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Title:
Literacy assessment in the early years: teachers at work in a changing policy paradigm

Date:
2020

Persistent Link:
https://hdl.handle.net/11343/268186

Literacy Assessment in the Early Years: Teachers at Work in a Changing Policy Paradigm

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Melbourne Graduate School of Education
The University of Melbourne

December, 2020

Abstract

This thesis reports on a mixed-methods, two-phase study, which focused on the literacy assessment practices of early years teachers and literacy leaders in Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese in a period following the devolution of assessment responsibility to schools. Phase 1 of the data collection resulted in 76 literacy leaders' responses to a questionnaire on literacy assessment practices in their schools. In Phase 2, semistructured interviews with 23 early years teachers and seven literacy leaders were conducted to investigate their literacy assessment beliefs and practices. Importantly, the thesis reports on the participants' interrogation, innovation on, resistance to, or acceptance of both previously mandated and current options around literacy assessment priorities and practices. Additionally, the thesis explores assessment in the early years within the contemporary high-stakes assessment environment which is characterised by heightened levels of teacher accountability.

Bernstein's (1990, 1996, 2000) pedagogic device is used as a theoretical framework to examine the complexities and tensions of policy enactments at the school and classroom level. Findings from this study illustrate that early years teachers' literacy assessment work is complex due to working in a "boundary zone" of tension and compromise where, on one hand, they are encouraged to engage in age-appropriate, child-centred early years pedagogies yet, on the other, are mandated to assess and report against system-wide primary curriculum standards.

Declaration of Originality

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Education;

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;

(iii) the thesis is fewer than 55,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

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Martina Tassone

Preface

Pam Firth (The Detail Devil, Editing Services for Researchers) provided professional copyediting and formatting services, and her recommendations are according to the guidelines laid out in the university-endorsed national *Guidelines for Editing Research Theses* (Institute of Professional Editors, 2019).

Acknowledgements

> And I made a mistake I think a lot of people make, which is thinking that one day I suddenly have this block of time open up and I'd be able to suddenly focus on this goal with no distractions. And of course, that never happened. It didn't happen for me either, but I did realise that if I was going to do it, I was going to have to do around my day to day schedule. So, I made the time, deliberately, to find time to work on it. (Jane Harper, cited on GARRETTPODCAST.COM, 2020)

I would like to start with sincerely thanking my supervisors, Dr Paul Molyneux and Dr Carmel Sandiford for their unwavering commitment throughout the doctoral process. They provided enough pressure to push me outside of my comfort zone but balanced that with the right amount of support. I would also like to thank the chairs of my doctoral committee initially Professors Lesley Farrell and then Nicola Yelland for being encouraging throughout the doctoral process.

To the many friends and colleagues in Catholic Education and at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education who have supported my teaching and academic career, a sincere thanks. Thank you also to Pam Firth for copyediting the thesis.

To all the participants involved in my research who were so willing to share their insights and who demonstrated such a commitment to teaching and learning, thank you. Teaching really is a noble profession and deserves the highest respect.

I thank my parents for valuing education and for choosing Australia as the place to bring up and educate a family: my mum for reading poetry to me when I was young and dad for talking politics on our trips home from school, encouraging me to think and question. As the first in family to go to kindergarten and university, I thank my parents for their commitment to my education. I wish you could be here mum to celebrate this educational milestone. I know you would be proud.

A special acknowledgement to my wonderful sister-in-law Carmel Mesiti, one of the smartest people I know, who has shared this doctoral journey with me. She read many of my early drafts, and we engaged in long conversations about all things related to research. I do not think I could have done this without you.

As the above quote from one of my favourite Australian authors, Jane Harper, alludes, this research took place while juggling all the other demands of life: working full time, being a wife, mother, daughter, sister, and friend. I am not sure I always got the balance right, so to that end, I want to conclude this with thanking my beautiful family for their support and patience, my children Ronan and Stella who have only ever known a mother who studies, reads, and writes. I hope I have inspired you. And to my amazing husband Vito who is my strongest supporter; you always knew to say and do the right things at the right time. This feels like a family effort, and now I hope to get the work–life balance right.

My entire childhood, all I ever wanted to be was a teacher, and when I finally made it, I was fortunate enough to find myself in a primary school with supportive colleagues who were amazing teachers and passionate educators. I made lifelong friends. I would like to dedicate this thesis to Lucy Jackanic, a passionate educator and principal, who had full faith in me as a graduate teacher and provided me with so many leadership opportunities that set me on the path I am on today, working with the next generation of teachers. Thank you Lucy for the years of friendship and support!

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List of Abbreviations

AHQE	Alliance for High Quality Education
AC	Australian Curriculum
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AfL	assessment for learning
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ALEA	Australian Literacy Educators Association
ARC	Assessment Research Centre
CAQDAS	computer-assisted qualitative analysis software
CECV	Catholic Education Commission of Victoria
CEM	Catholic Education Melbourne
CLaSS	Children's Literacy Success Strategy
CSE	compulsory school education
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DET	Department of Education and Training
EAL/D	English as an additional language/dialect
ECE	early childhood education
F–2	Foundation to Year 2
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAP	National Assessment Program

NAPLAN	National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy
ORF	official recontextualising field
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRF	pedagogic recontextualising field
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PLT	professional learning team
ROL	record of oral language
SLAT	Speaking and Listening Assessment Tool
SAE	Standard Australian English
VEYLDF	Victorian Early Years: Learning and Development Framework

Chapter 1. Introduction

Literacy Assessment in the Early Years: Teachers at Work in a Changing Policy Paradigm

> The importance of differential assessment techniques for different purposes is fundamental to literacy assessment and space for individual pedagogical choice. (Fehring & Nyland, 2012, p. 12)

1.1 Current Climate

This research investigated early years teachers grappling with issues of literacy assessment. Since 2012, there has been devolution of responsibility to Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese in terms of literacy assessment tools and practices required in the early years (Foundation to Year 2), with a shift from a prescriptive and mandated approach to literacy assessment (1998–2012) to allowing schools much greater autonomy in terms of the literacy assessment devices and practices they employ.

However, there exists a tension for these early years teachers; their newfound autonomy has occurred in a period of education where all schools are more accountable than ever before. The educational landscape is dominated by high-stakes testing, a curriculum based on standardised expected achievement, and school data are published and available for public scrutiny (Comber & Nixon, 2009; Polesel, Dufler, & Turnbull, 2012; Reid, 2019). Literacy is also a contested space, with wide-ranging views on how literacy should be both taught and assessed (Woods & Exley, 2020). In the current climate, early years educators have a difficult task in balancing the

developmental needs of young children and their learning with conforming to the demands of policymakers, and this inevitably causes some tension (Moyles, 2008, p. 3).

There appears to be widespread agreement on the importance of assessment but with much debate around the purpose and forms assessment should take. Some promote a standardised approach to assessment (Brown & Hattie, 2012; Joseph, 2018), while others call for a more nuanced approach that caters to the differing needs and backgrounds of those being assessed (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2010; Griffin, 2014; Popham, 2010; Masters, 2013a; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2006).

Given these tensions, an investigation into the literacy assessment practices of early years educators (F–2) in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese within a changing policy paradigm is necessary to explore how these teachers balance their newfound autonomy in an era of increased accountability (Klenowski, 2009, 2012; Supovitz, 2009; Wu & Hornsby, 2014). The increased accountability is characterised by the centrality of high-stakes testing such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Alongside a focus on assessment, there has been renewed attention on the importance of education in the early years internationally (UNESCO, 2010), nationally (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2009), at the state level (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011), as well as by the Catholic system (Catholic Education Commission of Victoria [CECV], 2014).

The current focus on measuring literacy numerically through a range of international, national, and local mechanisms is attributed to the influence of a pervasive neoliberal ideology. Literacy in neoliberal terms has become a valued commodity and one that needs to be measured to demonstrate learning and to ensure children can eventually contribute economically to society. Savage (2017) stated, “Education, therefore, is now framed and justified in policy as primarily a site for building human capital and contributing to economic productivity, from the early childhood years, right through to the tertiary level” (p. 150). Additionally, in a historical

overview of literacy policy, Fehring and Nyland (2012) posited, “The neo-liberal discourse of literacy as human capital is very evident as the dominant ideology framing major curriculum initiatives being promoted” (p. 8). Neoliberalism has changed education from focusing on “personal transformation as well as being part of a social justice ideology” (Fehring & Nyland, 2012, p. 9) to economic productivity. In the current climate, neoliberal policies are shaping curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment are described by Bernstein (1971) as the three interrelated message systems of schooling, and when one of these message systems is changed, it impacts the other two. Changes to the message systems are executed through a process Bernstein (1996) described as recontextualisation: “The recontextualising functions then become the means whereby a specific pedagogic discourse is created” (Bernstein, 1996, p. 33). Bernstein’s (1990, 1996, 2000) pedagogic device describes the relay that occurs to convert knowledge from a primary field outside of education, into an educational discourse that can then form official education policy to be reproduced by teachers in schools. The process of transforming knowledge into education policy occurs through a process of recontextualisation, and this knowledge is said to be pedagogised (Singh, 2002). Currently, neoliberalism ideology is taken from its primary field outside of education and recontextualised into an educational discourse. Neoliberal ideas are recontextualised into official education policy in the form of testing, making the results from testing readily available to the public and having a standardised curriculum.

The recontextualisation of neoliberal ideology into official education policy impacts the message systems of schooling, and the ways teachers reproduce curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment changes as a result of the recontextualised policy. My research investigated how early years teachers responded to an official Catholic system policy change to literacy assessment requirements, which gave them greater autonomy while managing wider neoliberal accountability policy demands.

The interface between the fields of research, policy, and practice is central to this doctoral research, and Bernstein’s pedagogic device, as a multilayered concept that connects the three fields, was ideally suited as a theoretical framework for my study.

The use of Bernstein's pedagogic device as a framework for my study is discussed further in Section 2.3.

1.2 Background: Changing Policy Paradigm

Between 1998 and 2012, Catholic primary schools across Victoria implemented an approach to literacy designed to improved outcomes by providing consistency of practice in early years classrooms. The Children's Literacy Success Strategy (CLaSS), an initiative by the CECV and Centre of Applied Educational Research, Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne, was based on research by Crévola and Hill (2005). The approach was grounded on the principle that schools have a "narrow window of opportunity" (p. 4) to improve student literacy learning outcomes, and that early intervention is essential as children who fail to make progress in the first 2 years of schooling rarely catch up with their peers.

The CLaSS initiative was premised on a design approach comprising nine elements, illustrated in Figure 1.1, based on international research on school improvement (Crévola & Hill, 2005). Rather than a discrete literacy program with a focus only on improving literacy at the classroom level, the nine elements were designed to work in synergy to bring about whole-school improvement with an emphasis on literacy in the early years. The design approach was based on the belief that all children can learn given sufficient time and support, and all teachers can teach to high standards given sufficient time and support. As part of the CLaSS project, each school appointed a literacy coordinator to ensure successful implementation of the project. The Catholic system provided schools with additional funding to support the role of the literacy coordinator and targeted ongoing professional learning for literacy coordinators, early years teachers, and principals. The literacy coordinator role was seen as pivotal for improving literacy teaching, learning, and assessment. The literacy coordinator acted as a coach and mentor to teachers in the early years. The title of coordinator was subsequently changed to literacy leader in recognition of the importance of leading literacy change in schools (Fullan, Hill, & Crévola, 2006). During the CLaSS period (1998–2012), all early years teachers, literacy leaders, and school principals participated in professional learning facilitated by Hill and Crévola and literacy staff from the Catholic Education Office Melbourne. The professional learning was

designed to build literacy principals' and leaders' capacity to lead literacy improvement and for early years teachers to teach and assess literacy in the early years to ensure early literacy success.

Figure 1.1. CLaSS design elements.

Note. Adapted from *CLaSS: Children's Literacy Success Strategy: Overview and Program outline* (3rd ed., p. 5), by C. Hill and P. Hill, 2005, East Melbourne: Catholic Education Melbourne. Copyright 2005 by Catholic Education Office Melbourne and Hill and Crévola Pty Ltd. Adapted with permission.

One of the nine elements of the design is "monitoring and assessment". At the commencement of CLaSS, standards and targets were set in relation to students' reading achievement in the first 2 years of schooling. Teachers were required to assess students at both the beginning and end of the school year using standardised assessment tools. A system requirement was for assessment results to be reported to CEM via an online portal. The online portal also allowed schools to compare their literacy assessment results to schools with similar enrolment demographics ("like schools").

