may bring about failure, using unsuccessful moments as sources of information and then persist in that task until they achieve success. Similarly to Bandura’s self-efficacy theory, Dweck posits that a growth mindset permeates every part of an individual’s life and is the best means of reaching individual potential. Persistence and resilience is a key quality in people with growth mindsets and this again corresponds very strongly with Bandura’s theory that people with a strong sense of self-efficacy are willing to invest high levels of effort into the achievement of their goals and believe in their own capacities.

In their chapter ‘Competence Perceptions and Academic Functioning’, Dale H. Shunk and Frank Pajares draw on Bandura and Dweck’s work further as they argue the recent focus in education on individual self-beliefs is an important research that posits the notion that all individuals are actively involved in their own cognitive development (Elliot & Dweck, 2007). Similarly to Dweck’s contemporary work on ‘growth mindset’ as a determining factor of individual success, Shunk and Pajares reference in detail
Bandura’s extensive body of work on self-efficacy, a theory grounded in social cognition and work that spans almost half of a century. Clearly, extensive social research shows the power of positive, self-perceptions in any academic context and their link to resilience, mental health and its proportionality to perseverance in the face of adversity. Thus individual resilience linked to positive beliefs about one’s ability is bound to play a key role in this research and is likely to connect to the statements made by the student participants.

**Contemporary Research of Student Self-Concepts and Literacy:**
A recent New Zealand Study investigated the connection between levels of academic literacy and self-efficacy in students entering tertiary studies. It put forth a very strong case that strong self-efficacy was a positive factor in success when it matched actual academic literacy. Moreover, the greatest negative effect on academic literacy was seen on adult students with high academic ability and low self-efficacy (Wilson, 2012). Although this investigation focused upon young adults in the context of post-secondary school settings, its findings are highly relevant to 15-year old adolescents, because both age groups are in the process of investigating post-secondary pathways that require consistent demonstrations of sound, academic literacy capacities. However, for the young adult group as opposed to the fifteen-year-old high school students, the need to demonstrate strong academic capacities is likely more pressing since they are attempting to successfully enrol in a specific area of post-secondary school training after completing high school. Therefore, the self-efficacy factor may be much more influential in the shaping of their perceptions about their literacy capacities.

Based on the strong evidence of Wilson’s work, as well as accumulated global research, it is possible that self-efficacy will surface as one of the factors impacting students’ perceptions of their literacy capacities (Alvermann, 2002; Bandura, 1998; Miller, 2006; Scott, 1996; Wilson, 2012). Other studies have affirmed the strong link between students’ positive beliefs in their self-efficacy and literacy, such as Jill E. Scott, who established this strong connection and proved it to be powerfully influential on students’ literacy-related accomplishments in academic settings (Scott, 1996).
Conclusion:
Although the disciplines of psychology and pedagogy are separate academic fields, in education they relate to one another. This interconnectedness manifests itself through the students themselves. Students’ emotional well-being profoundly links to their cognitive functioning; ergo it connects to their perceptions of their literacy capacities. Consequently, it was necessary to explore the history and the underlying foundations of literacy-related instructional approaches, as well as cognitive theories in psychology that connect to the formation of self-concepts in individuals. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the intention of this study is to illuminate an area of academic literacy that directly links to students’ intellectual as well as emotional states. Therefore, an attempt at synthesising these two disciplines has been made in this literature review in order to better contextualise the student perceptions of their literacy experiences.
CHAPTER 3
Qualitative Methodology

Multiple Case - Study:
To facilitate the emergence of any institutional and personal factors that are influencing students’ perceptions, I opted to use a semi-structured interview format that would allow me the flexibility to broaden or alter the type of questions I asked of the participants as was needed. In this way I could use the interview plan in a flexible manner, based on the students’ divergent literacy capacities and academic experiences (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Qualitative researchers assert that such experiences are constructed or shaped by each person, creating a partial rather than an objective reality (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Hence, I knew that according to qualitative methodology precepts, I would not be able to construct generalities from each specific case, but that I could generate rich data by encouraging participants to elaborate upon their ideas and beliefs. Any factors that would emerge from these interviews and which may be shaping students’ perceptions could be illuminated and scrutinized with the aid of Green’s three-dimensional literacy model.

I employed qualitative methodology because high schools are complex, highly contextual academic settings, where independent variables are not easily eliminated. Consequently, the research lens needed to function like a kaleidoscope or a mechanism capable of projecting multi-faceted patterns. Although complex, such patterns provided me with a rich snapshot of the students’ academic, emotional and social realities (Walters, Lareau, & Ranis, 2009). Moreover, a qualitative methodology enabled me to ‘understand, interpret and explain’ the ‘highly contextualised’ literacy profiles and perceptions of the five year-ten students (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 17). Employing empirical measures gathered via uniform surveys would not have adequately probed into the students’ divergent literacy capacities and beliefs in relation to their specific, academic and personal contexts.
METHOD

Access to Site and Research-participant Selection:
The research took place at a secondary college situated in the north-western suburbs of Melbourne’s Central Business District (CBD) in the state of Victoria. The school enrolment of approximately 1400 comprises students of working and middle class parents of different cultures. For example, the School Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value comprises of 983 which is below the Australian average value of 1000. Another way to contextualize the student body is to consider that only 6% of the school population falls under the heading of ‘top quarter’ of the ICSEA value as opposed to 25% in an average Australian high school. Additionally, a significant portion of the students speak a language other than English at home because their parents were born overseas. Understandably, utilization of two languages in everyday contexts significantly impacts students’ literacy capacities, particularly in terms of academic reading and writing (Hoff, 2006). Accordingly, in many cases parents of such students are not able to provide the same level of support in the areas of English speaking, reading and writing as parents for whom English is a primary language of communication.

Recruitment of Participants:
Since I work in this school as a Literacy Leader, I wanted to avoid exerting any pressure on teacher and student participants. Consequently, I asked for teacher volunteers first during an open forum at a general English staff meeting. This meeting took place at the start of the second school term in April of 2015 and then I waited for teachers to approach me for more information. The reasoning behind this decision was to ensure individual teachers or literacy program instructors did not feel obligated to participate in the research if one of their students agreed to become involved before they had a chance to decide whether they were interested in participating themselves. Therefore, it was important to recruit teacher volunteers first before approaching any students. During that initial explanation I made it clear participation was strictly voluntary and that if interested parties changed their minds about becoming involved after receiving written information and permission forms, they would not be obligated in any way in continuing with the project. I also stressed the fact that their decision to withdraw from
the project would have no bearing on their professional relationship with me, nor affect the security of the literacy support programming in any way.

Shortly after this meeting, five English teachers approached me expressing their interest in becoming involved. At that point I provided the teachers with a more comprehensive explanation of the project that was detailed in ‘The Teacher Consent Letter and Permission Form’ (Appendices 6 & 7). These prospective teacher-participants were asked to take the forms home and return them signed or unsigned during the next few days. I reasoned that if the teachers were given at least another few days to think about their involvement in the project, they would feel more comfortable to opt out, just in case they felt any pressure to step forward during the English meeting.

A few days after these conversations, I received all five of the teachers’ permission forms as well as invitations to visit their classes in order to invite students to become involved. During my visits I explained the nature and purpose of the project to the students and provided interested individuals with relevant forms, which consisted of a ‘Plain Language Statement’, a ‘Parental Permission Form’ as well as a separate ‘Student Permission Form’ (Appendices 3 – 5). Approximately twenty-five sets of these forms were distributed between the different English 10 classes. Over the span of approximately four to five weeks, I made short return visits in order to collect the forms.

During June and July of 2015 several students approached me in the library and school court-yard in order to ask clarifying questions about the nature of the interview and how I would record the videos and who would see the footage. I answered all these questions exactly in the same manner as they were explained in the written consent forms. Some of the students requested new forms to take home in order to obtain parent permission. They seemed very keen to be involved in the project. I thanked the students for their interest and reminded them once again they were not obligated to be involved if they changed their minds after discussing the project with their parents. I reiterated the fact that their involvement or non-involvement would have no bearing on their English courses or any of their academic assessments. By the end of June 2015, I was able to compile five sets of signed parental and student-permission forms and managed to secure a diverse group of students, who were willing to discuss their literacy capacities
in a recorded interview. The five student-participants shared three of the original five English Teacher Volunteers.

Two of the five students had participated in the school’s literacy support programs under my administrative direction during the preceding school year. However, since I do not teach in these programs myself, I had no detailed prior knowledge of these two students either, aside from the fact they had made use of the school’s literacy programs in the past. Most importantly, neither of these two students had been in a dependent student-teacher relationship with me, nor was presently enrolled in programs under my direction.

To eliminate bias, I ensured participants were not my students. I limited my knowledge of the students’ academic and social profiles to two sources of information. Firstly, I interviewed the participants’ English teachers using interview questions delineated in the ‘Teacher Interview Plan’ (Appendix 2). Secondly, to help ensure the students’ diversity, I analyzed their academic profiles by accessing the school data base of student assessments in literacy and numeracy. This aggregate is titled ‘Student Performance Analyzer’ (SPA) and contains literacy and numeracy information on students that is based on teacher assessments and in-house as well as government tests, such as ‘On Demand Testing’ and ‘National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)’ that measure students’ reading, writing and computing abilities according to national as well as state norms.

In the final selection of five student-participants, I was able to reflect the schools’ diverse population of year-ten students. For example, the three male and two female participants exhibited different literacy capacities and their cultural backgrounds varied as well. It had been my aim from the start to base participant selection on the ‘Purposive, varied intensity sampling’ method, because it complemented the qualitative methodology driving this study. ‘Purposeful sampling’, specifically ‘varied intensity sampling’ is a process by which a researcher acquires a small number of information-rich cases relating to a specific area of interest (Patton, 2002, pp. 230 - 235).

In this case I was also fortunate to be able to recruit participants with varied literacy capacities and divergent academic interests so that the sample corresponded with the varied intensity sampling criteria. Furthermore, two of the student-participants spoke a
language other than English outside of school and all five participants were part of diverse social groups in their year-ten cohort. Finally, detailed student profiles that are provided within the data analysis segment of this paper as well as the appended interview transcripts (ST#1 – 5 & TT #1-3), show that these student-participants were involved in different co-curricular programs in and out of school, had different career pathway interests, as well as held diverse attitudes about learning.

**Interviews:**

I gathered detailed statements from student and teacher-participants via a semi-structured interview format (Fontana, 2003). After I conducted all of these interviews, I transcribed them into scripted style documents for subsequent coding and analysis (Seidman, 2006). These transcripts are appended to this research and titled Student Transcripts numbers 1 – 5 (ST #1-5) and Teacher Transcripts numbered 1 – 3 (TT# 1-3). The student interviews were video-recorded and lasted approximately 30 – 40 minutes.

The teacher interviews were shorter (20-30 minutes) and they were audio taped. I conducted semi-structured discussions with the students’ current English teachers – Ms. Miller Teacher Transcript #1, Ms. Collins – Teacher Transcript #2 and Ms. Jackson Teacher Transcripts # 3 (T.T. #s 1 – 3 enclosed within the appendices).

The questions for these interviews were predominantly open-ended and designed to gather information about the students’ literacy related activities in the context of their school-subjects, co-curricular pursuits and any other relevant activities they were involved inside or outside their school. This prepared interview plan is enclosed with this research as Appendices 1 and 2. Please note that I asked each participant all the main questions within this interview plan, but also posed additional questions for clarification purposes or to elicit a more detailed narration from participants. During some of the interviews I did not pose the questions in their sequential order to follow a specific thread of conversation that proved to be particularly relevant to the investigation question or in order to make student-participants feel more comfortable by keeping the interview less formal.
The Interview Plans (Appendix 1 & 2) provide an example of key questions that were asked of the students. I avoided posing ‘leading questions’ that would have directed students in specific directions and I achieved this by retaining a neutral tone when posing any questions relating to their literacy capacities so they could not easily discern my value judgments. Moreover, I did not include value-laden, modifying words such as ‘helpful’, ‘positive’, or ‘effective’ in the interview plan (Seidman, 2006, pp. 84-85).