During the mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment period (1998–2012), teachers were required to administer Clay's (2005) *Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (often referred to as the Observation Survey, or Ob. Survey, by teachers)

to all students in Foundation and Year 1, and to those students in Year 2 identified as not having met a required literacy standard, at both the beginning and end of the year. The Observation Survey consisted of five literacy assessments: (1) Letter Identification, (2) Concepts About Print, (3) Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words, (4) Word Test and (5) Recording Words. Prior to the CEM 2012 policy devolution, teachers were required to administer all assessments after they had completed a running record for each student, using a set of prescribed levelled texts at the beginning and end of the year. A running record is an assessment tool that enables teachers to gain insight into a student's reading as it is happening (Clay, 1993). Table 1.1 presents a description of the mandated assessment requirements.

Table 1.1

Assessment Tool Requirements During the Mandated and Prescriptive Literacy Assessment Period (1998–2012)

Foundation	Year 1	Year 2
Running Record	Running Record	Running Record*
Record of Oral Language	Record of Oral Language	Record of Oral Language**
Observation Survey—Letter Identification	Observation Survey—Letter Identification	Observation Survey—Letter Identification
Observation Survey—Concepts About Print	Observation Survey—Concepts About Print	Observation Survey—Concepts About Print
Observation Survey—Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words	Observation Survey—Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words	Observation Survey—Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words
Observation Survey—Writing Words	Observation Survey—Writing Words	Observation Survey—Writing Words
Observation Survey—Word Test	Observation Survey—Word Test	Observation Survey—Word Test
BURT Word Reading Test	BURT Word Reading Test	BURT Word Reading Test
		Peter's Dictation (Spelling Assessment)

*In Year 2, if a child scored Level 15 or below in the running record, the teacher was required to re-administer the assessments from the Observation Survey. **If a child scored Level 15 or below in the end of Year 1 testing, the Year 2 teacher was required to re-administer the Record of Oral Language.

The Observation Survey was designed to be completed in its entirety, enabling the teacher to gain a more holistic picture of a student's literacy strengths and needs (Clay, 2005). It was originally designed to be used with children who had completed 12 months at school but, from 1998 to 2012, CEM prescribed its use for children in Year 1 and 2 as well as the first year of school (Foundation level). In addition to the Observation Survey, teachers were required to administer the Record of Oral Language (Clay, Gill, Glynn, McNaughton, & Salmon, 2007), and CEM also mandated the BURT Word Reading Test (Gilmore, Croft, & Reid, 1981) prior to 2012. Once children were in Year 2 of school, and if they could decode a text level of 15, teachers were no longer required to administer the Observation Survey but would continue to administer a word reading test (Gilmore et al., 1981) and a dictation task to assess spelling (Peters, 1975).

The CLaSS off-site professional learning aimed at ensuring all teachers received training in administering the literacy assessments as well as facilitating the mandated two-hour literacy block. The CEM used the data collected through the mandated literacy assessments to track improvement over time, but the data were also designed to be used by schools to monitor progress and plan to ensure students' needs were being met. Crévola and Hill (2005) noted that assessment should provide more information than simply looking at the value that has been added to learning. They stated,

> The key function of assessment and monitoring within CLaSS is to assist the teacher to find out as much as possible about each student's strengths and weaknesses in literacy, to establish starting points for instruction and to use diagnostic information to drive the classroom instructional program. (Crévola & Hill, 2005, p. 12)

Schools during this period were required to have weekly professional learning team (PLT) meetings where the focus was ongoing literacy assessment to inform teaching; this was referred to as data-driven improvement (Crévola & Hill, 2005).

In 2008, after 10 years of CLaSS, the CEM established a focus group to consult with principals and literacy leaders from 10 schools to review the literacy assessment practices of Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese. The focus group's

consensus was that the CLaSS approach to assessment was overly complex, time consuming to administer, insufficiently attentive to differing school contexts, and did not inform teaching. Participants in the focus group reported they were not using the data collected from the mandated literacy CLaSS assessments to inform teaching; rather, they reported that they largely saw the data collection as a requirement for the system. This tension of teachers using data for dual purposes—to inform teaching and improve learning as well as for accountability purposes—is well documented (e.g., Parr & Timperley, 2016). Because of this tension, it was decided that further research was required, and the Assessment Research Centre (ARC) at the University of Melbourne was engaged in 2011 to investigate all aspects of the CLaSS-mandated literacy assessment in the early years (F–2).

The ARC research involved 28 Catholic primary schools from across Victoria trialling a range of literacy assessment tools. The ARC recommended a focus on the skill development of students from Foundation to Year 2 and identified the component skills that contribute to reading comprehension in the early years, as depicted in Figure 1.2 (Care, Crigan, Zhang, & Peach, 2012). This resulted in a seismic change of CEM policy around school-level literacy assessment and reporting. Instead of being compelled to implement a plethora of literacy assessments and report the results to the CEM, after 2012, it was decided that schools would only be required to collect two pieces of evidence to enable the system to track student achievement. Schools would still be required to administer the Record of Oral Language (Clay, 1983) at the beginning of the year and administer a running record (Clay, 2002) at the end of the year using the prescribed texts; all other literacy assessment decisions were at the school's discretion. This marked a very strong pendulum swing from highly prescribed and centralised decision-making to that which involved far greater choice and was more localised. It offered schools and teachers increased agency and empowerment in decision-making around literacy assessment. Little is known about how schools have responded to this devolution and the decisions that schools have made in terms of literacy assessment in the early years as a result of this change in official system requirements.

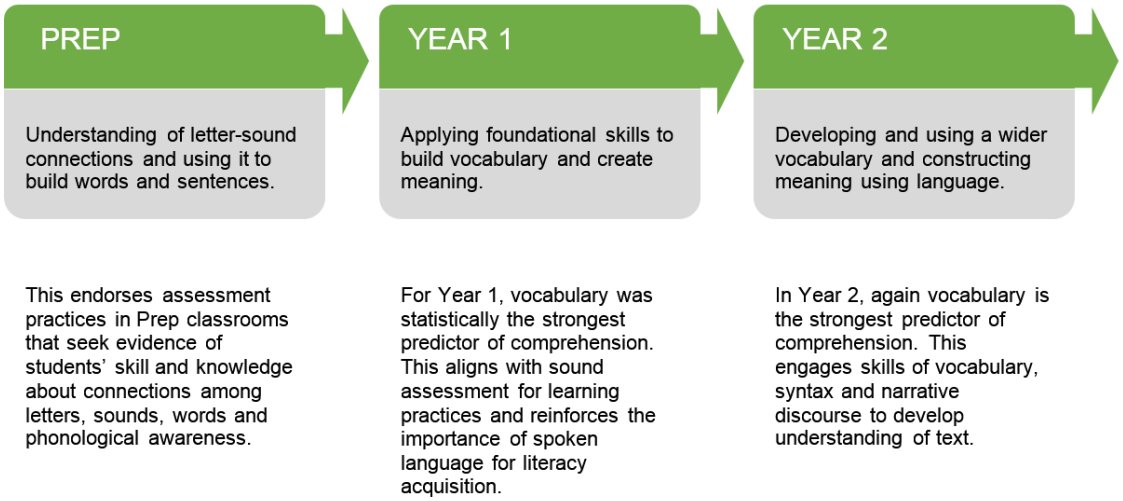


Figure 1.2. ARC component skills that contribute to reading comprehension.

Note. Adapted from *Report to Principals P–2 Literacy Assessment* (p. 2) by Catholic Education Melbourne, East Melbourne: Catholic Education Melbourne. Copyright 2013. Adapted with permission.

To support schools with making informed decisions about literacy assessment at the local level, CEM published and disseminated a brochure summarising the ARC research and developed an online literacy assessment resource to guide schools in making decisions about literacy assessment in the early years. The aim was to build schools' capacity to make informed decisions in relation to literacy assessment that best suited their context. The message to schools was that they now had autonomy in relation to literacy assessment in the early years, but they were encouraged to use the ARC's research and the assessment resources made available to them by CEM to support them with making informed decisions about literacy assessment.

In the period that ensued (2013–2015), CEM in conjunction with the ARC developed a suite of professional learning programs designed to build "assessment-capable teachers". The terms "building assessment-capable teachers" and "assessment capacity" were recontextualised by Catholic Education and used to promote this new approach to assessment. Although these terms were never fully defined by Catholic Education, they do appear consistently in the literature along with a range of terms used to identify how teachers engage effectively with assessment.

Teachers who are assessment capable are said to use assessment in support of learning (M. Hill, Cowie, Gilmore, & Smith, 2010) and possess the requisite knowledge and skills to carry out assessments (DeLuca & Johnson, 2017). Assessment-capable teachers require a high degree of assessment literacy (Fullan, 2001; Howley, 2013; Mertler, 2004), which is a fundamental skill situated within a sociocultural view of assessment, whereby assessment is seen as a social practice and requires teachers to "understand the assessment–learning relationship [and to] practice teacher assessment and social moderation" (Klenowski, 2009, p. 19).

Although many discuss the need for teachers to be assessment literate, others refer to the need for educators to have data literacy skills. Gummer and Mandinach, (2015) described data literacy as "the ability to transform information into actionable instructional knowledge and practices", whereby a teacher "combines an understanding of data with standards, disciplinary knowledge and practices, curricular knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and an understanding of how children learn" (p. 2). Although these terms are clearly defined by theorists, they may not necessarily capture the complexities and nuances of how early years teachers engage with literacy assessment in schools and teachers' narrative in the current climate where there is a prevailing discourse around assessment.

In 2013 and 2014, CEM invited the 28 schools that had participated in the 2012 ARC research to engage in further professional learning to support them with building their literacy assessment capacity of their early years teachers. In 2015, 12 schools that were not part of the original research were invited to participate in off-site professional learning aimed at building literacy assessment capacity. Both the CEM and the ARC facilitated the professional learning. This meant over half of Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese did not receive any official off-site professional learning from CEM or the ARC to assist them with managing the devolution.

This was a very different approach to that during the CLaSS period, whereby principals, teachers, and school literacy leaders attended regular off-site professional learning, and early years teachers were mandated to complete literacy assessments and to have weekly PLT meetings to discuss assessment. By 2012, CLaSS was dismantled without a clear alternate approach to literacy teaching and assessment in its place.

Instead, school and teacher autonomy was promoted as a response to many schools' dissatisfaction with the mandated and prescriptive CLaSS approach.

Current research is very much in favour of teacher autonomy, in that autonomy is an indicator of professional authority and that professional identity is linked with autonomy (Evetts, 2011; Gerrard & Farrell, 2013; Imants & Van der Wal, 2020). This research set out to investigate how schools transitioned from a highly prescriptive and mandated approach to assessment in the early years (1998–2012) to having much greater autonomy and less intervention from CEM. It was therefore vital to find out how schools responded to this major policy shift and how early years teachers balanced their newfound autonomy in an era characterised by a range of neoliberal policies, including standardised testing, mandated curriculum, and reporting against curriculum standards.

1.3 Purpose

Although early years (F–2) educators in Melbourne Catholic schools since 2012 have had much greater autonomy in making decisions in relation to literacy assessment, this autonomy exists in a period characterised by high levels of accountability. The effects of high-stakes testing in the middle and upper years of primary school are filtering down, and according to DeLuca and Hughes (2014), many early years teachers feel compelled to adjust their teaching and assessment because of this. Further, Pyle and De Luca (2013) stated that research in early years assessment is lacking, with minimal guidance provided for early years teachers to manage developmental assessment within accountability contexts. The importance of assessment is frequently emphasised as critical, as Shay (2008) articulated: "There can be no single more powerful form of leverage on curriculum improvement and student learning than assessment" (p. 595). Therefore, in an era where teachers have decreased direction and support from the system but increased accountability in terms of, for example, national testing, publicly available school data, media scrutiny around perceived declining literacy standards, and the teaching of literacy, a study of the literacy assessment practices in the early years is both timely and necessary.

1.4 Research Questions

The aim of this research was to explore the literacy assessment practices of early years teachers in Catholic primary schools, following a devolution of literacy assessment that allowed schools much greater autonomy over literacy assessment in the early years after a long period of mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment (1998–2012).

To understand the impact of this devolution within the contemporary high-stakes assessment environment, characterised by heightened levels of teacher accountability and coupled with increased autonomy around literacy assessment decision-making returned to schools, I posed the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

- What are the current literacy assessment beliefs and practices of teachers in early years classrooms (F–2) in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese?

Research Question 2 (RQ2)

- In what ways do devolved responsibility and increased autonomy for literacy assessment allow early years teachers to interrogate, innovate on, resist, or accept both previously mandated and current literacy assessment priorities and practices?

To answer these two questions, I used a two-phase approach to data collection. Phase 1 involved collecting both qualitative and quantitative data through an online questionnaire completed by literacy leaders in 76 Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese. During Phase 2, eight diverse schools were purposefully selected from the 76 Phase 1 schools to collect more detailed data from early years teachers and literacy leaders on their literacy assessment practices (see chapter3).

1.5 Researcher's Background

Researchers bring themselves to the research process. Charmaz, Thornberg, and Keane (2018) stated, "Researchers bring their histories, social standing and cultural background with them to all their involvements, including the research process" (p.

421). My interest in researching the assessment practices of early years teachers in a changing policy paradigm is influenced by my history in education. I commenced my teaching career as an early years teacher, and over the past 25 years, my career has focused predominantly on the early years and literacy in my roles as a school teacher, a literacy education officer at CEM, and a university language and literacy lecturer.

In 1998, I was appointed literacy coordinator in one of the first schools to participate in the CLaSS project. In 2001, I took on a position at CEM as a CLaSS facilitator; this role involved supporting CLaSS schools with the project's implementation. As a CLaSS facilitator, I saw firsthand both the benefits and challenges of the approach. I was aware that many schools struggled with aspects of the mandated requirements of the CLaSS project, including literacy assessment, and I was interested in exploring how schools navigated the move from a highly mandated and prescriptive approach to literacy assessment (1998–2012) to having much greater autonomy.

Through my roles as literacy education officer, language and literacy lecturer, and early childhood and primary course coordinator, I am all too aware of the range of international, national, state, and local system policies and programs that filter down and affect early years teachers at the local school level, as well as the current intense focus on literacy standards that are measured numerically. This professional background has resulted in my interest in investigating the literacy assessment practices of early years teachers in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese. My professional and personal interest in the topic aligns with the need for research into the effects of this devolution of decision-making to the school level.

Although there is much research around assessment in relation to preservice, upper primary, and secondary educators (Claveric, 2010; DeLuca, Chavez, Bellara, & Cao, 2013; Howley, 2010), there appears to be a gap in terms of literacy assessment in the early years (F–2) in the Australian context. With a renewed focus on the early years and a change from mandated literacy assessment to greater literacy assessment autonomy within Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese, it seems necessary and timely that research into literacy assessment in the early years be conducted. My research investigated the literacy assessment practices of early years teachers working in a changing policy paradigm within the Melbourne archdiocese and

explored the interplay between policy and practice using a Bernsteinian lens (see Chapter 2). Although this research explored the impact of the assessment devolution in Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese there are clear implications for the wider education community with teachers in the current climate having to navigate the complex policy terrain underpinned by neoliberal principles.

1.6 Summary of Chapters

This thesis consists of seven chapters, a reference list, and appendices to report the findings of the research. The following is an outline of each chapter.

Chapter 1. The introduction provides background to the research. Current policies underpinned by neoliberal principles, together with a discussion of how current policy is impacting the work of teachers have been provided. The context and rationale for the research have been identified, the research questions presented, my background and interest in the research topic outlined and the significance of the research postulated.

Chapter 2. The literature review is organised around key three areas, starting with an exploration of some of the big picture neoliberal principles impacting teachers' work. Second, the literature relating to the role of policy is explored, and national, state, and local policies that inform and influence early years teachers' literacy assessment practices are discussed. A summary of other key research relating to assessment and the early years and how it relates to my research is provided. The chapter concludes with an explanation of Basil Bernstein's (1990, 1996, 2000) pedagogic device and how it was used as a theoretical framework for my research.

Chapter 3. The methodology chapter outlines the pragmatic paradigm that underpins this predominantly qualitative mixed-methods research and justifies the use of a case study to answer the research questions. The two-phase sequential explanatory design is explained, and the methods used in Phases 1 and 2 of the data collection are described and justified. The approaches to managing the data from both phases are discussed, including the process of coding and developing themes. The quality of the research is justified using Zitomer and Goodwin's (2014) quality criteria. Ethical considerations and limitations are also discussed.

Chapter 4. Questionnaire results, analysis, and discussion from the Phase 1 data collection are presented. The core themes that emerged are presented and discussed.

Chapter 5. Interview results, analysis, and discussion of school-level issues from the data collected from Phase 2 of the research are presented. This chapter provides a rich written description of the themes that emerged from an analysis of the Phase 2 interviews.

Chapter 6. Interview results, analysis, and discussion of the sociocultural landscape and how this impacts literacy assessment is provided.

Chapter 7. The conclusion presents the key findings that emerged from Phases 1 and 2 of the data analyses, and key recommendations are outlined based on these findings. The chapter discusses the contribution the research makes and offers suggestions for future research.

1.7 Summary

My research addressed issues central to teachers' work today, including professionalism, teacher agency, and empowerment. While the research investigated one context, early years teachers in Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese, and cannot be generalised to other contexts, the research set out to investigate what happens when schools are trusted to make localised decisions. The Catholic system in Melbourne had not engaged in any research to investigate the impact of the assessment devolution and this research therefore fills an important gap. In addition to informing the Catholic system in Melbourne this research makes a valuable contribution in better understanding the work of contemporary teachers and what is possible when teachers are entrusted with important professional decision-making.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

> It is the professional judgement of teachers made in the context of their teaching that not only provides the best way to support student learning, but also the best evidence for system-wide accountability. (Reid, 2019, pp. 298–299)

The current acute focus on students' literacy attainment levels is driven by neoliberal ideology and a need for citizens who can contribute economically to society (Appel, 2019; Broom, 2012; Hursh, 2007; Reid, 2010a; Reid 2019). In neoliberal ideology, literacy is identified not only as a commodity to be valued, but also one that needs to be measured (Chen & Derewianka, 2009; Freebody, 2007; Reid, 2019). This has given rise to literacy being assessed at the international, national, and local school level and results reported to the wider community. The results are regularly reported by the media and often paint teachers in a negative light (Adoniou, 2018; Reid, 2019; Snyder, 2008), resulting in an assessment and accountability culture that teachers constantly need to navigate (Chen and Derewianka, 2009), and teachers in the early years are not immune.

This chapter explores relevant literature to expand on the key issues relating to early years teachers' assessment of literacy and thereby support my response to the research questions in this thesis.

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

- What are the current literacy assessment beliefs and practices of teachers in early years classrooms (F–2) in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese?

Research Question 2 (RQ2)

- In what ways do devolved responsibility and increased autonomy for literacy assessment allow early years teachers to interrogate, innovate on, resist, or accept both previously mandated and current literacy assessment priorities and practices?

I use neoliberalism as a key concept to frame the discussion of the literature in each of the three sections in this chapter. My research investigated the impact a shift from a prescriptive and mandated approach to literacy assessment to allowing schools much greater autonomy over the literacy assessment devices and practices they employ. However, as I noted in chapter 1, there exists a tension for the early years teachers in my study; their newfound autonomy has occurred in a period of education where all schools are more accountable than ever before due to a range of neoliberal policies including high-stakes testing, a curriculum based on standardised expected achievement, and school data which are published and available for public scrutiny.

First, in section 2.1, I address the pervasive influence of neoliberal ideology in the education sector. Neoliberalism has changed education with economic principles being applied to education. Neoliberal policies have resulted in a focus on test scores and valuing what can be measured. Additionally, in the current climate, neoliberal policies are shaping curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Sections 2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 are closely aligned with a discussion of teacher identity, teacher autonomy and teacher knowledge and beliefs. In Sections 2.1.4 and 2.1.5 I take a closer look at the Australian context with a discussion of the national mandated literacy assessment, NAPLAN, and explore the implications of NAPLAN and more formal assessment for the early years of schooling.

In section 2.1.1. I discuss the literature on teacher identity and autonomy and the neoliberal political forces that have been recognised as impacting teacher identity are addressed, noting that teacher identity is "embedded in culture, ideology and power relations"(Zembylas and Chubbuck, 2018, p.190). The literature describes autonomy as something teachers desire, but it is also acknowledged in the literature that in the current neoliberal climate, characterised by heightened levels of accountability,

autonomy is difficult for teachers to achieve and this is elaborated upon in section 2.1.2. Teacher autonomy over assessment has been called into question by many theorists who argue that teachers lack the requisite skills to engage in high quality assessment and I explore this in section 2.1.3 with a discussion of teachers' assessment knowledge and beliefs.

An increased focus on measuring students' achievement through a range of formalised assessment tools, as a result of neoliberal policies, was identified in chapter 1. One of these formal assessment tools is the mandated national literacy assessment tool, NAPLAN, which has been identified as having a major influence on the assessment practices of teachers. The pervasive impact of NAPLAN is explored in section 2.1.4. Section 2.1.5 draws section 2.1 together focusing on assessment in the early years and outlines concerns identified in literature about the influence of NAPLAN, and NAPLAN style assessments practices, in the early years. I discuss the literature that calls for more developmentally appropriate literacy assessment practices in the early years.

My research engaged with the policy enactment challenge in that it investigated how early years teachers interrogated, innovated on, resisted, or accepted both previously mandated and current literacy assessment priorities and practices. However, importantly, as posited by Moor and Clarke (2016), in the current neoliberal climate, it is very difficult for teachers to resist policy. They stated, "Resistance is seldom a simple or a comfortable business and . . . its pursuit is generally more easily talked about than put into practice" (p. 675). In section 2.2, the literature pertaining to assessment policy at a national, state, and system level is explored and issues relating to early years teachers interpreting and following policy are discussed.

The challenge of policy enactment by teachers is explored in my research using a Bernsteinian lens (1990, 1996, 2000). A discussion of Bernstein's pedagogic device and how the framework was used to support the research process is provided in 2.3, the final section of the chapter. Bernstein's pedagogic device is used to explore the power relations and tensions that operate through the device, at the macro level, through those that have power to influence teachers at the micro level, such as government and departments of education through a range of policies and mandates. Bernstein also

acknowledged that teachers can be influenced by agents with less official power, such as publishers, the media, teaching organisations and unions, which can also exert influence at the local micro level through a range of programs and advice. These agents have the potential to impact teacher professional identity and agency in terms of influencing assessment beliefs and practices. Bernstein described the power struggles that can occur in and between the fields of the pedagogic device and these are discussed using relevant literature in section 2.3.

2.1 Assessment in an Era of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is described as a political ideology that focuses on competition and free markets and is associated with globalisation. In recent decades, policies based on neoliberalism have become dominant in education (Broom, 2012). In a neoliberal model, free market economic principles are applied to education, which encourage parents' and students' choice of schools, assess students using standardised assessments that call mostly for factual recall, promote competition through the public rating and ranking of schools, and ensure compliance through such means as accountability contracts and standards (Broom, 2012, p. 17). Proponents of neoliberalism see it as

> necessary to increase educational efficiency within a world in which goods, services, and jobs easily cross borders. Increased efficiency can only be attained argue neo-liberals, if individuals are able to make choices within a market system in which schools compete. (Hursh, 2007, p. 498)

Neoliberal ideology is found in the education policies of many countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Supporters of neoliberalism believe that competition improves education and that quantifiable information from standardised tests needs to be made available to inform decision-making (Hursh, 2007; Reid, 2010a, 2019). This includes parents having access to schools' assessment data to assist in choosing a school for their child. However, the benefits of competition in education have been called into question, Reid (2010a) noted that it creates winners and losers, with schools always at the top and bottom. He stated, "Far from promoting transparency by encouraging openness, collaboration and rigour across an education

system, the high-stakes test approach closes this down, by fostering a competitive jockeying for position between individual schools" (p. 18).

Further, Matters (2005) contended that the demand to improve decision-making through data occurs because we are living in an age of accountability facilitated by new technology. Matters, in a critique of neoliberalism's role in education, also noted the government's take on monitoring teachers and schools to ensure students are educated to the highest possible standards to have the competitive edge when they enter the workforce; this requires schools to be accountable and to ensure standards are met. If individuals have this competitive edge, they are less likely to be out of work for extended periods of time, and the chances of them relying on the government for welfare is therefore decreased. Collecting data from schools is identified as essential as proof of learning and so, too, is making data available to parents to assist in school selection (Pratt, 2016). However, data are being "used by" and even "used on" teachers to facilitate changes in school outcomes (Pratt, 2016, p. 897). In these neoliberal times, data have become a valued commodity.