Each student participant was given a copy of the interview plan a few minutes prior to filming so he or she could think about the questions and feel more relaxed talking in front of the camera. Indeed, providing the student-participants with a paper-copy of the questions prior to the interview proved to be very successful in diverting their attention away from the camera’s presence. In four of the five cases, participants seemed to forget about the camera within a few minutes of the interview as they became engrossed in providing answers to the questions. Their relaxation was also evident from their body language, such as a relaxed posture or a facial expression. Another indicator of students’ comfort with the camera’s presence became evident when they stopped making eye-contact with the camera and focused their attention on the questionnaire. Emotions they exhibited in their faces and vocal tone matched the content of their narratives. The tenor of the interview thus became conversational and more conducive to retrospective thought.

In the case of the fourth participant, Susan, the provision of the interview questions did not work as effectively as in the other interviews. During the first fifteen minutes, she could not formulate her answers without stopping mid-sentence, nervously fidgeting with the questionnaire and hesitating over her answers. Susan’s body language reflected her nervousness and distraction. She appeared tense and her gaze wondered from the camera to the goings on outside the glass doors of the interview room. In order to make her feel more comfortable, I decided to pause the recording and provided her with a short break. Then, I repositioned the camera on the opposite side of the room, so that once our interview resumed Susan’s back was to the glass door. This strategy proved to be effective, because within a few moments of the second part of the interview, Susan began to concentrate on formulating her answers to the questions and provided detailed information about her literacy capacities that lasted almost thirty minutes.
The purpose of obtaining video footage of the student interviews was to capture not only the verbal answers, but also participants’ non-verbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions in the belief this additional information would be useful for subsequent analysis. These questions enabled student-participants to elaborate upon their reading, writing and attitudes about their English coursework. Interviews of English teachers were conducted to contextualize students’ statements, but these were audio-recorded only. All interviews were transcribed into a scripted style document (Seidman, 2006).

**Ethical Considerations:**
Since student participants were not of legal, adult age, permission from their parents or guardians was obtained in writing. Please refer to Appendices 3-5 which provide an example of the forms that were sent home with students so they could discuss the project with their parents and thereby make an informed decision about their participation. In order to protect participants’ privacy, teacher and students’ actual names were replaced with pseudonyms and hence are not published in this paper.

It should be noted students’ participation in this type of a research would not be considered an unusual activity by members of the school community, because many students in this school attend a variety of tutorials and leave their regular classes routinely to participate in activities that take place in small conference rooms where video or audio recording takes place. Additionally, many teachers in this school setting engage in conducting ‘action research’ for professional development purposes, and thus this research project was viewed as ‘business as usual’ by the community. Therefore, students’ participation in these interviews was not perceived as a departure from norm by their peers. Participants did not incur any harm in the form of peer-teasing or ridicule. In short, as a researcher, I was able to keep to the well-established, qualitative field method of ‘putting [the needs of] my subjects first, [the needs of] the study and [myself] last’ (Fontana, 2003, p. 90).

**Data Analysis:**
I used standard analysis techniques to thematically categorize, compare and cross reference students’ interview answers with the answers of their English teachers (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Cross referencing or comparing the participants’ answers
to the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions was particularly useful as it highlighted information relating to the students’ beliefs and helped to isolate repeating factors between participants (Duke & Mallette, 2011, p. 21).

Most importantly, Green’s 3-D Literacy Model served as an analytical lens that helped me to organize and scrutinize the field data. His framework underpins much of my analysis pertaining to students’ perceptions of their literacy capacities due to the holistic account it takes of literacy and its flexibility (Green & Beavis, 2012, p. 26).

Green organizes literacy into three dimensions – operational, critical and cultural. In this research these three literacy dimensions have been used to categorize participant’s statements according to their definitions. Moreover, any links between students’ perceptions and discussions about their literacy capacities have been highlighted and discussed in the findings. Due to the fundamental role Green’s model has been given in the analysis of this research, its construct is explained and contextualised against other models in the body of this literature review.

The Operational Dimension:
The operational dimension of Green’s Literacy in 3D describes the language medium through which a given literacy event happens. It necessitates language competency in terms of vocabulary, grammar, phonetic decoding and all other elements that enable an individual to use language effectively in specific contexts. Green’s operational literacy emphasizes text creation, or how ‘adequately [the written language system] is handled’ by a given individual within his or her specific context (Green & Beavis, 2012, p. 5). One manifestation of the operational dimension can be explained through individuals who have a strong capacity to read and write in an efficacious manner that is congruent with the grammatical expectations of their environments. Green argues it is essential for any school curriculum to incorporate instruction that treats operational skills as a fundamental part of teaching and learning and not as an optional extra (Ibid, 2012).

The Cultural Dimension:
Bill Green explicitly states that his 3D Literacy Model draws upon Halliday’s body of work in Systemic Functional Linguistics and this is particularly evident within the cultural dimension, where it links to text register as an integral facet of literacy (Green
Learning a language entails learning a culture in order to be a successful participant in that culture (Halliday, 1975, 1978). In an educational context, Green describes cultural learning as ‘being socialised into a [domain-specific] subject’ (Green & Beavis, 2012, p. 6) and he draws attention to the strong relationship between subject-area literacy and cultural literacy because functioning successfully within a specific domain via one’s reading and writing abilities involves ‘being socialised into a [given] subject’ (Ibid, 2012 p.7).

The Critical Dimension:
Proficiency in the Critical Dimension of literacy provides access for individuals in ‘the meaning system of culture in order to function in it effectively and productively’ (Green & Beavis, 2012, p. 7). Green explicated this dimension in great detail in his original 1988 article, titled ‘Subject Specific Literacy and School Learning’. Therein he defined the critical dimension as closely associated with making sense or deriving meaning from literature through its creation. Another way to explain this dimension would be through an individual’s capacity to make inferences about a given text. This dimension is highlighted to an individual through schooling, which plays an integral role because students need to be given access to the grounds for selection and the principles of interpretation into the processes and possibilities of knowledge production. In the text creation sense this literacy dimension is subject-specific and can operate as a means of social control and even student empowerment.

Critical literacy enables an individual not only to interpret and thereby consume knowledge, but also to produce knowledge. In this way individuals can maintain and transform their own culture as they ‘[reflect] critically on what is being learned and taught in classrooms [in order] to take an active role in the production of knowledge and meaning’ (Green 1988, p. 163). Green contends that ‘individuals need to gain access to the meaning system of the culture in order to function in it effectively and productively’ (Green & Beavis, 2012, p. 7). Moreover, the critical dimension can be explained as the opportunity for individuals to interpret information through their own production of that type of information, thus making optimal use of their own cognitive functioning. In the context of education, text creation is not only expected of its participants, but it is also highly formalized and differentiated within each domain, meaning its producers must be privy to its specifications and be given ‘opportunity[ies] to work collaboratively and
constructively towards [reaching] informed personal meanings’ (Ibid., p. 8). Text creation or production and not just consumption is a fundamental aspect of Green’s model and thus of vital importance to this research project, which investigates year-ten students’ perceptions of their literacy capacities at a time in their educational journey where text creation via essay writing, for example, is an established and an expected norm.

Green defined and explained the operational, critical and cultural dimensions for multiple purposes such as framing research, as a pedagogical reference for classroom instruction or even in order to inform school literacy policies. The model explains the import of each aspect of literacy acquisition and does not limit literacy to reading, speaking and writing, encompassing the creation and critical comprehension of multimodal text or computer text, which is an essential requirement in the contemporary, digital age. Since Green’s initial construction of this model in the late 1980s, it has been utilised in numerous ways by researchers and educators (Green, 1988; Green & Beavis, 2012). In his latest textual collaboration with Catherine Beavis, Green’s 3D Model is re-articulated and utilised for educational research purposes in the context of Information Technology (IT) Media Education, Drama and Language Arts (Green & Beavis, 2012).

**Anticipated Problems & Solutions:**

As a researcher in this project, who is involved in the school’s literacy programs, I had to be extra careful with participant recruitment, so that no one felt coerced to become involved. Also, I had to ensure each participant’s privacy was respected, which I did by referring to each individual by a pseudonym. Moreover, by focusing the research on students’ beliefs about their literacy capacities, I avoided indulging in literacy program reviews. However, my professional involvement in this educational institution also had advantages because it enhanced my understanding of participants’ learning and social contexts, as well as provided me with a thorough knowledge of the school culture.
CHAPTER 4
Research Analysis & Findings

Research Question: What are the influential factors in year ten students’ perceptions of their literacy capacities?

Are these factors stemming from personal or institutional settings?

Introduction:
This chapter describes how the interview transcripts were analysed. The purpose was to illuminate any factors accounting for students’ self-efficacy in the context of literacy and to identify their source as either belonging to the students’ personal lives or institutional contexts. In addition to field data analysis, I have provided some background information regarding each participant, along with an explanation of how I utilised Bill Green’s Literacy in 3D model as a tool for this analytical process.

The five year-ten participants in this study belonged to different social groups and varied in interests and academic backgrounds. A brief overview of their learning profiles, personality traits and interests is included in order to help with the analysis of their perceptions relating to literacy. For example, once a given factor is identified, its source can then be determined as either stemming from the students’ personal lives or educational setting. In addition to scrutinizing the students’ literacy data, English teachers’ descriptions of the students provided me with rich detail that helped to illuminate each participant’s literacy journey.

Student Perceptions and Bill Green’s Literacy in 3D Model:

As I detailed within the methodology section of this research, Bill Green’s Literacy in 3D Model served as an analytical tool of the five participants’ statements. This framework helped me to identify factors and sources of students’ literacy perceptions. Green specifically devised the operational, critical and cultural dimensions to be used for research data analysis, among other functions such as curriculum design (Green & Beavis, 2012). It’s vital to restate that the operational, critical and cultural dimensions are not hierarchical in any sense and hence do not supersede one another. Each dimension fulfils a different task that cannot operate without the other two. Therefore, as students’ statements reveal their interaction with any one of the dimensions, they inevitably tap into the components of the other two dimensions.
The model served as a way to separate and organize participants’ literacy-related statements into the three categories – operational, critical and cultural so that any factors directly impacting their perceptions could be made more visible and distinct. For example, if a given participant’s perceptions centred on the operational dimension, then factors supporting these perceptions were traced and identified as they related to this dimension. Thus, participants’ literacy perceptions were categorized and illuminated according to the model’s structure.

As my field-data analysis progressed, the utility of the 3D Model broadened from a magnification lens to a whole set of laboratory tools. Its functionality became analogous to a centrifuge that separates a whole mixture into its distinct components so these can be isolated and magnified for further analysis. It became vital to separate and organise students’ literacy-oriented perceptions into the operational, critical and cultural categories because it enabled factors influencing their beliefs to emerge more clearly and helped me to recognize whether they stemmed from the students’ personal or educational contexts.

Since the operational dimension is linked to language, participant’s statements pertaining to grammatical or functional elements of literacy fell into this category. The operational dimension can be described as an individual’s ability to effectively utilise the language system within its specific context, whether through text consumption such as reading, or text production such as writing and speaking (Green & Beavis, 2012).

Students’ statements that connected to the cultural dimension were identified through their references to different text-types, modes or channels of information exchange, or through the way they characterized their interpersonal relationships within their literacy-related activities (Green, 1988a; Green & Beavis, 2012; Halliday, 1978, 1985).