Additionally, the "system of testing and accountability permits the state to determine the goals and output without directly intervening in the process itself, thereby reducing resistance" (Hursh, 2006, pp. 28–29). Or as Ball (1990) stated, governments control from a distance; there is a perception of school autonomy, but the process of testing and reporting assessment data to the public means teachers really have no choice but to engage with data game.

In 2012, Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) moved from a long period of prescriptive, mandated literacy assessment (1998–2012) to allowing schools much greater autonomy in terms of literacy assessment in the early years. This research investigated how early years teachers responded to the system's devolution of literacy assessment. Interestingly, theorists have contended a devolved approach is difficult to achieve in an era characterised by a high level of accountability (Ball, 2003; Hursh, 2007; Reid, 2010a). Ball (2003), drawing on the work of Du Gay (1996), raised the question of whether there can ever be true control in education, describing a "controlled de-control" (Ball, 2003, p. 217) and further noting there is only an appearance of freedom in a devolved environment. Deregulation in an era characterised by neoliberal policy

would be better described as reregulation, a mere shifting of sands (Ball, 2003). Additionally, Farris-Berg (2014) reiterated Ball's (2003) and Du Guy's (1996) argument, stating, "Many teachers say they control what happens in their classroom within the boundaries of policies that have already been determined by other parties" (para. 9). The devolution of assessment responsibility by the Catholic system to teachers afforded greater opportunity for autonomy in the early years, but this autonomy occurred in an era characterised by high accountability due to a range of key neoliberal policies.

2.1.1 Teacher Identity and Teacher Autonomy

Teacher identity is a multifaceted construct (Schutz, Hong & Francis, 2018) and incorporates both personal and professional elements of teachers' lives. Additionally, according to Mockler (2011), teacher identity, "is formed and re-formed constantly over the course of a career and mediated by a complex interplay of personal, professional and political dimensions of teachers' lives" (p.518). It appears the term teacher identity and teacher identities are used interchangeably in the literature without a clear distinction. The plural form typically includes both personal and professional aspects of teachers' lives. I used teacher identity in my research as I specifically focussed on the professional dimension of teacher identity.

A strong professional teaching identity has the capacity to empower teachers in their practices rather than being merely a technician whose role it is to adhere to policies and procedures as set out by government and departments of education. Mockler (2011) cautions that in a neoliberal landscape there is a focus is on the role of the teacher and the technical aspects of that role whereas teachers with a strong professional identity are more likely to be reflective practitioners, who are, "politically aware teachers with a strong sense of their role and their purpose [and] are likely to prove more unwieldy than those fixated upon technical aspects of their role and 'teaching to the test"(Mockler, 2011, p.525).

Hargreaves (2010) suggested teacher identity and autonomy have suffered under a neoliberal agenda, and teachers' ability to make professional judgements has been called into question. Further, Broom (2012) noted that a teacher's role in an era of accountability becomes more like that of a technician whose role is to improve test

scores rather than to engage in creative and innovative teaching that promotes thinking. This aligns with Pratt's (2016) ideas on the uses of data; in the current climate, teachers are required to collect data as proof, not only of student learning but also to prove the worth of their teaching. Neoliberal education policies have resulted in a general distrust of teachers; according to Larson (2011) and Pitt and Phelan (2008), this distrust is of teachers' ability to manage effectively what was traditionally their role—curriculum, planning, and assessment.

Teacher Identity can also be found "in an organisation of knowledge and practice" (Ball, 2007, p. 149). If this is the case, it raises the question of how the teacher's identity is shaped in an era when teacher knowledge and practice are constantly called into question. Ball (2003) argued teachers are struggling with their identity in the current educational climate, noting,

> [Teachers] become ontologically insecure: unsure whether [they] are doing enough, doing the right thing, doing as much as others, or as well as others, constantly looking to improve, to be better, to be excellent. And yet it is not always very clear what is expected. (p. 220)

As a way of describing the pressure neoliberalism places on teachers, Ball (2003) developed a theory of performativity to capture the current acute focus on teacher performance, student performance, and school performance, which is mapped using data and measured by standards. Performativity is a term that has been appropriated by a range of theorists, including Brehony (2005), Moore and Clarke (2016), and Appel (2019). Performativity results in a focus on how things are perceived, with high scores from standardised tests perceived as equating to good teaching and good education (Ball, 2003; Butland, 2008). The function of high-stakes testing is that of accountability (Butland, 2008). Globally, these high-stakes tests serve the neoliberal purpose of education by aiming to shrink the allocation of public funds to education while maintaining a central control of curriculum and pedagogy (Butland, 2008, p. 5). The neoliberal focus on economy and education has resulted in an impoverished approach to education, according to Butland (2008):

> Debate over the philosophy of education and the nature and value of authentic curriculum as the means of engaging students has given way to the demands of centralised lock-step curriculum and accountability systems. The values of a rich, authentic student-centred curriculum, as well as the notion that education ought to be about the creation of a citizenry able to contribute to a more equal, just and a democratic society, have been discarded. (p. 5)

Traditionally, the early years have been positioned by theorists as child centred and focused on the child's developmental needs (Flottman, Stewart, & Tayler, 2011; Puckett & Black, 2008; Tayler & Page, 2016). However, with research findings showing that investment in early years results in future productivity gains (Tayler & Ishimine, 2013, p. 6), there is a growing interest by governments, both in Australia and internationally, to invest in the early years. In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG; 2009) declared that a focus on the early years is required by governments to ensure "all children have the best start to life to create a better future for themselves and society" (p. 4). Iorio and Tanabe (2015) described this linking of productivity from early childhood to employment as part of a readiness chain. Where workforce readiness was once linked to upper secondary and university to prepare individuals for the workforce, this has now been driven down the "chain" to kindergarten and the early years of schooling. Iorio and Tanabe (2015) proffered that this has resulted in a complete change in the purpose of early education:

> The clarity offered by seeing readiness as a complete chain is found in the disturbing recognition that the whole readiness project is based on the process of producing employees, as opposed to things like citizenship, democratic learning, and knowledge production. As a result, this process is tilted away from the more traditional aims of self actualization, appreciation, and happiness. It is in the ability to check off a box of measurable outcomes, assurance of accountability in education across the levels… (p. 1)

Even teachers in the early years, in a neoliberal era, are called upon to provide a future-focused education. Politicians call for teachers to ensure learners are flexible, creative, and lifelong learners who can meet the demands of an unknown future. Buchanan, Holmes, Preston, and Shaw (2012) suggested that in the current educational

climate, this creates a dilemma for teachers: on the one hand, they are called upon by politicians to implement an innovative and future-focused approach to learning and teaching, including implementing "new literacies" as a contemporary approach to literacy education, while on the other hand, students are assessed nationally using a system that assesses "basic literacy" skills. Similarly, P. Johnston and Costello (2005) stated that most standardised tests

> oversample narrow aspects of literacy, such as sound-symbol knowledge . . . and under-sample other aspects such as writing, any media beyond print and paper, and ways of framing texts and literacy, such as critical literacies necessary for managing the coercive pressures of literacy. (p. 257)

Buchanan et al. (2012) asserted that teachers are left with little choice but to focus on a narrow set of basic literacy skills in the classroom to prepare children for standardised testing. Neoliberal ideas and policies appear to be key drivers and impact directly on teachers' practice and sense of autonomy and this is discussed further in the following section.

2.1.2 Teacher Assessment Autonomy in an Era of Accountability

Butland (2008) called for Australian policymakers to learn from the mistakes of other countries and to support teachers to feel confident in contextualising student learning, providing a broad curriculum and ensuring assessment is linked with learning (p. 26). Moreover, Hargreaves (2010) called for teachers' professional judgement to be respected, like that of a doctor, noting that data matters but so, too, does teacher judgement (p. 58). In the current climate with its focus on standardised, quantitative data, the importance of teacher judgement is often missed. Reid (2019) stated that we need to change the current discourse, which lacks support for teacher judgement. He stated, "It is the professional judgement of teachers made in the context of their teaching that not only provides the best way to support student learning, but also the best evidence for system-wide accountability" (pp. 298–299).

Enabling teachers to use their professional judgement in the process of assessing students' literacy requires a level of autonomy. The importance of teacher autonomy is well documented in the literature (Butland, 2008; Caldwell, 2016; Hargreaves, 2010;

Phelan, 1996; Pitt & Phelan, 2008). If the aim is to create autonomous students, autonomous teachers are required (Larson, 2011; Pitt & Phelan 2008). Autonomy is defined by Pitt and Phelan (2008) as the ability to "think for oneself in uncertain or complex situations in which judgement is more important than routine . . . Teaching involves placing one's autonomy at the service of the best interests of children" (pp. 189–190). The belief that high-performing teachers are required to produce high-performing students (Appel, 2019) has resulted in key performativity measures (Ball, 2003) and teacher surveillance mechanisms, which include teacher standards, prescriptive curriculum, and standardised testing, all of which curtail teachers' autonomy. Strong and Yoshida (2014) described autonomy as the aspect teachers desire most in their teaching. However, autonomy is difficult to achieve in an era of high accountability. A large-scale quantitative study in the United Kingdom, in which 1,100 teachers completed an online questionnaire about their perceived autonomy, found that teachers had lower professional autonomy than other professions, with teachers reporting particularly low autonomy over assessment and data collection. The researchers reported that school policies were restraining teachers' assessment autonomy (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020).

How teachers are supported to manage newfound autonomy after a highly prescriptive period has been identified as important. G. Moss (2017) argued that the dismantling of the National Literacy Hour in the United Kingdom in 2010, a very similar approach as CLaSS, was problematic. She stated that teachers had a familiar way of working and assessing stripped from them, virtually overnight, with very little guidance provided to support them with the change:

> The department had stepped back from its role as the authoritative and reliable source of support for schools. Schools were on their own now, acting as purchasers in a market for system improvement resources, choosing their own path, and following their own ideas, making their own fixes, and thus, of course, free to make their own mistakes too. (G. Moss, 2017, p. 61)

G. Moss (2017) described teachers in the United Kingdom as operating in an era of high autonomy with high accountability, and the same could be said of the early years teachers in the Catholic system in the Melbourne archdiocese. Early years

teachers were given school-based literacy assessment autonomy in a climate characterised by high levels of accountability in relation to mandated government testing, reporting against mandated curriculum standards, and reporting of data to the wider community.

Performative measures impact teachers' autonomy in developing and carrying out meaningful assessment in their day-to-day teaching. Moreover, a focus on summative assessment, using mandated assessment, is causing an erosion of assessment for learning (AfL) in the classroom, according to Popham (2006), a staunch advocate of AfL. AfL occurs throughout the teaching and learning cycle and results in statistically significant gains in student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2005). Popham (2006) argued that in the current high-stakes testing climate, with its focus on accountability and scores, teachers find it difficult to maintain fidelity to AfL, abandoning it to focus on teaching to the test to enable improvement in scores (p. 2). He is not alone in this argument; Darling-Hammond and Adamson (2010) stated that high-stakes testing can limit teachers' instruction, resulting in teachers emulating the content and format of the test. They discussed the limitation of multiple-choice-style summative assessments and called for a much broader view of assessment. Similarly, Stiggins (2008) noted that although high-stakes testing serves accountability purposes, the obsession with this form of assessment has done education no favours in terms of narrowing the so-called gap it was designed to narrow and called for a refocus on assessment that matters—AfL—to truly narrow this gap. Adoniou (2018) also criticised the focus on assessment at the expense of teaching, calling for a renewed focus on teaching that she argues has been lacking in the past 10 years. She acknowledged a need for teachers to be accountable but not at the expense of teaching:

> Of course teachers should be accountable, they have a hugely important job—the education of Australia's future. However, it is unfair to be held accountable to a regime you have had little to no say in. And for the last decade all the talk has been about testing, and nobody has been talking about teaching. (para. 5)

As well as a focus on teacher accountability there has been questions raised about teachers' ability to assess students and this is discussed in the following section.

2.1.3 Assessment Knowledge and Beliefs

The importance of teachers' knowledge of assessment is well documented by theorists and researchers (DeLuca & Klinger, 2010; Mertler, 2004; Popham, 2009; Stiggins, 1999). However, again, there is a recognised tension between the knowledge that teachers produce from inside the classroom and the knowledge from researchers and policymakers, according to Meyers, Paul, Kirkland, and Dana (2008). In the Australian context, AITSL (2018) has set out professional standards for teachers to ensure high-quality learning and teaching for all students. There are seven standards that teachers perform at increasing levels of proficiency. Standard 5 directly relates to assessment and states that teachers need knowledge around assessment to ensure they can effectively assess student learning, provide feedback to students on their learning, and make consistent and comparable judgements. The continuum recognises that these skills develop over time as teachers progress from graduate teachers to lead teachers.

The terms "assessment-capable teachers", "assessment knowledge", and "assessment literacy" are used interchangeably throughout the literature, without great differentiation, to discuss the knowledge and dispositions educators possess in relation to assessment and how these are used in their practice (Mertler, 2004). Willis, Adie, and Klenowski (2013) acknowledged the lack of clarity in the field and providing the following definition for assessment literacy:

> Assessment literacy is a dynamic context dependent social practice that involves teachers articulating and negotiating classroom and cultural knowledges with one another and with learners, in the initiation, development and practice of assessment to achieve the learning goals of students. (p. 2)

Consistently, there is an expectation that teachers need to have an excellent knowledge of assessment practices and tools and how they can be used to improve student learning (Claveric, 2010). However, again, teachers' ability to assess effectively has often been called into question. Some lament the lack of teacher knowledge around assessment: "There is a wealth of research evidence that the everyday practice of

assessment in the classroom is beset with problems and shortcomings" (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 5). Likewise, Mertler (2006) posited that teachers lack the fundamentals of assessment, and this affects their ability to use assessment to improve learning and motivate students. This deficit view of teachers' ability to assess effectively is widely held by experts in the area (Masters, 2013a; Popham, 2009; Stiggins, 1991). Griffin (2014) went as far as saying that curriculum specialists do not have the requisite knowledge to be assessment experts. He noted the success of specialist programs facilitated by the ARC at the University of Melbourne to build the capacity of teachers' assessment knowledge, citing the demonstrated success in the improved levels of students across 400 schools (p. 1).

Research over a 30-year period has identified that teachers themselves have doubts about their knowledge in assessment and express their desire for further assistance in the area: "In short, across multiple studies conducted over decades, a significant proportion of teachers report uncertainty or a desire for improvement in their assessment practices" (Kim & Young, 2010, p. 6). A large-scale empirical research undertaken by Lysaght and O'Leary (2017) involved 594 primary school teachers from 42 schools in the Republic of Ireland who completed a self-assessment questionnaire to audit their own assessment capacity. The data revealed an urgent need to develop teachers' assessment literacy (p. 271). The researchers proposed that this capacity building should take place on site in schools rather than through large-scale external professional learning.

There are those that hold a more positive view of teachers' assessment knowledge (e.g., Goertz, Oláh, & Riggan, 2009; Howley, 2013; Leighton, Gokiert, Cor, & Heffernan, 2010), positing that teachers possess a sophisticated, grounded knowledge of assessment. This knowledge base consists of theoretical ideas about assessment as well as practical logistics around linking assessment to teaching and learning (Howley, 2013). This knowledge base should be taken seriously when researching and discussing assessment literacy (Howley, 2013).

Many studies have illustrated that teachers' knowledge of assessment can be built through working with an "expert" (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, Wiliam, 2003; Goe & Mardy, 2008), and some recognise that teachers can build their knowledge of

assessment though rigorous dialogue around evidence through professional learning team (PLT) meetings (Griffin, 2010, 2014; Meyers et al., 2009). Assessment literacy is built when teachers reflect on their practice (Howley, 2013). Teachers who possess assessment literacy do not blindly implement what they are "told" by experts; they adjust their assessment practices to suit the context (Howley, 2013). The system in which teachers work also plays a role in supporting teachers to build their assessment knowledge. Wylie and Lyon (2009) noted that teacher professional development is insufficient without considering the larger system in which teachers work. Administrators need to provide support for their teachers' growth within a larger systemic context. The current research specifically investigated if and how early years teachers adjusted their literacy assessment practices when given greater autonomy by CEM.

Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes (2018) conducted four qualitative research projects between 2008 and 2017 that focused on classroom assessment practices in the first year of schooling in the United Kingdom. The findings from their research indicated that a focus on assessment and quantifiable data had filtered down and was impacting negatively in the early years. They discussed the "datafication" of the early years, a term used to describe the dominant production and use of data with young children and the impact this has on both children and teachers. Their research also indicated that datafication resulted in a narrow approach to teaching and assessing literacy. Bousfield and Ragusa (2014) also discussed datafication as leading to an "adultification" of childhood, describing it in the Australian context as children being

> subjected to developmentally inappropriate expectations, pressure, stress and precocious knowledge in response to NAPLAN testing and reporting. Adultification, we argue, is a side-effect of individualisation, managerialism and neo-liberal government policy played out in Australian schools and exposing children to the harsh realities of political, economic and social life. (p. 170)

Since 2008 in Australia, students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 have undertaken the mandated NAPLAN testing which has resulted in a heightened focus on testing and data. NAPLAN has become a major issue for teachers, as highlighted by Bousfield and

Ragusa (2014) and Adoniou (2018), and this is discussed further in the following section.

2.1.4 Australian Context: NAPLAN

Research into high-stakes testing has revealed that Australian politicians could have learned many lessons from countries that were early adopters of neoliberal approaches to education such as national standardised testing and publishing data from these tests. As Australia embarked on its first round of national standardised tests, much had been written internationally about the negative impacts of standardised testing. A House of Commons (2007) report on the impact of testing in England revealed testing had resulted in narrowing the curriculum, teaching to the test mentality, neglecting lower achievers, and stress in primary school students. Hargreaves (2010) also noted the impact of high-stakes testing on teachers. He stated, "The increased top-down pressure and prescription have often depressed the status of teaching and made attraction and retention of high quality teachers (and leaders) even more difficult" (p. 56).

A major Australian research project in which 8,000 teachers were surveyed to investigate the impacts of NAPLAN across both primary and secondary school contexts found, "NAPLAN is not only limited in itself, but . . . it may be having a detrimental effect in areas such as curriculum breadth, pedagogy, staff morale, schools' capacity to attract and retain students and student well-being" (Polesel et al., 2012, p. 31). Additionally, Adoniou (2008) also noted that NAPLAN has resulted in a data frenzy in schools:

> More and more data collecting tools are passed on to schools to measure performance, with the hope more data will improve NAPLAN scores and help their state win the NAPLAN race. Data walls proliferate in staffrooms, and excel sheets swamp teachers' computers. (para. 4)

Similarly, in the United States in 2001, the No Child Left Behind policy was legislated. The motives for the policy appeared more than positive: to close the gap between high performers and low performers and to support those who traditionally struggled with education—that is, the poor and the marginalised. However, its implementation left a trail of devastation for schools, teachers, and students alike

(Butland, 2008; Schul, 2011). Punitive measures, such as schools closing because of underperforming in standardised testing and the publication of results, had far-reaching consequences. Education historian Diane Ravitch in an interview (see Hudson, 2012) described No Child Left Behind as a wreckage, leaving a trail of destruction in its path and turning teachers into "testing technicians" (para. 15).

Even with the negative backlash from standardised testing in both the United States and United Kingdom, Australia pursued its own model of standardised testing. Hargreaves (2010) critiqued the appropriateness of Australia looking for guidance in education from the United States and United Kingdom. Dinham (2015) also described Australia's borrowing of educational ideas from other countries as ill-advised, stating, "Because of Australia's close links with England and the USA and their influence it is not surprising that the myths and beliefs underpinning these developments have been accepted almost without evidence or questioning in Australia" (p. 12).

Countries often "policy borrow" from other countries; however, Lingard (2010) asserts policy should not be merely borrowed but innovated upon to suit the new context. He stated,

> To be effective, policy borrowing must be accompanied by policy learning, which takes account of research on the effects of the policy that will be borrowed in the source system, learning from that and then applying that knowledge to the borrowing system through careful consideration of national and local histories, cultures and so on. (p. 132)

Contrary to learning lessons from what has occurred internationally, the Australian Government launched NAPLAN in 2008. This was followed in 2010 by the launch of the My School website, which Reid (2010b) criticised for elevating the stakes of NAPLAN, stating that My School changed the focus of NAPLAN

> from being one piece of information which informed schools and education systems about one aspect of the outcomes of schooling, to being a high-stakes test purporting to measure the quality of a whole school and to compare it with other schools. (p. 16)

Concurring, Voight (2019) stated NAPLAN has failed because of misuse of the tool, specifically, publishing data on the My School website: “NAPLAN has pitted our schools against each other and distracted from a true educative pursuit” (para. 8).

In more recent times, there has been a groundswell of criticism against NAPLAN, which is currently seen in a “breakaway” review of NAPLAN conducted by state and territory governments, including Victoria, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, and Queensland, but it is not endorsed by the Federal Government. In an open-access article published by the University of Melbourne, Milligan (2019), director of the Assessment Research Centre (ARC) at the University of Melbourne, asserted reviews of NAPLAN miss the point and that not only has NAPLAN failed, it is also obsolete, and “substantial reform [is] now needed”. Further, Milligan stated that this includes a “root-and-branch reform of our assessment regime” (para. 6). The current Victorian Minister for Education (see Carey & Baker, 2019) also acknowledged issues with NAPLAN in its current form but still posited the need for some form of standardised test. He contended, however, that “NAPLAN has lost the support of much of the teaching workforce and that simply isn’t good enough” (para. 18).

In spite of the criticism NAPLAN has provoked, its status as a high-stakes assessment like its international counterparts has been questioned (Au, 2007; Dowling, 2008; McGaw, 2012a). The controversy around NAPLAN is unwarranted, according to Barry McGaw, the first chair of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), which manages NAPLAN. McGaw (2012b) stated that the primary purpose of NAPLAN “is to give parents information on how well their children are developing fundamental skills in literacy and numeracy from a broader perspective than individual teachers and schools have” (para. 4). The stress that NAPLAN supposedly causes children is a stress that teachers create, according to McGaw (2012b). He argues that the only high-stakes testing in Australia are the final Year 12 exams; NAPLAN in his opinion provides relevant information for all stakeholders. He also criticised schools that narrow the curriculum and spend time practising for NAPLAN testing, asserting this is totally unnecessary:

> The best way for schools to develop their students' literacy and numeracy skills is to give them a rich curriculum with reading and writing and the use of mathematics in a wide variety of learning areas. This will build the skills that students need for NAPLAN tests and, much more importantly, as the basis for further learning. (McGaw, 2012b, para. 24)

It is interesting to note, however, that in 2019, McGaw was one of three panel members of the "breakaway" group charged with reviewing NAPLAN by the Victorian, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, and Queensland governments. The panel's preliminary findings were reported in a media release that reported major issues with NAPLAN, including "the increased stakes of NAPLAN and related impacts, such as school comparisons, and the inability of NAPLAN to provide meaningful information about the level of achievement for both high and low performing students" (Minister for Education, 2019). Criticism of NAPLAN has also resulted in discussion around what constitutes sound assessment and a call for teachers to have greater skills and knowledge to enable them to engage in a more robust approach to assessment. Although NAPLAN is not undertaken by students in the early years, there is growing concern that early years are not immune to the pressure of NAPLAN testing, with teachers feeling the responsibility to prepare students for the test. It is also evident that a suite of resources is being marketed to both teachers and parents to assist with preparing students early for NAPLAN.

Education in a neoliberal era has become lucrative, resulting in the rise of "edu-business" with a range of private businesses selling an array of products to schools with the purpose of improving test scores. Hogan (2016), in discussing the U.S. context, stated the edu-business market is worth US$48 million a year. Further, Brown-Martin (2017) noted that teachers, even though not wanting to intentionally focus on quantifiable data and test scores, have been forced to take on this approach, which has enabled a market for the commercialisation of assessment. He stated,

> The measurement industry, or the assessment industry, is a multibillion dollar business, and it's run by large, multinational corporations. The result of having measurement as the goal, as the purpose of education, is that while most people wouldn't agree if you said, "the purpose of school is to get kids to pass tests", even most teachers wouldn't agree—but inevitably, that's what it's become. Because we collude, we collude around grades, we collude around tests. And we've got ourselves addicted to a set of state exams, which are provided by commercial organisations. (para. 5)

According to Giles (2016), the edu-business market in Australia is worth AU$3.8 billion, with the national government forming an alliance with edu-business. As a result, teachers, parents, and students have been excluded from decision-making. Giles (2016) noted that this is evident in the government excluding teacher unions from representing teachers' voices in key government-endorsed organisations, including ACARA and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL).