The participants’ statements that linked to their critical thinking and even thinking about thinking, known as metacognition, were classified according to the definition of the critical dimension. (The critical dimension includes cognitive processes such as text interpretation and links to individuals’ capacities to understand or make sense of texts.)
Student Participant 1 – Daniel’s Profile:

Daniel is the first male participant in this project. He is a confident speaker, who volunteered to become involved in this research without hesitation. Daniel does not speak another language at home aside from English. He actively participates in the school’s Leadership and Enrichment programs as well as other athletic, co-curricular programs offered at his school. Outside of school Daniel is heavily involved in a community football club and he openly admits he’d rather be playing sports than reading. However, since his mother insists he must read on a regular basis and discusses his readings with him, he attributes his reading proficiency to these sessions:

Daniel: ‘...I think the majority of primary school I did enjoy reading . . . it was something still I wouldn’t choose to do at home, but I did enjoy it when I was forced to do it.’

(Student Transcript [ST] #1, lines 111 - 112).

Additionally, Daniel places high value on the help he receives from his older sister, because he perceives her literacy capacities to be more proficient than his own, as she is currently completing her university degree.

Daniel’s strong oral communication skills are evident during the course of our interview and were described as such by his English teacher, who had assessed Daniel’s verbal skill in class during formal, oral presentations. Moreover, Daniel’s confidence in his speaking ability shows in the enthusiastic manner he volunteered to participate in the study, putting his hand up without hesitation during recruitment and in the way he approaches the video interview with confidence. His enthusiasm for the project is consistent with his willingness to lead school projects, as part of the school’s student leadership program. Daniel has also been a keen participant in the Group Literacy Support (GLS) program in the previous year, in which he took on a proactive role due to his confidence and initiative. His enthusiasm for this endeavour was noted by his English teacher, who described Daniel as a natural leader with strong public speaking skills.
Daniel’s aggregated literacy data, which dates back to his year seven performance on standardized reading comprehension tests, shows he consistently performs above expected standards in the areas of reading and writing and this information corresponds with his English teacher’s as well as his own statements about his reading, writing and speaking skills.

Daniel & the Critical & Operational Dimensions:
When he is asked directly how he perceives his literacy capacities, Daniel focuses the discussion on his public speaking and essay writing through the context of text interpretation and writing. Daniel perceives his capacities to be more than adequate in the context of critical and operational literacy dimensions providing certain factors are in place:

Daniel:  ‘I think of myself as a confident speaker in terms of literacy, but I enjoy writing as long as I understand the writing form and what we’re doing. I really need to get a good, uhm, interpretation of what we’re doing and then I, in most terms I fly through it. I’m really successful at that . . .’
(ST1, lines 127 – 130)

It’s noteworthy that Daniel puts a condition on his critical literacy proficiency with ‘I really need to get a good interpretation of what we’re doing’. Daniel’s reference to interpretation can be understood in terms of the critical dimension, which requires a student to be able to formulate a thorough understanding of the text’s literal and figurative meaning. Once Daniel perceives this literacy competency to be in place, then he feels he can ‘fly’ through the required assessment. In the latter segment of his interview Daniel provides some detail as to the learning conditions that need to be in place in order for him to arrive at a good interpretation of text and his thorough understanding of the writing form. He states he needs time to discuss it in a safe environment and that his teachers need to provide him with many opportunities and regular chunks of time to discuss texts in detail with peers and also with an adult, who is capable of guiding and facilitating such an analytical discussion:

Daniel:  Uhm, the primary thing we just did was, uhm, was made up in the room. Discuss and just really concentrate on a particular thing and go in detail
with that and—. I’m not gonna lie – we didn’t – we didn’t cover too many things, right? But uhm, whatever we did, we did it in really good detail and that’s what I really enjoyed about it.

**Interviewer:** Ok, so that was important?

**Daniel:** Yeah, to me.

**Interviewer:** Why?

**Daniel:** Uh, just because of the reason I was there. I was there to get a deeper understanding and that’s exactly what the teacher was doing. So, I got everything that I asked for. I was really happy with that.

**Interviewer:** ‘So, the detailed talking - talk to me about how that impacted your sense of power, or competence?’

**Daniel:** Uh, just with deeply understanding the topic, *(nods his head in affirmation).* Is just gonna really raise your confidence in that area, and with confidence, I believe, you’re gonna do better in the task. And I was really confident, going into it, after the GLS program. *(ST #1, lines 237-250)*

Furthermore, Daniel reveals that the critical and operational dimensions of literacy have to be firmly in place, before he feels competent enough to write about it, especially if his creation of a text will be assessed by the teacher. The teacher has to provide a safe space for a detailed discussion of a given text and make participants feel comfortable to state their ideas in order to arrive at ‘a deep understanding [of] the topic’ *(ST #1, 237 – 250).* His characterization of the instructional approaches involving the creation of a safe space for discussion and multiple opportunities for rehearsal of text analysis corresponds with the theoretical constructs of ‘embodied cognition’ *(Valenzula, 2009).* These two instructional approaches are clearly emerging as institutional factors influencing Daniel’s perception of his reading and writing competencies.

Next, Daniel states the tone of these discussions has to be conducive to the feeling of safety. For example, the students need to be able to take risks by offering a variety of answers that will not be negatively judged by the teacher or other students. Daniel describes his ideal location as ‘not an open environment’ *(ST #1, lines 237 – 250).* He is speaking metaphorically in terms of emotional safety and also literally, because he is alluding to a physical location. In his school context, Daniel’s reference to ‘not an open
environment’ means a room that is contained by walls so that students can feel free to express their opinions without being overheard by other classes and students, which happens in an ‘Open Space’ environment. In Daniel’s school context, many English classes take place in ‘Open-Space’ venues:

Daniel: ‘We were in the ‘Space’ in the Conference Room.
Interviewer: ‘Did the location make any difference to you?’
Daniel: ‘I think it did. It really did, yeah.’
Interviewer: ‘Really? Tell me about that.’
Daniel: ‘Uhm, I’d say, well, never in an open environment. I think if we were, it would [have] impacted. It’s the fact that it was in a closed environment and–.’
Interviewer: ‘So room something like this, but slightly bigger?’
Daniel: ‘Yeah. It was a bigger room for the six students and only six students and, the, the size of the room – the location. I think really helped with that. And, uhm, even just the, the things on the wall, like the posters and that. They were all uhm, you know involved in the text we were talking about, so the location, made a big impact, I think.’ (ST #1, lines 222-232)

In this ‘closed-walled’ class location the teacher plays a significant role in creating a safe, contained space that fosters free expression. According to Daniel in addition to providing students with a quiet venue that offers privacy for the group, the teacher has to be open to a variety of answers to his/her questions, where ‘anything is not the wrong answer’. Although this last statement may seem confusing, it acquires clarity when the context is explained. Daniel is referencing his GLS tutorials and English classes, where two different teachers implicitly and explicitly allowed for an open group discussion of a text and were able to integrate a variety of student answers into their respective lessons. Moreover, the importance of this factor becomes evident early in Daniel’s interview, for example in his initial answer to the question whether he considers himself to be a leader in classroom discussions. He answers in the affirmative, providing the teacher is open to positively receiving a variety of student answers:
Daniel: ‘I’m definitely an active participant if it’s a - you know, discussion kind of thing where everyone’s, uhm, thoughts are heard.’ (ST #1, lines 177 – 178)

Of course, Daniel’s usage of the term ‘heard’ does not denote where everyone’s answer is audible, but rather metaphorically, where anyone’s answer is acceptable and is likely to be positively received by students and teacher alike. The positive reinforcement of student self-efficacy by the teacher guiding this discussion corresponds with Bandura’s second and third sources of self-efficacy pertaining to a skilled opinion giver, who competently models a given skill and then affirms and strengthens Daniel’s perceptions of his literacy capacities (Bandura, 1995, 1997 & 1998). In Daniel’s case the feeling of safety is fostered when the teacher provides a quiet venue and guides participants in an in-depth discussion of a required text. The teacher’s creation of these specific learning conditions helps Daniel navigate through both the operational and critical dimensions and builds his sense of self efficacy to such an extent, he feels empowered to prepare for assessments that involve analysing the aforementioned text independently. He feels that thus he is able to face an assessment task such as an exam with greater confidence and greater capacity to prepare effectively:

**Interviewer:** ‘Cause you said you did very well and you were really surprised.’

**Daniel:** ‘I don’t know; I’m generally a good speaker, but I wasn’t very confident when I came to the essay. Like, uhm, the essay was on things we’d done previously during the year and the first essay was about ‘Romeo and Juliet’ and we did that earlier, in the first month or so. ... ‘So, just the fact that we did that so long ago, in the memory. I did go over all the notes that I still had from the start of the year as I−.

**Interviewer:** ‘You prepared’?

**Daniel:** Prepared. As good as I could, so it did help according to the results. (Daniel scored above 80% on this assessment) (ST #1, lines 159 - 169)

Aiding Daniel’s current perception of preparedness for the essay task at hand are his previous successes with this type of a task (St #1, lines 131 – 158). Daniel indicates he is comfortable with the required format of the essay and that he has had much practice with its construction under the direction of his previous English teacher and so he
perceives his literacy capacities in this area to be more than adequate. Daniel’s confidence has been bolstered by the instructional approach he has inadvertently pointed out in this part of our interview. The instructional approaches he describes directly correspond with the work of genre theorists and also specific aspects of the reciprocal teaching method, where students are explicitly taught to identify features of a given text, as well as guided to continually reflect on prior knowledge they acquired whilst deconstructing similar texts in different contexts (Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Cope & Kalantzis, 2012). Having had successful prior experiences constructing essays for assessments, suggests another educational or institutional factor that has influenced Daniel’s perceptions about his literacy capacities.

**Daniel and the Cultural Dimension:**

According to Green’s literacy in 3D model specific features of text types, such as structural organization or required tone, fall under the cultural dimension. So, when students make specific references to different genres they read or are expected to produce, they are classified and scrutinized through the cultural lens. During his interview Daniel makes many references to the essay format as the type of genre he is expected to produce most frequently for academic assessments, especially in the context of English. He emphasises his need to become proficient in creating this text type and expresses appreciation for several teachers who have helped him develop confidence in essay writing. He states he values the time he spent learning to analyse texts in depth with the guidance of his year nine English and Literacy teachers, both in a small group tutorial and whole class context. In fact, Daniel attributes his current level of confidence in the subject of English to his ability to analyse different texts and to produce his own response to such texts via the essay genre. He states he is particularly proud of his latest success on a timed essay task that asked him to analyse Shakespeare’s ‘Romeo and Juliet’ and considers this as a positive turning point in his current English class.

In the context of the cultural dimension another important consideration for Daniel includes peer interactions, which according to Green relates to field and tenor, both are components of text register. Text register is also explained as an insight into or a proficiency with unique types of languages associated with specific contexts or situations (Halliday, 1978, 1985 & Green & Beavis, 2012). Daniel describes his academic interactions with peers and is explicit about the need to utilise peer discussion
productively and relevantly to the academic matter at hand. He is very honest about his challenges in lower grades to keep such discussions focused on class matters. Perhaps without intending to, Daniel reveals the significant role teachers can play in redirecting conversations between their students to relevant classroom material. In this case they fulfil the role of ‘efficacy-builders’ as they guide text analysis and ensure student conversations relate to academic topics (Bandura, 1995). Thus, another institutional factor affecting perceptions of Daniel’s literacy capacities emerges:

**Daniel:** *Just, uhm, talking with peers, uhm, it can’t be a positive impact, unless you’re talking about the topic, which we weren’t. It was always, you know, just talking about anything, and uhm, ...you’re never going to learn as much or concentrate having someone next to you talking to you like that. ...Whereas at the GLS program, uhm, there was never really a time we were off topic. It was everyone talking about the thing you wanted to talk about – the topic. It was just really good* (ST #1, lines 271 - 276).