Hogan (2016) identified NAPLAN as indicative of the pervasive influence of edu-business on teachers. She discussed issues in relation to Pearson (a publishing firm) being contracted to deliver NAPLAN for the states and territories—including the Victorian State Government, which engaged Pearson to mark NAPLAN tests, including training and paying NAPLAN markers, and is said to be worth AU$41.6 million. However, Pearson also engage in marketing and selling a range of resources to both schools and parents aimed at improving NAPLAN data that, Hogan (2016) argued, is clearly a conflict of interest.

The My School website that reports NAPLAN data also provides an example of edu-business profiting from the testing culture. Hogan (2016) listed those companies engaged by ACARA as part of the administration of the My School website and noted the amounts of money these companies receive from these contracts:

> For example, in 2012, ACARA spent over $4 million contracting ACER, Pearson, Educational Measurement Solutions and Educational Assessment Australia for a range of services. Some of these services included item development ($2,075,717), trialling of the test items ($681,253), equating of the test items ($527,848) and analysis and reporting of the results ($610,247). (para. 6)

A range of other private companies also profit from NAPLAN, offering a variety of professional development programs for teachers, specifically marketed as supporting teachers to improve NAPLAN data. Other companies sell software to manage the data from NAPLAN and other assessments. NAPLAN has proved to be a most lucrative business for many, identified as impacting teachers' identity and autonomy. Early years teachers are responsible for literacy learning and teaching in the years prior to NAPLAN, but as discussed, theorists acknowledge that early years teachers are feeling the pressure to prepare children for standardised testing like NAPLAN and this has resulted in a rise in the use of commercialised assessments in the early years as well as a change in the focus on teaching and assessment in the early years, this is discussed in the following section.

2.1.5 Assessment in the Early Years

It is not only commercialisation in relation to NAPLAN that is a concern in the early years. The narrow focus on the "basics" in terms of literacy teaching has also resulted in early years teachers using a range of commercialised materials that focus on basic literacy skills. Campbell, Torr, and Cologon (2014) researched the use of commercially produced phonics programs in the early years that focus on a synthetic approach to phonics. They proffered that the use of these types of commercialised teaching and assessment materials in the early years have increased due to teachers having to report against curriculum standards, and teachers use these commercially based materials to prepare children for assessments that will measure their performance in terms of basic literacy skills. The teachers in their research identified using commercially based phonics programs as they did not feel they had the requisite knowledge to teach synthetic phonics. Campbell et al. (2014) also discussed the conflict of interest with the manufacturers of commercial phonics programs, which offer teachers professional learning while promoting their products as the answer to the teaching of reading.

Hardy (2018) gathered qualitative data over a 2-year period through engaging with Year 3 teachers in literacy planning meetings at a Queensland school and found a "strong focus upon various numeric measures of student achievement" (p. 8). He identified teachers having to use a range of commercially produced packages to

measure literacy numerically. He noted the teachers recognised the limitations of these tools, but they were mandated by the school to use them. Hardy proffered the data from these assessments were being used to also measure teacher quality and concluded that using standardised tools for reading have "perverse effects, appearing to actually decrease teachers' data literacy" (p. 18).

The question needs to be asked whether it is possible for early years teachers in the Melbourne archdiocese to embrace the literacy assessment autonomy afforded them by the system devolution when NAPLAN is looming large and there is a preponderance of commercially produced assessment tools. Research is needed to explore how teachers navigate this complex terrain.

Theorists support teachers having the requisite knowledge to enable them to engage in robust forms of literacy teaching and assessment rather than relying on teaching basic literacy skills and NAPLAN-style assessment.

Although the first NAPLAN assessment occurs when students are in Year 3, this formal style of standardised assessment is also impacting early years teachers (DeLuca & Hughes, 2014; Hesterman, 2018; Jay, Knaus, & Hesterman, 2016; Laevers, 2007). NAPLAN, according to Tayler and Ishimine (2013), has changed the way early years teachers assess and has resulted in teachers focusing on similar styles of assessment to that of NAPLAN in their own assessment practices. This arguably reductive style of assessment can make early years teachers feel as though "their professional decision making has been compromised" (Ewing, Callow, & Rushton, 2016, p. 201). Recently, Roberts, Barblett, and Robinson (2019) reported on their research into the impact of NAPLAN in the early years. They interviewed 38 early years teachers in 10 independent schools in Western Australia to explore early years teachers' perspectives on NAPLAN. The findings from this research revealed NAPLAN was impacting negatively upon the teachers well-being, and teachers identified that it resulted in a narrowed approach to the curriculum. The researchers called for further research to be conducted into the effects of standardised testing in the early years of schooling. The tension explored in my doctoral research was how early teachers navigated the autonomy for literacy assessment given to them by the Catholic system they worked within while enduring the wider, ever-present accountability agenda.

A significant body of research demonstrates the long-term influence of education in the early years (DeLuca & Hughes, 2014; Ewing et al., 2016; Tayler & Page, 2016). In Australia, the early years is defined as the period from birth to 8 years and is recognised as crucial, as described in key Victorian Department of Education policy:

> The early childhood period of children's lives has a profound impact on their learning and development for the long term. From birth to eight years, children's developing brains undergo rapid change. This is when children have the greatest opportunities to develop neural pathways for learning and are also most vulnerable to negative experiences. (Department of Education and Training [DET] and Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [VCAA], 2011, p. 7)

Concern has been raised over some of the narrow literacy assessment practices that are starting to creep into the early years—for example, children being "regularly tested on 'sight' words learned by rote, reading, knowledge of sound patterns of spoken Standard Australian English (SAE) and written symbols of the English writing system" (Alliance for High Quality Education [AHQE], 2014, p. 3). This concern is in relation to not only the narrow set of skills being taught and assessed, but also how the data are being used to label students and offer an even narrower form of intervention. The AHQE (2014) noted,

> As a consequence young children who are just beginning to become literacy and numeracy learners can now be labelled as failing to meet set targets, often mislabelled too soon and are subjected to a narrowing of the curriculum in order to "catch them up". (p. 3)

There is also concern about this in terms of a child's self-efficacy when children are labelled too early and the effect this has on future learning (King & Janson, 2009).

Policy on learning and teaching in the early years clearly acknowledges the importance of a robust curriculum. In 2008, each state government, through the *Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008), committed to supporting the strengthening of early childhood education by providing each child with

the opportunity for the best start in life. Subsequently, the Victorian government developed the Victorian Early Years: Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF), which was designed to support early years educators to implement a robust developmental curriculum (DET and VCAA, 2009). The VEYLDF states educators are required to use assessment to

> discover what children know and understand, based on what they make, write, draw, say and do. Early childhood professionals assess the progress of children's learning and development, what children are ready to learn and how they can be supported. (p. 15)

A developmental view of assessment is recommended by many theorists (Masters, 2013b; Griffin, 2014), and early years researchers believe assessment should not compare children to the group average but should focus on each child's individual developmental trajectory (Flottman et al., 2011; Puckett & Black, 2008).

Although the VEYLDF clearly indicates best practice for education in the early years, there is tension between policy and what is enacted in the classroom (AHQE, 2014). The pressure on teachers to prepare students for the Year 3 NAPLAN causes them to focus on the narrow set of skills to be assessed, resulting in a narrowing of the curriculum (AHQE, 2014; DeLuca & Hughes, 2014; Hesterman, 2018). The narrow set of literacy skills that teachers in the early years are often required to assess, in increasingly formal ways, has caused an ideological tension for them, according to Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes (2018). They noted that teachers in the early years prefer assessment that is less formal and based more on teacher judgement. The expectation that early years teachers engage in more formal standardised styles of assessment contradicts many early years teachers' beliefs.

The tension for early years teachers is exacerbated by the mixed policy messages from key policy, which is meant to inform practice. The term "early years" and "early childhood" are often used interchangeably in many key Australian policy documents. Dobozy (2013), in a critique of early childhood policy, found several flaws in Australian policy that cause confusion for teachers working in the early childhood space. She stated that this has arisen due to both a frequent changing of ministerial portfolios in

terms of those in government who have responsibility for early childhood and mixed messages in key policy documents, which on the one hand state early childhood is the period from birth to 8 years and on the other focus on what happens before children enter school, thereby ignoring the period from 5 to 8 years.

Krieg and Whitehead (2014) concurred, noting that the divide in early years is a key issue in countries like Australia where there is more often a physical divide between preschool (0–4 years) and compulsory school (5–8 years), with most preschool sites in Australia located separately to schools. They stated that this was not an issue in a country like Finland where formal schooling commenced at 7 or 8 years. Furthermore, they argued that "in situations where the early years of compulsory school are included in a country's definitions of early childhood, they often occupy a tenuous place in research, policy and practice" (p. 319). They further noted that the divide between precompulsory and compulsory in the early years is evident in documents such as the VEYLDF, which has broad objectives and is designed to guide the practices of early childhood educators including those in the early years (5–8 years), compared with content from the Australian Curriculum (AC) that has very specific achievement standards for each year level of compulsory schooling, which teachers are required to report against.

Krieg and Whitehead (2014) described the early childhood space as fragmented and confusing and called for a greater focus on the early years period (5–8 years) to ensure continuity in practice and philosophy, including specialist training for teachers working with this age group to support them in navigating this important stage. Moss (2012) also identified the fragmentation between early childhood education (ECE) and compulsory school education (CSE); writing extensively on the topic, he stated that currently, CSE is increasingly limited by prescriptive outcomes and technical practices, and this is neither child centred nor pedagogically rich (p. 195). He called for a reconceptualisation of ECE and CSE, a meeting place where the child's developmental needs from birth to 8 years and learning are central.

Hesterman (2018) investigated the tension for early years teachers trying to implement the Western Australian Early Years Learning Development Framework while simultaneously engaging in formal standardised assessment in the first year of school.

The research project gathered data from 365 teachers across state, Catholic, and private schools on their perceptions of the state mandated on-entry standardised school literacy assessments. The data were gathered through an online questionnaire consisting of Likert items and short answer responses. Teachers saw the on-entry assessments as tests in which "student, teacher and school were judged for system accountability purposes" (p. 24). The Western Australian government tracks the on-entry assessment data and links the data to the students' Year 3 NAPLAN data. Hesterman proffered that this has had a significant impact on teaching in the early years. She noted a privileging of a basic skills approach to literacy teaching, including synthetic phonics, and called for a critical debate on standardised testing in the early years, including an expansion of "the definition of literacy to include the diverse 'mulitliteracies' that children bring to school" (p. 23). She urged governments to ensure policies "safeguard the child's right to be a unique individual—who is too young to fail" (p. 24).

Early years teachers in the first 3 years of schooling in Victoria occupy a conflicted space, which on the one hand calls for teachers to acknowledge the developmental needs of students from birth to 8 years, and on the other hand calls for a focus on 5 to 12 years and a requirement for teachers to assess and report against mandated curriculum standards. The first 3 years of school could be described as a "boundary zone", occupying two spaces, the early years and the primary years, as depicted in Figure 2.1.

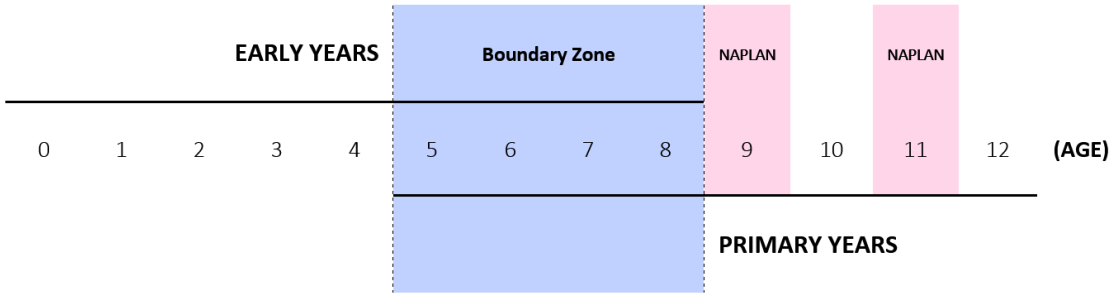


Figure 2.1. Boundary zone.

One of the questions this research set out to answer was how early years teachers interrogated, innovated on, resisted, or accepted both previously mandated and

current literacy assessment priorities and practices. As noted in this section, early years teachers are required to draw on several key, and sometimes conflicting, policy edicts to support them with their teaching and assessment practices. To follow is a brief outline of the assessment messages from key national, state, and system policies.

2.2 Policy

Policy is a contested space, according to Rizvi and Lingard (2010) who have written extensively on policy in education. Drawing on a range of other key seminal policy theorists, including Ball (2006) and Ozga (2000, cited in Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), Rizvi and Lingard (2010) noted how definitions of policy have changed over time. Some key points they highlight in their 2010 meta-analysis of policy research include the following:

- Policy is not just a written text; it includes processes and incorporates both what was intended in the policy and what is enacted.
- There can be a "policy gap" where policy is not enacted the way it was intended.
- Policy describes a desired change and can appear quite simple compared to what is required to implement or enact the policy.
- The process of interpreting and enacting policy is crucial in understanding how policy brings about change.

Ozga (2000, cited in Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) stated that teachers could be seen as policymakers; however, more recently, Ellison, Anderson, Aronson, and Clausen (2018) have contested this idea. In discussing policy, Ellison et al. identified that in a climate of accountability, teachers are situated as "de-professionalised actors lacking expert knowledge" (p. 157) and therefore need explicit policy to inform their practice. Further, they identified a range of "policy actors" who influence education policy, including from outside education, contending there is a policy hierarchy:

> An education policy field can be conceptualised as a structured space of elite network-actors from government, business, entrepreneurial philanthropy, think tank and policy institutes inhabiting a position of relative advantage in relation to non-elite policy actors, such as families, students and teachers, who perform and negotiate policy discourses in the struggle over the production and actualisation of education policy. (Ellison et al., 2018, p. 158)

Not only is policy a contested field but so, too, is literacy, and this influences both literacy policy formation and enactment (Harris, McKenzie, Chen, Kervin, & Fitzsimmons, 2007; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). According to Rizvi and Lingard (2010), policy is often conceived to address a perceived problem, but they cautioned that sometimes, this perceived problem is not reflected the same way in theory or research. They provided an example of literacy policy that has been produced in response to a perceived issue with declining literacy levels, which has resulted in some literacy policy being focused on a "back-to-basics" approach. Conversely, they noted, policy has been developed by those who have a differing philosophy to addressing a perceived literacy crisis with a focus on "multiliteracies". They contended, "It is not hard to see how the competing policy proposals are grounded in differing representations of the context, historical narratives of what has worked or has not, and the contemporary problems that need to be solved through policy" (p. 7). Harris et al. (2007) further argued that in an era where there is greater government focus on teachers' professional knowledge, "It is not surprising that there appears to be little alignment between most research being conducted in Australia, the policies being proposed by the government, and what happens in the classroom" (p. 3). Likewise, Adoniou (2018) is also critical of the current policy landscape. She argues that "the voices of teachers are curiously absent as informants in educational policy and practice" (para. 25).

The policy field is multilayered, with many players vying to have their voices heard that could lead to teachers feeling unsure about which policy to follow. The following sections outline current assessment policy at the national, state, and system level.

2.2.1 Assessment Policy

Two key forms of assessment policy have been identified as influencing the work of teachers (A. Braun & Maguire, 2018; Cumming, Van Der Kleij, & Adie, 2019):

"imperative" and "exhortative". Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2011) described imperative policy as creating passive teachers who enact external assessment directives; the second policy, exhortative, relies on teacher judgement. More broadly, these two can be thought of as assessment for accountability (imperative) and AfL (exhortative). Assessment for accountability includes policy that promotes and endorses external assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and NAPLAN, and these types of assessment policies are said to be "steering educational systems in particular directions with great effects on schools and on teacher practices, on curricula, as well as upon student learning and experiences of school" (Lingard, Martino, & Rezai-Rashti, 2013, p. 540).

AfL policy has gained momentum since Black and Wiliam's (1998) seminal work identified it as being critical in improving student learning. Additionally, Cumming and colleagues (2019) noted that there are both advocates for and critics of imperative and exhortative forms of assessment. What is agreed is that "assessment plays an important part in learning, and through policy, directs teachers, students and the community regarding what is valued in learning and what should be the focus of classroom activity" (p. 842). The autonomy afforded teachers through the devolution of responsibility to schools in this research came about through a system-wide policy change; however, teachers are also required to follow a range of other assessment government policies, and these are discussed next.

2.2.2 Assessment Policy Alignment: National and State

Over the past 10 years, several key policies have emerged that have influenced teachers' assessment practices. MCEETYA's (2008) Melbourne Declaration replaced the Hobart and Adelaide declarations. The declaration outlines the agreed national purposes and role of schooling to deliver high-quality education regardless of cultural, linguistic, and economic background (Carter, 2018). The Melbourne Declaration identified assessment as a priority to ensure a world-class education and outlined the three forms of assessment as

- assessment for learning—enabling teachers to use information about student progress to inform their teaching

- assessment as learning—enabling students to reflect on and monitor their own progress to inform their future learning goals

- assessment of learning—assisting teachers to use evidence of student learning to assess student achievement against goals and standards. (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 14)

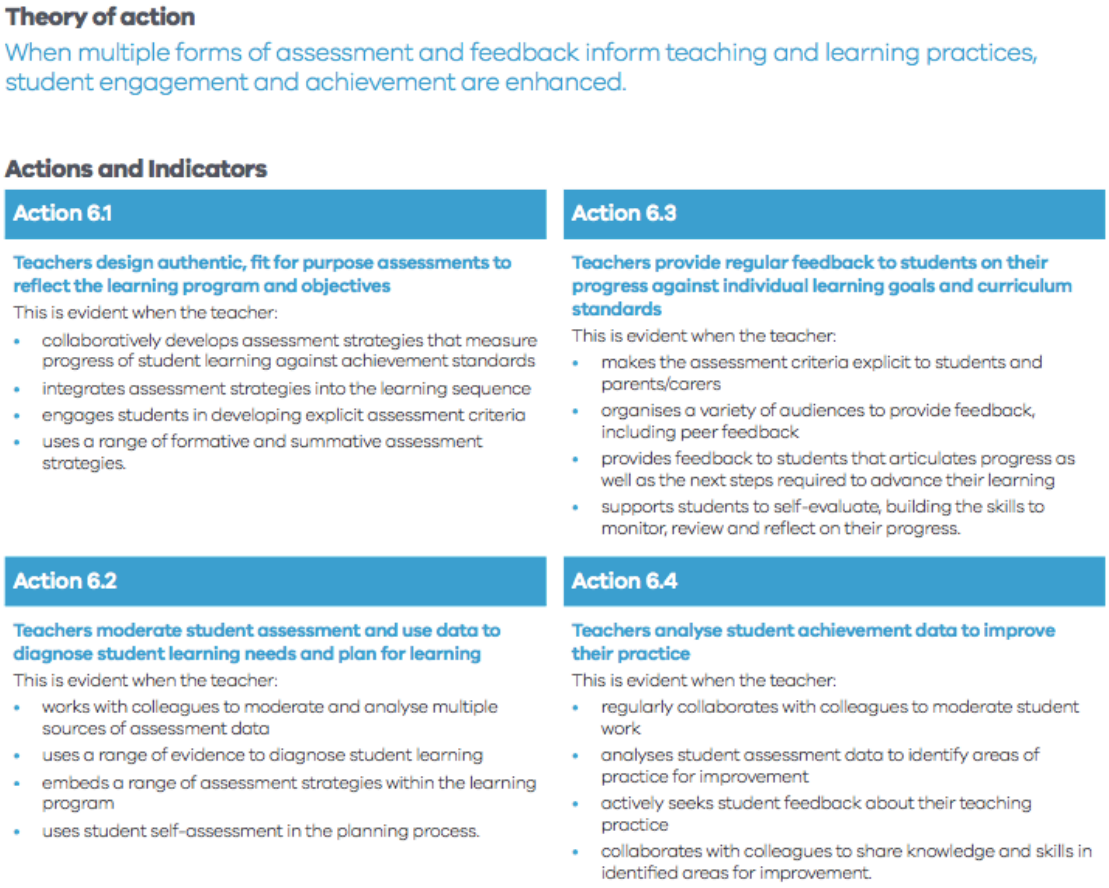
The declaration, according to Cumming and colleagues (2019), establishes Australian assessment policy as incorporating both accountability assessment (imperative) and AfL (exhortative). They stated AfL is summative in nature and incorporates both national and international testing.

Another key policy development as a result of the Melbourne Declaration is the Australian *National Professional Standards for Teaching* (AITSL, n.d.). AITSL was established to develop and oversee the national standards that

> are a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality. They define the work of teachers and make explicit the elements of high-quality, effective teaching in 21st century schools that will improve educational outcomes for students. The Standards do this by providing a framework which makes clear the knowledge, practice and professional engagement required across teachers' careers. (AITSL, n.d., p. 3)

AITSL Standard 5 specifically focuses on assessment and states that teachers should "assess, provide feedback and report on student learning" (AITSL, n.d., p. 8). Standard 5 requires teachers to be able to use data from their own and external student assessments "for evaluating learning and teaching, identifying interventions and modifying teaching practice" (p. 17), as well as to implement formative assessment practices in their classrooms. This reflects the two policy directions: imperative and exhortative (Cumming et al., 2019). The standards have drawn criticism as they are said to reduce the professional autonomy of teachers and show a lack of trust and respect for teachers (J. L. Johnston, 2015, p. 13) and, as previously discussed, are described by Ball (2003) as a performativity mechanism.

At the state level, The Victorian DET sets out nine practice principles designed for teachers to engage in a close analysis of their own teaching practice (DET, 2018), similar to the national teaching standards. Practice Principle 6 states teachers should engage in rigorous assessment practices and feedback to inform teaching and learning (DET, 2018). Each practice principle is accompanied by action statements and examples of evidence to show how the principle can be achieved, illustrated in Figure 2.2.



Theory of action

When multiple forms of assessment and feedback inform teaching and learning practices, student engagement and achievement are enhanced.

Actions and Indicators

Action 6.1

Teachers design authentic, fit for purpose assessments to reflect the learning program and objectives

This is evident when the teacher:

- collaboratively develops assessment strategies that measure progress of student learning against achievement standards
- integrates assessment strategies into the learning sequence
- engages students in developing explicit assessment criteria
- uses a range of formative and summative assessment strategies.

Action 6.3

Teachers provide regular feedback to students on their progress against individual learning goals and curriculum standards

This is evident when the teacher:

- makes the assessment criteria explicit to students and parents/carers
- organises a variety of audiences to provide feedback, including peer feedback
- provides feedback to students that articulates progress as well as the next steps required to advance their learning
- supports students to self-evaluate, building the skills to monitor, review and reflect on their progress.

Action 6.2

Teachers moderate student assessment and use data to diagnose student learning needs and plan for learning

This is evident when the teacher:

- works with colleagues to moderate and analyse multiple sources of assessment data
- uses a range of evidence to diagnose student learning
- embeds a range of assessment strategies within the learning program
- uses student self-assessment in the planning process.

Action 6.4

Teachers analyse student achievement data to improve their practice

This is evident when the teacher:

- regularly collaborates with colleagues to moderate student work
- analyses student assessment data to identify areas of practice for improvement
- actively seeks student feedback about their teaching practice
- collaborates with colleagues to share knowledge and skills in identified areas for improvement.