During his junior years Daniel was unable or unwilling to stay focused on the lesson content unless the conditions in the classroom prevented idle chat. However, currently he is able to redirect such unproductive conversations because he feels year ten is a time to focus on his studies in order to prepare adequately for his upcoming Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) courses he will have to complete in years 11 and 12. Daniel frequently alludes to the prospective, academic pressures of year eleven and twelve and restates that year ten is more serious for that reason several times during the course of the interview. Clearly for Daniel, curriculum-focused peer discussions are an important positive, institutional factor in his learning. Moreover, he demonstrates characteristics of a growth mindset, using his own previous failures constructively in order to keep current peer-discussions focused on academic matters (Elliot & Dweck, 2007).

When Daniel is asked to recall his acquisition of basic reading skills in primary school, he provides insight into his beliefs about his literacy capacities in the context of his early school days, (ST #1, lines 107-112). Although he is unable to recall this facet of his literacy journey as far back as the early primary years, Daniel is able to remember key moments in years four and five. In this instance he is very clear about his positive
perceptions of his reading, characterizing it as ‘really, really good’ several times and providing some details about his motivations to be at the top of his class in this skill:

**Daniel:** ‘...cause I’ve always been, like I wouldn’t say competitive, but I liked being you know one of the top students in everything I could, and I really enjoyed reading.’ (ST #1, Lines 107 – 112)

Daniel does not define what constitutes ‘being a good reader’, but once he is asked to elaborate about his literacy journey, he describes his perceived competence and lists specific genres he likes and dislikes:

**Daniel:** ‘...I was always into sport or uhm, maybe horror, the ‘Goosebumps’ series and things like that.’ (ST #1, Line 114)

Daniel recalls reading sport fiction, whilst intensely disliking non-fiction books such as biographies or autobiographies. Daniel vividly remembers disliking non-fiction in primary school, but presently he enjoys it. In this cataloguing of present-day and past reading choices, a clear picture emerges of Daniel’s integration with the cultural dimension of reading via his choices of genre. According to Green’s elaboration on the specific characteristics of the cultural dimension, a person’s literacy competency is to some extent dependent on a sufficiently wide collection of genres, in accordance with a relatively arbitrary and socially determined standard (Green, 1988a; Green & Beavis, 2012; Halliday, 1978, 1985).

**Student Participant 2 – Nadia’s Profile:**

The second student participant, Nadia, is a female, year ten student, of Anglo-Australian background, who, similarly to Daniel, does not speak any other language aside from English at home. These two participants share many similarities between their respective literacy journeys, especially in relation to the factors that seem to have influenced their perceptions about their literacy capacities. Nadia’s English teacher, Ms. Collins describes her as a student on the high end of the class with strong speaking, reading and writing skills. In fact, both the school librarian as well as her English teacher strongly praised Nadia’s academic accomplishments and her willingness to contribute to the school’s co-curricular programs and other initiatives. For example, Ms. Collins noted the frequency with which Nadia asks for extension work and appreciates her efforts to differentiate the curriculum in order to challenge her. Her learning profile
strongly corresponds with a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008 & 2012). Furthermore, Ms. Collins noted Nadia’s ability to make connections between the skills she is learning in her Literature and English 10 classes, her capacity to reflect on her learning and her enthusiasm for contributing to class discussions.

Nadia is a captain of the school’s reading book club and thus she reads on an average two to three novels per week as part of this co-curricular involvement. In addition, Nadia plans to publish her writing as soon as possible and is intent on making creative writing a part of her future professional life. Her newest project includes writing a short play. Her reputation in the school as a reader and a writer is quite well known among the teaching staff. For example, her drama teacher has invited Nadia to write a short script for next year’s school play. When asked how Nadia would characterize a successful student, she states without hesitation that it has to be a motivated individual with a goal and the capacity for perseverance, qualities she exhibits herself as is evidenced in many different ways.

Nadia was one of the first students in Ms. Collins’ class to put up her hand to participate in this research, stating she wanted to make a positive contribution to the school’s future literacy programs. Nadia’s active participation in literacy related events in the context of her school is in itself a relevant institutional factor that has a positive impact on her perceptions of her literacy capacities. Nadia says she absolutely loves public speaking, but immediately launches into a discussion about how she used to be quiet and uninvolved in the school community and during classroom discussions until her involvement in the school’s leadership program. This program comprised of a nine-week stint spent in Alpine School that forced her out of her shell. Again, Nadia’s views on the significance this program played in her development of public speaking skills and personal confidence are similar to Daniel’s beliefs and statements in this context:

**Nadia:** ‘I used to hate it, uhm, before I went to the Alpine School, but after that I developed a huge amount of confidence in public speaking...’ (Student Transcript number 2 [ST#2], lines 116 – 117).

**Nadia:** ‘Before Alpine School, I didn’t care how I did at school. I just tried to get through the day as I could so I could go home. I didn’t enjoy school at all. I
used to rush on tests and I never studied, because I just, I didn’t care. And after I came back from Alpine School, I became a lot more motivated; persevere in school.’ (ST#2, lines 138 - 141)

Nadia and the Critical and Operational Dimensions:

Nadia’s English teacher and the librarian, who leads the School Book Club, describe her literacy capacities as exceptional. In this context Nadia attributes her literacy-related successes to the support she has received from her mother since primary school. Shirley Brice Heath’s comparative study ‘What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and at school’ (Brenneis & Macaulay, 1996) linked the importance of bedtime reading rituals to the development of critical reading skills needed in later school years, such as high school. Heath explains that during bedtime readings, adults model critical literacy skills, such as relating book content to the real world, which children emulate later in their respective, academic contexts. This is certainly evident in the case of Nadia, who repeatedly alludes to her mother’s role as a reading model and an active supporter of her creative writing endeavours. This emerging personal factor is supported by Bandura’s theories about the importance of early childhood and adulthood efficacy builders, who create a positive atmosphere for student attainment of academic achievements (Bandura, 1995, 1997 & 1998):

Nadia: ‘Grade five or six – uhm, I wrote a story about a couple of girls, who gained super powers and they had to save the world. I remember my mum reading it and she turned to me... she said that’s so good! ...that really gave me the motivation to keep writing’ (ST #2, lines 254 – 258).

Nadia places strong emphasis on the support she receives from her mother, who helps her with school work and clearly perceives this help to be a strong factor in her literacy capacities. She states her interest in reading developed during her primary years due to the praise she received from her mother, which fuelled her motivation to continue reading and writing:

Nadia: ‘If anyone helps me, it’s definitely my parents, namely my mum. Ah, she – she’s just so smart. She likes English as well so she’s always there to help me if I don’t understand something or I’m not feeling motivated or
procrastinating or something like that. She’s always there to give me that extra push.’ (ST #2, lines 180 - 182)

Since Nadia became interested in creative writing in her early primary years and has maintained it to the present moment, it is not surprising she has become proficient in this endeavour and that this in turn has earned her a great deal of recognition from peers and teachers alike. Praise from peers and teachers emerges as a secondary institutional factor that positively influences Nadia’s beliefs about her writing capacities:

Nadia: ‘during English my strengths would definitely be my writing overall over everything else ... mainly because I practise so much, but I’ve been told by many, many teachers that my writing is so good, that I should keep trying, keep going with my writing ... ’ (ST #2, lines 159 - 162).

Ms. Collins: ‘...I think she is quite good at, her writing reads quite well in terms of, you know, her use of metalanguage and her sentence structure. She works quite well on that. I know she does do some drafting as well. I think that links into her being able to extend it as well, where she is able draw onto what she already knows and apply that into the current context.’ (Ms. Collins, TT #2, Lines 156 – 159).

Nadia feels efficacious in relation to creative writing and reveals this confidence extends to her approach in written English assessments, though she admits she is currently struggling with adhering to teacher-set, time limits:

Nadia: ‘I find that my weakness of mine would be time-management, actually. So, in relation to English it would be when writing essays. I would either go into so much detail I would write too much or I, uhm, try to manage my time and I write too little. So, I find I have to find a balance. It’s been difficult, but I think I’m getting there.’ (ST #2, lines 162-165).

Despite the challenges Nadia faces conforming her writing creativity to expected time-lines, her interview statements reflect confidence and her strong intention to acquire the necessary skills to conquer this perceived weakness. Nadia’s proficiency and resilience
in regards to her capacities within the operational dimension is stemming from a combination of factors listed above, including repetition, perseverance, experience with the writing of other genres and finally peer and adult affirmations (Elliot & Dweck, 2007, Dweck 2008, 2012).

**Nadia and the Cultural Dimension:**
In order to get an insight into Nadia’s navigation through the cultural dimension, questions pertaining to tenor are posed when she is asked to elaborate about the role others play in her literacy-related pursuits (Halliday, 1975, 1978, 1979; Green, 1988):

Nadia:  
‘...lucky for me most of my friends also love English. They love writing; they love reading, uhm, so if I write something and someone wants to read it, I’ll let them read it and they will give me some great feedback ...when they give their work to me, I love reading it as well, just because we can share ideas and converse in that way.’

Interviewer:  
So, how important are they to you as an audience, as a support?  
Nadia:  
So important, like I wouldn’t - I wouldn’t probably be writing without all the friends that I have now...’ (ST #2, lines 241 – 247).

Again, as in Daniel’s case, peer affirmation emerges as a factor that influenced Nadia’s perceptions about her literacy capacities. These literary conversations provided a forum for discussions and relevant feedback on Nadia’s creative writing.

Furthermore, Nadia sign-posts her navigation through the cultural dimension when she discusses how a specific genre sustained her interest in reading. She attributes her literacy successes to her capacity to read advanced novels, such as the ‘Narnia Series’ by C. S. Lewis, whilst her peers were still reading picture books. Her enthusiasm for the fantasy genre becomes obvious through her specific literary references and her English teacher’s characterization of Nadia’s fascination with this text-type, which she sees in her written work. During our interview Nadia recounts in detail books she is currently reading and ones that inspired her to read as a child:

Nadia:  
‘I remember being quite inspired by a book called ‘Clariel’ by Garth Nix, very much, uhm, fantasy...because the main character is Clariel and she’s
about my age, ah she’s very, ah, she resonated with me. She got pushed beyond her limits...’. (ST #2, lines 212-215)

Nadia’s positive immersion in the cultural dimension corresponds with Green’s description of the benefits such an early navigation through this literacy dimension would have on individual reading capacities (Green & Beavis, 2012). Moreover, Nadia’s current reading repertoire is diverse in terms of her genre selections and books of varying reading levels, and thus her literacy profile exhibits the characteristics Green specifically describes in his description of the cultural dimension:

‘A person may be said to be literate in the more significant sense if he or she has competence with regard to a sufficiently wide repertoire of contexts and written registers, in accordance with a relatively arbitrary and socially determined standard.’ (Ibid, p.5)

The phrase ‘I enjoyed’ recurs in Nadia’s dialogue and her enthusiasm for literacy is evident through statements such as, ‘I fell in love with reading . . . it was what set me onto the path of literature... ’ (ST #2, line 85). Nadia shows a deep commitment to her independent reading habits and this is evident implicitly through her frequent references to specific titles she is reading and explicitly when she states she reads on an average two to three new books per week as part of her book club (ST #2, lines 98 – 107).

Nadia’s literacy journey highlights her strong engagement with the fantasy genre and signposts her immersion in the cultural dimension, which influenced her positive perceptions about her literacy capacities.

Factors Influencing Daniel and Nadia’s Perceptions:
Nadia and Daniel’s information about the adult support they have received reveal a strong and a consistent, personal factor shaping their perceptions of their literacy capacities. For example, Nadia describes her mother as her primary reading teacher and a mentor for her creative writing. She has had a profound impact on Nadia’s perceptions. Daniel’s mother ensured he maintained his independent reading despite his many outside interests. Clearly, both Nadia and Daniel had access to adults, who not only modelled reading themselves, but also actively engaged them in conversations about novels they read together.
It should be noted that all five of the research participants made direct references to supportive mentors, some of whom were their primary care-givers. These mentors encouraged strong reading habits from an early age. However, unlike the other three participants, Nadia and Daniel provided much more detail about the type of help mentors offered them in relation to building their literacy capacities and attributed a great deal of importance to the support they are still providing with their reading and writing.

Other important factors that emerged during these two interviews included peer-affirmation in safe venues, where literature could be discussed and analysed under the guidance of an educator. These professionals would monitor the tone of the discussion, ensure participant inclusivity and provide opportunities for students to rehearse their ideas with their peers. Moreover, these reading experiences revealed participant’s navigations through the cultural dimension via repeated exposures to specific genres. This institutional factor was not dependent on a classroom setting, as both Daniel and Nadia described these literacy events as being connected to their high school curricular and co-curricular activities. Interestingly, this factor corresponds with instructional approaches originating from both genre and whole language theorists (Goodman 1998; Cope & Kalantzis, 2012; Frankel, 2013).

**Student Participant 3 - Fillipo’s Profile:**

Fillipo is the third year ten participant in this research, but unlike the previous students in this interview group, English is his second language. On Saturdays Fillipo attends Language School in order to develop his proficiencies in Greek, which he puts to immediate use in his conversations with his family. Fillipo not only speaks Greek fluently, but also reads and writes in this language. He plans to complete his Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Greek language courses in year eleven and twelve outside of his mainstream VCE coursework. Fillipo lives with his extended family and tells me he enjoys conversing in Greek with his mother and grandfather, but that he prefers to speak English with his father and sisters. He giggles as he tells me he occasionally converses in Greek with his sisters if they don’t want others to understand what they are saying. At the same time, Fillipo turns serious and states that if there are people in his company who do not speak Greek, the whole family uses English so that
no one feels left out or that they are being spoken about. Fillipo adds that he rarely speaks Greek with his father, because he is not as proficient in the language as the rest of the family and so they are both more comfortable speaking English.

During our conversation it becomes obvious that Fillipo thinks very highly of his grandfather, who does not speak English and so Fillipo is at least partially motivated to improve his Greek language skills in order to converse with him. Fillipo states he has mixed feelings about the impact of his Greek language studies on his English literacy and unfortunately at the moment he feels his English reading and writing capacities are inadequate, despite his considerable investment of time and effort into his language studies. He does believe that attending Language School helps him keep motivated to study and persevere in his current English course.

Fillipo is very personable and a generous participant. When I explained the research to his class during the recruitment phase, he immediately indicated his interest to participate and asked many relevant questions about the project, such as how the data would be gathered and used. He was one of the first participants to bring back the permission forms and stated he hoped that through his participation other students might benefit in the future. Fillipo’s willingness to get involved greatly corresponded with his English teacher’s characterization of his generosity, positivity and industry in her classroom. She describes Fillipo as a hard-working and an enthusiastic contributor to class discussions, who stands out due to his productivity in and out of class.

Once Fillipo gets used to the camera’s presence during our interview, he quickly starts to provide detailed answers and without too much prompting begins to elaborate about his perceptions of his literacy capacities. Sadly, he perceives them to be inadequate. Fillipo is much more confident about his academic capacities in the context of mathematics and sciences. He characterizes these proficiencies as ‘doing pretty well’ and deficits as activities and subjects he feels ‘the least confident with’ (ST #3). In this context Fillipo is referencing his performance in English and although he states he works very hard to obtain high grades in this subject, in year ten his performance has dropped. Much like the other four participants Fillipo perceives that literacy relates primarily to his English course studies and is not as integral in other subjects:
Fillipo: ‘[In] Maths and IT. Yeah, I’ve done pretty well I gather. So far, in all my subjects, apart from English, I found I’ve dropped really a lot since last year.’ (ST #3, lines 12-13)

Fillipo’s literacy journey is compelling due to his genuine interest in helping other students in the school community, despite the fact he believes his own skills and talents lie in other academic areas:

Fillipo: ‘…I knew it would be really good to take part in something to help change or improve the system’ (ST#3, lines 313 - 314).

**Fillipo and the Critical and Operational Dimensions:**

During his interview Fillipo makes quite a few direct references to the way his knowledge of grammatical rules impacts his learning and these have been categorized under the operational dimension because they relate to the conventions or rules of language. As mentioned in his profile, Fillipo’s statements about his second language studies reveal he holds divergent beliefs about the impact studying Greek has had on his overall learning, particularly as it relates to his perceptions of his literacy capacities. Fillipo states his Greek language training has provided him with confidence and motivation to work diligently at school. Conversely, he feels the instruction of Greek grammatical rules has been a source of distraction when it comes to succeeding in English, specifically when he is asked to compose essays:

Fillipo: ‘...but I think having an additional language it’s helped me to – I don’t know – to keep going, to stay motivated... I find with English, it’s pretty straightforward, but Greek has shown me that there’s other things you have to learn to the language; it’s not just about speaking or being able to write. You have to improve, it’s about the way you word things, yeah. It’s taught me more ...Just makes me more precise, looking at things. Helps me learn better’ (ST #3, lines 184 – 192).
Fillipo considers his Greek language studies to have caused him to evaluate his wording or phrasing of ideas, presumably when he completes written assignments for his Greek course or engages in formal or informal conversations. He believes this knowledge has led him to ‘learn better’ by being more precise in the way he utilises specific words or implements knowledge of grammatical conventions. Of significance in this part of our interview is the fact Fillipo reveals he uses strategies he gleaned whilst learning Greek grammatical conventions, when he is composing his English assignments because he is becoming more analytical when checking his written work. Thus he is engaging the skills gained from the operational dimension in the context of one language (Greek) and activating them to function in the critical dimension in the context of another language (English). Despite the fact this pursuit has taught Fillipo useful skills he is applying in other academic contexts, he does not perceive their value. The benefit of his transference of literacy skills is not apparent to him because he perceives that literacy success in English hinges upon mastering essay writing. Despite Fillipo’s willingness to ‘work harder’ and to be ‘more precise [when] looking at things’, he does not believe he has the capacity to produce effective essays:

*Fillipo:* ‘Yeah, I know, but I don’t think I can write an essay that’s perfect or up to a high standard.’ (ST #3, line 75)

Fillipo’s narrative highlights the interconnectedness between the operational and critical dimensions through which he is engaging, whilst navigating between two different languages. It is possible the capacity to navigate through the dimensions in different contexts and even in different languages is a factor that can influence individual perceptions about their literacy capacities.

Moreover, Fillipo states that in his interactions with his older sister he has noticed she is ‘analysing everything’ whilst she is completing her course assignments for her Year 12 coursework (ST #3, lines 20-21). In fact, as the interview unfolds Fillipo makes several references to his conversations with both of his sisters which they conduct in English and Greek. In this context it is logical to infer his close-knit family provides Fillipo with ample opportunities to practise his critical thinking, analytical and debate skills. For instance, his older sister models text analysis as she engages with her course work. Fillipo’s grandfather and mother provide opportunities for natural conversations in
Greek, extending his second language course experiences. Similarly to Daniel and Nadia, Fillipo has access to more experienced student and adult-mentors to help him practise his Greek language as well as critical thinking. These interactions can be viewed as strong factors influencing his perceptions of his literacy capacities. With adult guidance, he is navigating through all three literacy dimensions – operational, critical and cultural as he is rehearsing his ideas and honing his discussion skills:

Interviewer: ‘...Do you see yourself as an active participant in class discussions?’
Fillipo: ‘Ah yeah, I feel that I do participate when – I always try and participate in class discussions.’
Interviewer: ‘Does that help you?’
Fillipo: ‘Ah, yeah, it’s really good participating.’ (ST#3, lines 121 – 125)

Fillipo perceives he is a confident speaker and a frequent participant in class discussions. His English teacher, Ms. Jackson also describes Fillipo’s active participation in class:

Ms. Jackson: ‘...Fillipo, uhm he’s confident in the sense that he’s not shy to ask for help and is not shy to attempt things even if it might be wrong.’
(TT #3, lines 33-35)

Once again, Fillipo does not attribute value to his literacy capacities in relation to speaking and analysing. Instead he focuses the discussion on his perceived setbacks in reading and writing:

Fillipo: ‘I don’t think my literacy skills [...] are as good as they were about a year ago. I feel like I’ve dropped, because I don’t do as much reading as I was last year’ (ST#3, lines 40-41).

Fillipo: ‘I enjoyed most of the in-class activities [in English]. It’s just the assessments I – I just hated them’ (ST #3, lines 138 – 139).
Fillipo repeatedly mentions his lack of current success in English and ascribes his difficulties to a number of factors. He talks about being disinterested in the assigned reading materials, having less time in class to pursue independent reading and struggling when producing texts for English assessments. He does not recognize his operational and critical literacy capacities as a valuable asset because he attributes all importance to the crafting of essays in the context of his English course and believes himself to be incapable of producing this text type at a high standard.

**Fillipo and the Cultural Dimension:**

Fillipo’s statements that indicate his navigation through the cultural lens of literacy relate to genre. When asked whether he sees himself to be a successful writer in other contexts or what he thinks of his own literacy capacities, Fillipo mentions his confidence in debates, class discussions and even writing stories, but as he describes these successes, each time he steers the focus of his discussion back to his current lack of proficiency in essay writing and even mentions it as a possible road block in his plans for his high school senior years and beyond:

**Fillipo:** ‘If it’s not an essay, I would feel more confident, than if it was not an essay. I think that I do better without doing an essay. So, persuasive texts, poems – all that sort of stuff that I enjoyed in year seven, I enjoy more than an essay’ (ST #3, lines 100-102).

Fillipo provides some detail about group literacy tutorials he received in the previous school years. In this context he discusses having received genre-specific instruction that benefitted his learning and this strongly corresponds not only with Green’s research, but also with the significant body of work conducted by genre theorists. They posited that such instruction will empower students, particularly if these students were part of less privileged socio-economic groups (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012; Frankel, 2013; Kalantzis et al., 2000; Martin & Christie, 1997):

**Fillipo:** Yeah, they helped me a bit, with my understanding of the novel, the topic, how to write an essay, the structure and that sort of stuff. It made me more confident to write the essay for the assignment.  
(ST #3, lines 219-222)
Again, it’s important to note that the first two student-participants, Daniel and Nadia also directly list the benefits of small-group discussions that are facilitated by an adult. Similarly to Daniel, Fillipo believes the tutorials are of greater value if several peers are involved, rather than just a one-on-one, teacher-to-student tutorial and links this peer interaction to the development of his confidence:

**Interviewer:** ‘Would you have preferred smaller or bigger [group tutorials?]’ (ST#3, line 238)

**Fillipo:** ‘Ah, nah, I feel that if you have five or six then they’re more confident, so they don’t feel like it’s just them who are, who need help or, I don’t know, it’s just, it’s just that having five or six makes you more confident to, yeah, improve. And then you’re not the only one who’s in the same boat or situation’ (ST #3, lines 239-241). ...No, having five or six people made me feel much more confident and that it’s not only me that was struggling or needed help.’ (ST #3, lines 246 - 247)

Fillipo considers peers to be important contributors to learning and this institutional factor is evident not only from his statements in relation to group tutorials, but also it can be inferred from his characterization of his favourite class activities in English:

**Fillipo:** ‘Well, for ‘Romeo and Juliet’ we had to set up the class like into a square and everybody would start reading; they got their character and they had to read out to the class – it was really good to see everybody mingling and getting along. Yeah, having a laugh.’

(ST#3, lines 141 – 143)

Much like Daniel and Nadia, Fillipo perceives his peers and the social aspect of learning to be of great benefit. The peer factor plays an integral role in his learning as a motivator, a stimulus for discussion and exploration of ideas and enjoyment of learning. His perceptions are consistent with a great number of contemporary theorists, conceptualising new literacies, who describe literacy as a social practice (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012; New London Group, 1996). In other contexts, Fillipo perceives peers as a negative factor, but one that he can control:
Fillipo: *Uhm. some peers, they can be a good influence; they help you; they want you to work, where some peers, can just be there to annoy you. Like in maths now, *uhm*, some peers combined, they just annoy you. Sometimes I get a headache in maths and I just can’t concentrate. Other peers they’re there and they encourage you to wanna work, to do better, yeah. ’*(ST#3, lines 250-253)

Therefore, similarly to Daniel, Fillipo feels in control of the peer factor and in his year ten context has the maturity to tap into the positive aspects peers can bring to his learning.

**Factors Influencing Fillipo’s Perceptions:**

Fillipo’s functioning within the operational and critical dimensions of literacy points to a number of contradictory factors that are influencing his literacy-oriented perceptions. Fillipo and his English teacher share the same point of view about his strong capacities in public speaking, group and class discussions. These experiences are a source of his confidence in English, especially when he participates in class debates and when he is asked to write assignments that do not involve essays. However, essay-genre knowledge in the form of text creation emerges as the strongest factor influencing Fillipo’s perceptions about his literacy capacities.

Fillipo is receiving considerable extra training outside of his mainstream schooling through his completion of Greek Language Courses and he perceives that to some extent as an asset for his confidence in his academic pursuits. However, what should constitute a strong factor stemming from both, personal and institutional sources, proves to be somewhat inconclusive. On one hand Fillipo acknowledges his Greek language skills as an academic asset, but a few minutes later, he describes his second language studies as a source of distraction.

In the context of literacy as a social practice, Fillipo is strongly supported by his family members. His narration of his conversations with his family emerges as another factor influencing his academic confidence and motivation. For instance, Fillipo’s older sisters influence his strong beliefs about the importance of text analysis. Their contribution to his critical thinking in relation to reading analysis constitutes a personal factor...
stemming from the critical dimension. This fuels Fillipo’s strong motivation to keep going as he faces academic adversity with resilience, a sign-post of a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008, 2012).

Finally, Fillipo is deriving a great deal of confidence from his successes in subjects other than English, such as mathematics and science in the context of his mainstream schooling. He does not perceive these successes to be related to his literacy capacities because he associates these capacities with the subject of English, specifically essay writing stemming from text analysis.

Student Participant 4 – Susan’s Profile:
The fourth year ten participant in this study is quite diverse from the others in terms of her personality, interests and academic priorities. Susan is an energetic individual, who enjoys a vibrant social life within her school community and the friendships she has forged are very important to her. The importance Susan attributes to her peer relationships at school are even evident during the recruitment phase of this project, because Susan puts up her hand to sign up for the interview only after she sees two other students in the class do so. During our interview Susan reveals many interesting details about her literacy-oriented interests that curiously are not transferred or directly evident in her English classes in an academic sense. Susan’s English teacher, Ms. Jackson corroborates this:

Ms. Jackson: ‘...she’s more than capable of, but needs to be pushed to participate and to share that knowledge with mates.’ (TT #3, lines 14 - 15).

However, in her personal life, Susan is a passionate reader and a creative writer, who gets very emotionally attached to the characters in the novels she reads. She has been encouraged to read by her mother and teachers since her early primary school and recalls she really got interested in reading when she received Emily Rodda’s ‘Deltora Quest’ book for her birthday in grade five. Apparently, once she got involved in the characters and plot of this fantasy novel, she got hooked and completed reading the entire series, which consists of eight books within the first series-set alone. Susan then began writing her own stories based on the characters within the series, publishing some
of them through ‘Fan-Fiction’ on-line publishing platform. These literacy-oriented activities in turn motivated her to read other books.

Throughout our interview Susan has a difficult time concentrating and articulating her answers. She finds it very difficult to detach from the camera, but each time she manages it, she responds to the questions with a great deal of depth and insight into her literacy capacities as well as the methods that motivate her to learn. Forging a strong rapport with her teachers is important to Susan’s learning and she is very clear about her need to learn through discussion once she feels comfortable with her peers and the teacher leading the group:

Susan: ‘My grade five teacher was funny and so he’d make jokes about things and I got along with him very well and so I didn’t question anything he did. Like it’s with me – I like having friendships with teachers because they’re the people that are getting you somewhere. So, when I got along with teachers, I didn’t really question what they were giving me and I like, had a desire to impress them, especially those teachers’ (ST #4, lines 303 - 307).

As the interview progresses it becomes clear that the optimal learning environment for Susan is one in which she is able to make personal connections with her class members and the teachers. Interestingly, she reveals that in order to fully understand the books she reads, she has to form an emotional connection with the fictional characters as well. This need for a personal and peer-connected environment explains some of Susan’s camera-shyness and difficulty expressing her answers during our interview.

Susan’s eyes seem to be irresistibly drawn to the goings-on in the hallway, of which she has an unobstructed view through the glass door. She interrupts her narrative each time she glances up and notices different students and staff pass by our room. Once I realise these interview conditions are impeding Susan’s ability to concentrate, I suggest we switch seats and take a small break. With encouragement and a few pauses, we both plod on and Susan’s unusual and interesting literacy journey begins to emerge. It is one that provides a great deal of insight into the power of the cultural dimension of literacy,
where genre and tenor play a significant role in stimulating Susan’s imagination and inspiring her to pursue her creative writing and readings.

**Susan & the Critical & Operational Dimensions:**
Susan declares that chemistry is one of her favourite subjects, and links her successful understanding of the course text to her strong reading and writing capacities she acquired in primary school:

*Susan:*  
...Yeah, grade five and so I wrote this book called ‘The black Shadows’ and [my teacher] bound it for me and everything and I kept writing other books and he kept binding them. And I did one of these letters, that was to a newborn child to give advice to it and the principal looked at it ... he gave me like an award thing for it ... and that boosted my self-esteem a lot and then, yeah. I loved it’ (ST #4, lines 43 – 46).

When asked about her academic literacy capacities, Susan defines them through her narration of her reading and writing success during primary years and then shifts their application to her current navigation through her chemistry textbook:

*Susan:*  
We have this book – it’s like a manual; it’s a chemistry manual and there’s pages just full of information and a lot of it is like, it’s very professional language. Like she needs to break it down for us – that’s why we need her there, but I find it easier to work my way through it if, like I’m better at literacy than like – sorry.’

*Interviewer:* That’s ok. Did you mean in that context? Did you mean in a chemistry context?

*Susan:* Like pulling apart the words.

*Interviewer:* Yes.

*Susan:* Like understanding words.

*Interviewer:* Because you know the root words?

*Susan:* Yeah’ (ST #4, lines 59 – 68).
In this context Susan reveals her successful use of the operational dimension due to her experiences with a wide variety of genres. Her statements that she ‘pull[s]’ apart the words to get at their meanings and that she likes to learn new words show Susan’s use of her operational skills in order to access the cultural and critical dimensions of this specific, scientific genre. Although out of shyness she cuts off in mid-sentence in this segment and it seems she is about to say she is better at this process than her peers, her strong self-efficacy in this operational context comes across. For this reason, I probe further with follow up questions so that Susan would explain her process of gaining an understanding of the scientific text, which she does when she reveals that she breaks words down in order to understand them.

Of significance is Susan’s statement about her expectations of the teacher – ‘she needs to break it down for us’, because it is similar to Fillipo and Daniel’s need for teachers to provide genre-specific instruction in the context of essay writing on timed assessments and in regards to text analysis. However, Susan then reveals she is able to undertake this process of reading comprehension independently when she states that she ‘finds it easier to work [her] way through it’. Susan perceives that she has the capacity to decode and comprehend challenging or lexically dense texts whether her teachers help her with this process or not. The factor influencing Susan’s perceptions centres around her previous mastery experiences in reading that led to linguistic knowledge that built up over time (Bandura, 1998).

**Susan and the Cultural Dimension:**

During the course of our interview Susan discusses types of genres she likes to read and describes the kinds of books that stimulate her imagination. For instance, Susan talks about her interests in mystery books that enable her to speculate about the identity of the main culprit. Then she goes on to discuss a book she is in the process of reading at the present moment and provides her character assessment of the protagonist, Holden in *Catcher in the Rye*. She becomes very animated and passionate about the extent of his arrogance as she details his character flaws:

**Susan:** ‘He’s just – he’s so conceited and up himself. He thinks he’s better than everybody and he thinks he understands people; like he puts everything down to like these, these categories and I just, I don’t like that. And I...’
think that everything is a lot more complex and he just. He thinks he’s better in everything, in school and everything and I’m just annoyed enough and into it and it’s just driving me crazy’ (ST #4, lines 81 - 84).

Susan’s discussion of this novel reveals her navigation through the cultural dimension, particularly as she utilises field and tenor of text register as she reads this sophisticated classic (Halliday, 1978 & 1985). Her brief synopsis of Holden’s behaviour shows she knows what is going on in the novel from a social context and this aligns with sub-segment of text register defined as field (Green, 2012). Susan responds emotionally to the character’s behaviour which she describes as ‘conceited’. She is exasperated with this character and this emotion is not just evident from her words, but also from her facial expressions and body language. In the same context, she states “I love books like that.” (ST #4, line 92)

Susan gains access to the novel’s meaning and begins analysis of its tenor as she interprets the nature of the protagonist’s interpersonal relationships with other characters and imagines herself in their respective situations. She tells me that in order to be motivated to read and write she has to build an emotional connection with the topic and the characters in the stories she reads. It’s clear she perceives this emotional connection to be an important factor in her learning.

Similarly to all the previous three participants of this study, Susan’s engagement with the cultural lens gives her the leverage to access the other two dimensions of literacy – operational and critical. For example, she gains proficiency in the operational dimension when she indicates she copes with difficult vocabulary in any novel by placing post-it notes by unfamiliar words in order to look up their meanings later. Moreover, as she analyses fictional characters and places herself in their likely emotional predispositions, Susan is interfacing with the critical dimension:

Susan: ‘cause it annoys me so much. Like not the language, just the character ... he thinks he’s better than everybody and he thinks he understands people ... ’ (ST #4, lines 77 - 82).
Susan’s emotional connection with the novel via the cultural dimension strongly corresponds with Green’s assertion educators should consider using this dimension as a way of stimulating students’ interest in order to help them ‘[draw in] the critical and operational organically, as the occasion and need arises’ (Green, 2012 p.29). This is validated when one considers the power Susan perceives from making such deep connections with the books she reads, acquiring new vocabulary, gaining more experience with text analysis and experiencing exposure to different genres.

The engaging power of the cultural dimension is particularly highlighted when Susan discusses how the nature of her relationships with her teachers affects her learning as well. As was explained in her character profile earlier, peer relationships are very important to Susan. One small indicator of this is her constant scrutiny of people passing by our interview room during our discussion. Moreover, Susan corroborates this aspect of her own character when she states she is not open to following instruction or learning effectively unless the person in authority or of a given expertise connects with her on an equal level and establishes a position of trust with her:

Susan: ‘It’s that kind of thing with me. It’s not – it’s just I don’t like teachers who think that they can treat students wrongly because they’re younger, like it’s not like teachers do that, it’s just I don’t like being – I’m, I’m totally blanking.

…Yes, exactly! That’s the word – condescending! I don’t like it when I’m being condescended to. ...

…It’s that kind of thing where I just believed in them because they believed in me.’ (ST #4, lines 312 – 324).

As has been defined earlier in this paper, in his explication of the cultural dimension of his literacy model, Green links it to concepts stemming from systemic functional linguists, specifically Michael Halliday’s theories in relation to text register. In this regard the tenor component of register is relevant in Susan’s case as it pertains to the nature of a relationship between participants in a given social activity (Halliday, 1978, 1985). In Susan’s case establishing a positive relationship with her teachers is an important institutional factor influencing her perceptions.
Although the cultural dimension includes register as well as genre, Green explains it is distinct from genre (Green & Beavis, 2012). Susan’s leverage of text register’s tenor manifests itself in numerous ways. For example, the emotional connections she makes with novels motivate her to sustain her readings, and to write character sketches and diary entries.

In relation to genre as a separate but fundamental component of the cultural dimension of literacy, Susan discusses genre-related challenges she is presently encountering in her English studies. She contrasts these experiences with previous year’s assessments and observes that in the lower grades teachers allowed more latitude with task format, reference materials and time allotments. Yet, despite the challenges essay writing poses for her currently, Susan is upbeat about tackling such assessments. She describes them as ‘good, ‘cause you’ve got to think more’ (ST #4, line 187). Much like Nadia, Susan shows resilience and a growth mindset as she talks about overcoming this new academic obstacle and even perceives this challenging task to be a positive learning opportunity (Dweck, 2008 & 2012).

**Factors Influencing Susan’s Perceptions of Her Literacy Capacities:**

Susan has a strong sense of her reading abilities from her personal reading routines at home. Firstly, she has acquired regular writing habits due to affirmation she received from her peers at school and readers on line via fan-fiction. Susan sees her peers as essential in helping her through her literacy journey by way of classroom discussions and as sources of feedback and encouragement. Her literacy capacities have been recognized and rewarded since her primary schooling years by parents and teachers alike. Hence, her perceptions of her capacities are positive and specific. Secondly, she believes that if she establishes a personal connection with her teacher, she is able to learn more effectively. In fact, in Susan’s case the need for such an emotional connection extends to fictional characters she encounters in her reading interests as well. Clearly, tenor emerges as a strong factor influencing Susan’s perceptions about her literacy capacities.

Genre knowledge presents as another strong factor in Susan’s perceptions about her literacy capacities, and this is evident through her references to essay writing (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012; Frankel, 2013). She perceives the creation of this text type to be a
challenge, but believes that with the support of her teachers and peers, she can successfully attain her goals in this context. Once again, much like the other participants of this study, Susan perceives mastering this text type as an important sign-post of literacy capacity.

**Student Participant 5 – Leonard’s Profile:**

The final participant in this study is a male, year ten student, named Leonard. During our interview Leonard states he is currently enjoying school academically and socially. His favourite subject is called ‘Crime and Punishment’ and Leonard loves it because of the interesting court cases his teacher brings to the class. Leonard’s favourite pastime is playing soccer and he is extensively involved in the local and school soccer programs. Leonard’s succinctness is echoed in the two-pronged career plan he has mapped out after he finishes high school. He plans to attend university in order to study law and hopes this will enable him to attain employment in this field. His second goal is to continue playing soccer and if he is not able to play competitively, he still plans to be involved in some way, such as coaching. Leonard even mentions career options such as sport-psychology or physiotherapy.

Although Leonard’s primary language of discourse is English, he is fully fluent in Spanish, a language he speaks with his mother. However, since Leonard’s father does not speak Spanish, the family utilises English on a day-to-day basis. Like Fillipo, Leonard converses in language other than English with his mother, but communicates exclusively in English with his father. Leonard does not read or write in Spanish. However, much like Fillipo, Leonard has mixed perceptions about the way his knowledge of a second language has impacted his English literacy capacities. On one hand, he feels that knowing another language has enhanced his confidence, but on the other, he does not see it as particularly relevant to his current literacy capacities. Unfortunately, Leonard does not explain whether this confidence boost pertains to his literacy oriented social interactions or academic work.

At times Leonard’s answers to my questions are almost mono-syllabic and I find it very difficult to get him to elaborate in order to gather some depth pertaining to his literacy journey. Unlike the other four student participants in this study, Leonard does not eventually block out the camera’s presence and to some extent this impedes the
interview. Nevertheless, both he and I press on with the prepared questions and despite his reticence; the literacy journey of an athletic year-ten adolescent emerges.

**Leonard and the Critical & Operational Dimensions:**
Leonard’s statements about his literacy competencies are very decisive and succinct. Several times during the course of our interview he appears to be confident about his ability to read, speak and write in most situations, except when speaking in front of large audiences or when he is asked to be creative in writing on tests or exams. Like all the other participants Leonard strongly associates literacy capacities with the ability to write essays under timed conditions. Frequently he uses binary opposites to describe his own literacy capacities. In this context he perceives them to be either ‘fine’ or to be in deficit and for this to pose ‘a problem’ (ST #5). This simple characterization reveals Leonard’s perceptions of literacy as an individual’s achievement of a specific endpoint or a goal – one that is either functional or dysfunctional. For example, reading is something that he either understands or not. Writing is something that he can create competently in specific formats and using required language features in different contexts, or not:

*Leonard:* ‘I find reading easy, just reading in general, like when it comes to even reading math equations, for example, like reading documents in ‘Crime and Punishment’, stuff like that. I find it easy around books – yeah, I don’t struggle at all... ’ (ST #5, lines 40 – 42).

*Leonard:* ‘...I like writing stuff about my own experiences. That’s one thing. Like if I was to write a story about something like about my experiences, things that have happened in the past, cause then I can sort of like reflect through them more, with myself. I also like writing stuff about sport, law, things like that.’ (ST #5, lines 50 - 52).

**Leonard and the Cultural Dimension:**
Leonard singles out essay genre as an area of challenge and concern to him in relation to year ten English. His facial expression and vocal tone turn serious as he starts to discuss English assessments and provides his thoughts about school reports. He reveals that producing essays under time constraints poses a significant challenge for him:
Leonard: ‘My school reports are usually pretty good. Uhm, I do well with my school reports sort of thing. I read them all. I always go through them and make sure what the teachers write, what they say, and yeah all that. Essays, essays I personally don’t really like because just the pressure of having to write like so much and it’s a lot to sort of do, especially when it’s timed. It’s hard. You just, you’ve got to think of it on the spot and like keep going and going – think of it. Yeah, it’s not easy.’
(ST #5, lines 188 - 192).

Leonard’s concern about his creativity in relation to the essay genre, especially when he is asked to write under time constraints, echoes the sentiments of the other four participants in this study. Gaining access to the cultural dimension of this genre is important to him as Leonard associates it with academic success and links it to progression towards successful high school completion:

Leonard: ‘Yeah, because I know you got to do all those essays. Uhm, yeah, I got a get; I probably have to get better at them. Just like I said before – the creativity sort of aspect of it. I have to get more creative when it comes to writing essays and in writing things in general.’
(ST #5, lines 197 – 199).

Of concern is that Leonard views mastering the skill of essay writing as the primary means to his further literacy capacity development during his high school senior years. He attributes tremendous significance to this genre, privileging it over other text-types or manifestations of literacy capacities. Although moments before Leonard spoke confidently about his reading and writing skills in different subjects and text-types, perceiving his literacy capacities to be more than adequate in those contexts, gaining full access into the cultural dimension of essay writing in English diminishes his confidence and poses a significant worry for him.

Leonard spends a great deal of time in his interview discussing or referencing his interactions with peers, whom he considers to be very influential in his academic growth. He details how and when he solicits peer support in relation to assignment
completion, assessment preparation and classroom work. At first Leonard singles out his parents and teachers as the dominant factors in his academic pursuits, and states he can turn to them for help in case he needs it and would not hesitate to independently seek teacher help during office hours if he required it. However, as the interview progresses, it becomes clear Leonard prefers to solicit his friends rather than adults when needing academic help. Leonard provides a number of specific examples that reveals his method of enlisting the help of his peers when completing assignments and preparing for major assessments:

**Leonard:** When it comes to preparing, uhm, like assignments and stuff. Yup, uhm, I usually always do with someone in my class who's doing the same thing. Like say for example: soccer. We had a ‘SAC’ (School Assessed Class Work) yesterday and I was on the phone all night, the night before with my friend and we're just like going through it, making sure we knew all that we were doing, making sure we knew what was in it, what was going to be in it ...' (ST #5, lines 205 - 209).

In the extract above Leonard shows how he galvanizes the social element of the cultural dimension of literacy, particularly tenor as he employs his literacy capacities. As explicated earlier in the preface to the student-participant analysis, tenor constitutes interpersonal elements of literacy that link to language usage in specific contexts and occur in relation to its mode, or type of communication delivery and field, which is content specific (Green & Beavis, 2012). In the case of Leonard, his employment of tenor emerges as he describes his social interactions within different subjects and academic contexts:

**Leonard:** ‘In the classroom I’m alright, because I know pretty much everyone in the classroom, so it doesn’t bother me, but like in public speaking in front of heaps of people, it’s, I don’t know. I get a bit nervous, especially if I know like what if they, sort of like if I make a mistake, for example and they’re all watching and I look like an idiot and -.’ (ST#5, lines 64 - 67).
Leonard’s narrations about his social interactions in relation to academic activities are revealing because his discussion about his literacy capacities are referenced with many examples involving his peers. Leonard perceives these social interactions to be conducive to his learning. Maintenance of positive peer relationships and utilising them as a tool for academic preparation emerges as another factor influencing Leonard’s beliefs about his literacy capacities.

**Factors Influencing Leonard’s Perceptions:**

Leonard’s need to rehearse his ideas with peers and adult guidance prove to be important factors influencing his beliefs about his literacy capacities. Although he does not solicit help from his peers and teachers in the context of his English course, he employs this strategy in other subjects such as Legal Studies. The on-task discussions the first participant, Daniel values so highly, also emerge as an influential factor for Leonard. He perceives this to be a fundamental strategy as a successful preparation for important assessments. Leonard states he does not hesitate to consult his parents and specifically his mother for help if he feels he needs it. Additionally, during our conversation Leonard reveals he receives his mother’s support with academic work.

Leonard displays confidence with his literacy capacities in all different subject contexts with the exception of English 10, where he openly admits and discusses his struggles with essay writing. This genre focused text production poses a major stumbling block for him. Leonard believes he needs to overcome his inability to think creatively and to elaborate on his ideas when writing essays under time constraints and that in order to attain his goals in the senior years of high school, he will need to rectify this problem.

Although Leonard indicates peer affirmation and discussion are important factors in his learning, unlike Nadia and Daniel he has not participated in adult-guided small-group forums. Whilst Daniel and Nadia participated in Alpine School, Group Literacy Support (GLS), Leadership and Book Clubs, Leonard has taken part in informal peer study groups only. Outside of the classroom, he has not had the opportunity to experience peer and adult affirmation in structured settings, specifically in relation to text analysis.
and rehearsals of public speaking skills. Therefore, in Leonard’s case, it can be said that lack of practice in text analysis in small-group forums presents as a significant factor in his perceptions about his literacy capacities.
CHAPTER 5
Conclusions and Implications for Further Research

Conclusions:
From the onset of this research I knew I would not be able to construct generalities from each specific case, but I could provide a particular insight into each student’s case study. I assumed that numerous institutional and personal factors were bound to be influencing students’ perceptions about their literacy capacities and that a set of five interviews could not account for all of them. For example, I assumed students would place high value on specific instructional approaches stemming from their classroom experiences and teacher relationships. In terms of factors stemming from their personal lives, I expected to find strong connections between independent reading and positive student perceptions about their literacy capacities. However, emerging in these discourses was the frequency of the students’ encounters with the cultural dimension, which originated from an unexpected institutional factor. This corresponds with Green’s assertion that of the three, the cultural dimension is most likely to engage students in an educational setting. Moreover, Green states that after students successfully interact with one dimension, they will gain access to the others (Green, 1988a; Green & Beavis, 2012; Halliday, 1979). This was borne out in this study, because when students interacted with peers, mentors and educators, whilst they processed and created texts, they perceived themselves as capable. Thus, their engagement via the cultural lens proved to be a gateway to the other literacy dimensions.

Interestingly, student-participants’ concerns regarding literacy centred on their experiences in producing academic essays. Their literacy journeys, encompassing primary school years to the students’ year ten high school, indicated a shift in their definition of literacy and along with that a change in their perceptions. Specifically, when all five participants were asked to describe their literacy capacities during their primary and junior years, they defined literacy capacities in broad terms. These included debates, personal readings, narrative writing and public speaking. However, once they were questioned about their current perceptions relating to their literacy capacities, their definition narrowed to achieving proficiency in essay writing under timed conditions. This became a sole focus of their perceptions even when these students were
demonstrating strong capacities in other areas of literacy, for example Nadia and Susan’s prolific reading and writing habits.

Participants’ anticipation of future construction of essays and hence their navigation through the operational and critical dimensions varied. Those who received opportunities to interact with this genre in different social situations, such as through teacher-directed group discussions or one-on-one conversations with older mentors, approached these tasks with confidence and resilience even when they encountered obstacles. Such was the case with Nadia, who was learning to develop an appropriate pace when writing under time-constraints and had no doubts she would master this competency in the near future. Susan held similar beliefs. She even viewed time-constrained writing such as exams as an opportunity to be challenged in order to think more. Daniel’s beliefs were also strong in this regard because he was adamant that as long as he was given time to deconstruct a given text prior to an assessment, in a discussion forum, and providing he understood the textual features required, he would succeed or as he put it, he would ‘fly through’ such a task.

What factors accounted for Nadia, Susan and Daniel’s positive interpretation of this challenge, versus the more anxiety filled perceptions of Fillipo and Leonard? In the context of this study the prominent differences comprised of the students’ access to out-of-class, small discussion forums, where adults guided and structured the students’ conversations in addition to other factors such as prior successes on assessments of this type and strong independent reading habits. Participants who had limited opportunities to explore texts in mentor-mediated venues, felt less self-efficacious and approached their writing with anxiety, as was evident in the case of Leonard and Fillipo. In these cases students’ perceptions were influenced by specific learning conditions created via the cultural dimension and constituted important factors influencing beliefs about their ability to engage with and to produce required texts. These conditions consisted of students being able to engage in frequent social interactions that provided them with opportunities to practise and develop their literacy skills in safe venues, where risk taking was encouraged by a skilled mentor. This mentor directed the conversation and ensured it remained focused on the content or a given literacy task at hand, thereby creating a space for the participants’ socialisation into the culture of the specific genre.
Three participants had access to this type of a discussion forum outside their mainstream classes, whilst two had limited opportunities. Of relevance is the fact that the safe discussion forum guided by a skilled practitioner was connected to each participant’s educational setting and hence constitutes an institutional factor. A clear link was evident between these experiences within the cultural dimension and the three participants’ formulation of positive perceptions about their abilities in relation to the operational and critical dimensions of literacy. The other two participants, Fillipo and Leonard, who had limited access to expert-led discussion forums, expressed anxiety about their writing skills and specifically singled out essays as a genre they needed to improve significantly prior to entering their VCE studies. Moreover, their perceptions about their speaking and writing abilities were less positive than the other three participants.

Peer affirmation emerged as yet another factor that influenced participants’ beliefs about their literacy capacities and this social element relates to the ‘register’ of language usage, characterized by Green as the cultural dimension of literacy and with Bandura’s self-efficacy theories (Bandura, 1998; Green & Beavis, 2012; Halliday, 1979). All five participants discussed peers as a contributing factor to their sense of self-efficacy in relation to their literacy capacities. Nadia and Susan attributed positive peer-feedback as a strong motivator for their creative writing efforts. Daniel perceived peers as a potential distraction and even an academic hindrance if literacy-related discussions were not adequately supervised by a teacher. At the same time he stressed the fundamental role peer discussion played in the development of his confidence in text analysis during the times he had engaged in group discussions. Fillipo indirectly revealed the importance of peers to his confidence when he discussed his successes in public speaking and debate. In this forum he received peer as well as teacher affirmation during his junior years. Finally, Leonard revealed he frequently galvanized peer assistance in order to prepare for major assessments.

As I anticipated there was a strong connection between participants’ reading habits and their perceptions about their literacy capacities in relation to text analysis. This finding is consistent with scores of diverse studies that make a positive link between independent reading habits and student academic achievement in reading (Greaney, 1977; Heath, 1982; Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Anderson, Hiebert, Elfrieda
& Scott, 1988; Cullinan, 2000; Howard, 2011). Daniel, Nadia and Susan demonstrated their operational successes through their recollections of characters and plots of novels they were reading. Moreover, they vividly described their first successful reading experiences in primary school and were able to name specific books and characters that captivated them and motivated them to continue reading. Their abilities to identify with characters and situations led them to analyse novels from different angles, such as plot, character and theme. Critical thinking of this type enabled these participants to formulate conclusions or judgments about the texts. As has been explained throughout the course of this research, any cognitive process that links to text deconstruction of this nature, is associated with the critical dimension of literacy (Green, 1988a; Green & Beavis, 2012; Moffett, 1981). Nadia and Susan’s enthusiastic engagements with their novels provided an insight into their confidence and competence with the critical dimension of literacy and provide a window into the source of their self-agency.

Relevantly, all five participants mentioned their frequency or infrequency of independent reading and openly acknowledged the importance of this activity to their learning. Three participants detailed their reading habits with specific references to challenging texts and provided substantive history of their reading journeys dating back to their primary school readings. For example, Daniel, Nadia and Susan listed specific titles and authors and their references revealed the nature of their successful encounters with all three literacy dimensions. These three participants employed sophisticated vocabulary and complex sentence structure as they communicated their ideas during our conversations, displaying confidence in their abilities to analyse and produce texts. Moreover, these participants held positive perceptions about their potential abilities to construct written analyses under test conditions as they anticipated having to demonstrate these skills on assessments. These students perceived such future activities as an opportunity to grow as learners, despite the fact they were experiencing difficulties with this in their current year ten contexts.

Fillipo’s statements about the importance of independent reading were more direct than Susan’s. He stated his literacy capacities were not as good as they were during the previous year when he had the opportunity to read independently in English on a regular basis. Unlike the other three participants who had a history of independent reading at home, Fillipo only referenced titles and authors in relation to his current English studies.
Much to his disappointment independent reading was not conducted during class time anymore and he perceived this had adversely affected his capacity to complete English assessment tasks successfully (ST#3, lines 42 – 54). Leonard attributed his academic accomplishments to his strong reading abilities of diverse genres when he listed his current successes in the context of his Legal Studies. In this case study, consistent independent reading habits emerge as one of numerous factors influencing students’ positive perceptions about their literacy capacities.

A personal factor emerged from the discourses with student-participants that strongly corresponded with social approaches to informal literacy instruction (Heath, 1982; Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Specifically, participants perceived their family members, particularly mothers, as important factors in the development of their literacy capacities. The significance of this parental role proliferated the interviews as students described their conversations during which their mothers provided consistent validation and an opportunity to practise their literacy capacities in all modes – speaking, reading and writing. For example, Daniel stated that although he’d rather be playing football, he enjoys his literary discussions with his mother and believes these conversations have fostered his strong reading capacities. Nadia was even more direct about the pivotal role her mother’s feedback plays in her creative writing endeavours, recounting the specific nature of her mother’s praise for her writing. Fillipo stated he practises his language skills with his mother and this was similar to Leonard, who said he holds academic conversations with his mother on a regular basis.

Changing instructional approaches to summative assessments emerged as a surprising, institutional factor. When participants were asked to describe how they became literate, in all five cases they described literacy in broad terms when referring to the past. They talked about reading, writing stories, public speaking and debating. However, when they were asked about their current literacy journeys, they all focused on their production of literary essays under time constraints. Definitions of their literacy capacities had narrowed over time. It became clear that at some point during their high school years participants began privileging genre oriented instructional approaches over other literacy activities. Furthermore, the nature of these perceptions varied according to the participants’ perceived successes or failures on these types of assessments in the past.
Finally, one might imagine that having an opportunity to learn other languages outside of mainstream education would constitute a significant factor in students’ perceptions in the context of literacy. After all, using another language on a regular basis enables Leonard and Fillipo to engage the operational dimension through their use of diverse vocabulary and grammatical structures. However, neither of these participants connected linguistic knowledge to his English literacy capacities, nor indicated his perceptions about these as having been bolstered by this ability. Perhaps the limited number of participants in this study did not provide the opportunity to explore bi-lingual knowledge as a factor of students’ perceptions in enough depth. Therefore, exploring this topic as an influencing factor behind students’ perceptions may merit further study.

Student-participants in this study attributed a great deal of importance to adult-facilitated, small group discussions with peers, where they could practise improving and developing their reading, writing and speaking capacities. This type of mobilization of the cultural aspect of literacy provided them with opportunities to engage the critical and operational dimensions, which significantly influenced the participants’ positive perceptions about their capacities. Knowledge of this factor can be utilised by schools and teachers in many different ways. For example, they can facilitate academically focussed discussions between students in small groups as part of regular instructional practices and this is consistent with recommended instructional approaches such as Reciprocal Teaching and Guided Reading (Palincsar & Brown 1984; Fountas & Pinnell 2001).

Alternatively, educational leaders or administrators can implement small group instruction more formally into the curriculum by scheduling it into school time-tables as part of extra literacy support. Moreover, they can organize a variety of co-curricular forums students can access during breaks or after school hours. Such initiatives would provide students with chances to interact with positive role models and a variety of community leaders. In addition, the reliance on academic essays as a primary assessment tool for measuring literacy capacities in later high school years can be broadened to include different types of literacy activities. Multi-modal presentations that showcase digital literacies, public speaking events, debates and creative writing can be used to provide a more balanced approach to restore students’ broader definitions of their literacy capacities.
Although the fundamental role family members and primary care providers play in the literacy development of youngsters and adolescents alike can never be fully replaced by school programs, knowledge of these personal factors can be used to bolster self-efficacy in students by implementing targeted literacy support or coaching. After all, the fractured nature of modern family life often prevents students from having regular access to support networks within the family unit, and this can be mitigated by school based programs that are sensitive to students’ needs and by providing adolescents with access to older mentors within the school context.

The school system has the organizational capacities and facilities to provide safe venues for small group discussions. Teachers can be guided to provide students with opportunities to safely rehearse their ideas in collaboration with peers, as well as model the operational skills in different contexts. In this manner educational settings can create safe forums to engage students in all three literacy dimensions. However, it should be stated the role of a literacy mentor at home, who nourishes the students’ self-efficacy in the operational, critical and cultural dimensions is not easy to replicate by a school system in the same quantity or perhaps even quality as it is fostered by primary caregivers (Heath, 1982; Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988).

Alternatively, parents who may feel ill-equipped to discuss literature with their children can be provided with assistance in this regard in after-school venues such as homework clubs. After-school events do not have to be limited to parent-teacher interviews or school promotional nights such as Expos. They can be broadened to include book-clubs and tutorials aimed to engage both parents and their children with literature. Once the importance of factors that positively influence students’ perceptions about their literacy capacities is fully understood, the motivation for parents to become directly involved can be harnessed. It is likely many parents would respond positively when given an opportunity to contribute to their children’s education in a practical manner. Together parents, teachers and administrators can play a key role in nurturing positive factors that influence students’ perceptions of their literacy capacities by providing them with both curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to safely practice and develop their prowess in all three literacy dimensions.
References


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