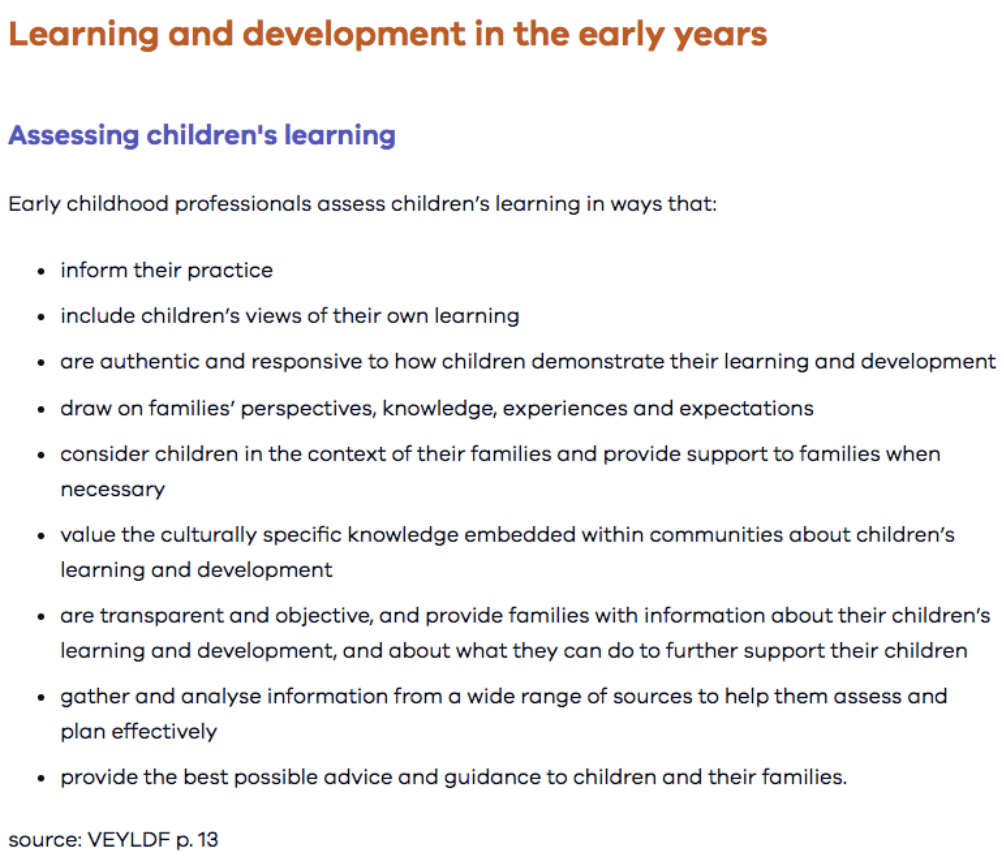
Figure 2.2. Practice Principle 6: "Teachers should engage in rigorous assessment practices and feedback to inform teaching and learning" (DET, 2018, p. 24).

Note. From *Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning* by DET Victoria, 2018, East Melbourne. Copyright 2018 by DET Victoria. Reprinted with permission.

Further, the DET (2018) advises early years teachers' need to refer to the VEYLDF:

> Early years teachers will also draw on the VEYLDF Practice Principles for Children's Learning and Development which provide an evidenced based understanding of the science of early learning and development to guide teachers to know what children up to eight years of age need to thrive and the pedagogy that best supports this. (p. 8)

Figure 2.3 shows assessment information from the DET website for early years teachers. The focus on assessment in the VEYLDF document could be described as more holistic and child focused. It does highlight, however, the issues of fragmentation that Dobozy (2013) described. The title is "Learning and Development in the Early Years", but the term "early childhood professionals" is also used. Early years teachers are directed to use the VEYLDF, but no mention is made of using the Victorian Curriculum, which teachers are mandated to report against. A. Braun and Maguire (2018) highlighted these issues, stating, "Teachers have had to negotiate contradictory policy messages, working to interpret and translate policies that stress well-being while also enacting burgeoning sets of tests and assessment tasks" (p. 2). My research explored this tension of how early years teachers navigated the often-competing and complex policy messages.



Learning and development in the early years

Assessing children's learning

Early childhood professionals assess children's learning in ways that:

- inform their practice
- include children's views of their own learning
- are authentic and responsive to how children demonstrate their learning and development
- draw on families' perspectives, knowledge, experiences and expectations
- consider children in the context of their families and provide support to families when necessary
- value the culturally specific knowledge embedded within communities about children's learning and development
- are transparent and objective, and provide families with information about their children's learning and development, and about what they can do to further support their children
- gather and analyse information from a wide range of sources to help them assess and plan effectively
- provide the best possible advice and guidance to children and their families.

source: VEYLDF p. 13

Figure 2.3. Assessing in the early years DET (n.d.).

Note. From "Assessment in Practice" (para. 12). Retrieved from https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/Pages/insight-practice.aspx. Copyright by DET Victoria. Reprinted with permission.

2.2.3 Assessment Policy: Catholic System

CEM has produced its own assessment policy. The policy documents draw on the definition of assessment from the DET but provide further information that reflects a Catholic ethos. The policy states,

> When the learning community is open to encounter, and the importance of relationships is valued, assessment becomes more than just results. Learning communities understand and value the narrative of their students, their context, their world and their families in order to see their students fully flourish. (CEM, 2016, p. 3)

This statement clearly positions assessment as "more than just results" and requires teachers to know "the narrative of their students". In addition to the general

information on assessment produced by CEM, teachers have password-protected access to the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) website. This site shows the policy requirements for administering the early years mandated literacy assessment and provides online resources for schools to assist them with transitioning from the mandated and prescriptive assessment period (1998–2012). This online resource includes professional readings and a PowerPoint presentation for literacy leaders to use to facilitate on-site professional learning for their early years teachers to support them with making decisions about literacy assessment in the early years.

Gerrard and Farrell (2014) stated that in the current climate with its focus on neoliberal policy, curriculum mandates, and standardisation, policy acts in a way to adjust teachers' professional practices. They stated, "Policy . . . remake[s], understandings and practices of teachers' professional knowledge, authority and discretion in relation to the curriculum" (p. 635), and it could therefore be argued that policy remakes teachers' assessment practices.

Multiple policies operate at the national, state, and system levels and reveal the complex terrain early years teachers need to navigate in terms of assessment policy. Although there are several areas of alignment, there are also points of tension, particularly in terms of which policy applies to early years teachers. Grieshaber and Graham (2017) reiterated,

> Policy enactment for qualified [early years] teachers has become increasingly difficult in recent years due to the proliferation of education policies, the rapidity of changes to curriculum, pedagogy and legislative requirements, as well as the development of more exacting accountability frameworks. (pp. 91–92)

The challenge of policy enactment by teachers is explored in my research using a Bernsteinian lens (1990, 1996, 2000). The following section describes how Bernstein's (1990, 1996, 2000) pedagogic device was used in this research to explore how the early years teachers in this research engaged in policy recontextualisation and reproduction.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This research explored the devolution of assessment responsibility by the Catholic system to teachers in the early years but acknowledges that this devolution occurred in an era characterised by high accountability due to a range of key neoliberal policies. G. Moss (2017) proffered that "tension points arise" in any attempt to enact policy because of the "gulf" between the original idea and its realisation in "real world settings". She further stated that this gulf is inevitable because "policy work is dispersed across time and space and involves very different actors" (p. 56). Bernstein's (1990, 1996, 2000) pedagogic device was used as a framework for my research to explore the gulf G. Moss (2017) described. The pedagogic device provided a mechanism for exploring the connections and tensions in the fields of research, policy, and practice across time and space. It was used both to design the exploration into early years teachers' responses to previous and current assessment policy and priorities and to critically analyse and theorise the findings from this investigation.

Bernstein (1996, 2000) described a series of rules or processes through which knowledge produced in a primary field, from outside of education, becomes the focus of research and is "pedagogised" (2000, p. 28) and reshaped into policy, curriculum, and classroom practice that can be evaluated and assessed. Bernstein gives the example of carpentry, which occurs outside of education but is pedagogised in the form of woodwork and is then taught and assessed in schools. To get to the point where it can be taught and assessed in schools, it has gone through a process of recontextualisation. Through the process of recontextualisation, woodwork has its own pedagogic discourse: "The recontextualising functions then become the means whereby a specific pedagogic discourse is created" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 33). Decisions are made at the education policy level to include woodwork as a school subject, and it forms part of education policy in terms of not only what will be taught, but also how it will be taught and assessed.

Bernstein (2000) argued that pedagogising occurs through a relay governed by three interrelated and hierarchical rules that occur across three fields that make up the pedagogic device: (1) the distributive rules as operating in the knowledge field through a process of creation, (2) the recontextualising rules as occurring in the

recontextualising field through a process of transmission, and (3) the evaluative rules as occurring in the reproduction field through a process of acquisition (p. 37).

The next section explains Bernstein's pedagogic device and reviews the literature relating to it. I present an understanding of Bernstein's concepts as they relate to my research. As this study was also concerned with the interface between research, policy, and practice, Bernstein's pedagogic device, as a multilayered concept that connects the three fields, was ideally suited to my study. As such, I applied it as a framework to

a. understand the impact of CEM's 2012 literacy assessment policy devolution;

b. explore early years teachers' literacy assessment practices in relation to this policy change; and

c. investigate how the teachers in this research interpreted, resisted, interrogated, innovated, or accepted both previous and current literacy assessment priorities and policies.

2.3.1 Origin and Description of the Pedagogic Device

Basil Bernstein (1924–2000) was a prominent and influential sociologist of education, his theories and models, particularly the pedagogic device, are widely used by researchers as robust tools for exploring the relationships between knowledge creation, program and policy development, and teachers' reproduction of these programs and policies at the classroom level. There are those that believe Bernstein's theories in relation to education provide a perfect lens through which to examine the "complexities and contradiction[s]" (Apple, 2016, p. 227) that exist within education. Further, his work has been identified as providing a means for analysing the message systems of education, particularly in relation to teaching and assessing English as a subject (Exley, 2015). Bernstein's (1971) earlier work described three interrelated message systems of schooling: (a) curriculum—that is, what is to be taught; (b) pedagogy—that is, how it gets taught; and (c) evaluation—that is, how the learning is assessed. In terms of the English curriculum, Vitale and Exley (2016) described how politics influence the three message systems, noting,

> Who decides what is taught in and through education, how learning is organised and the evaluative criteria for students and teachers is the site of intense struggle at the macro level of state policy formation, the mezzo level of syllabus committees and the micro level of face-to-face or virtual teaching and learning practice. (p. 7)

Bernstein's (1990, 1996) later work focused on pedagogic discourse, including areas such as policy, curriculum, and classroom talk. Harris, McKenzie, Chen, Kervin and Fitzsimmons (2008) discussed how this discourse translates to classroom practice. One aspect of Bernstein's later work explored the process of re-locating knowledge from research into the policy arena and then into classrooms and how the original knowledge is altered through this process. This process occurs through the pedagogic device through which Bernstein (1990, 1996, 2000) illustrated the collection of rules and criteria that are involved in pedagogising knowledge. Singh (2002), a scholar of Bernstein who has written extensively on his work, described Bernstein's theory that when knowledge is relocated from its original site and translated into classroom practice, it is said to be pedagogised.

Within the pedagogic device, Bernstein articulated three rules and three fields that relate to each other hierarchically. The three interrelated rules of the pedagogic device— distributive, recontextualising, and evaluative—encompass the principles of how educational knowledge is "formed, relayed and acquired" (Loughland & Sriprakash, 2016, p. 222). The three fields, on the other hand, are social spaces where key players compete for authority and include production, recontextualisation, and reproduction. Bernstein (2000) contended, "Essentially the pedagogic device is a symbolic ruler, ruling consciousness, in the sense of having power over it, and ruling it in the sense of measuring the legitimacy of the realisation of consciousness" (p. 114).

The links between the three interrelated rules and fields are now explained in turn.

2.3.2 Distributive Rules and the Production Field

Distributive rules determine the dissemination of various knowledge forms to different social groups (Bernstein, 2000, p. 114). These rules provide a connection

between the unthinkable and thinkable and are responsible for producing a discourse: "The distributive rules create a specialised field of the production of discourse, with specialised rules of access and specialised power controls" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 31). Knowledge is produced through research that usually takes place in higher education. Research in the field of literacy education is complex due to the many and diverse beliefs of language and literacy academics and researchers. Chen and Derewianka (2009) described how disciplines outside of education, such as psychology, sociology, linguistics, and literary studies, contribute to the knowledge base of language and literacy education research, contending that these disciplines often have vastly differing views regarding language and literacy education and research. They posited that psychology treats reading as a set of autonomous cognitive skills, whereas in the field of sociology, literacy is a social practice that is context dependent. Similarly, research around assessment and measuring progress is also diverse, with neoliberal ideas informing assessment policy and practice in education. Once knowledge is produced, it can be made available widely through a process of recontextualisation.

2.3.3 Recontextualising Rules and the Recontextualising Field and Subfields

Recontextualising rules regulate pedagogic discourse, and this occurs in the recontextualising field. Recontextualising rules provide a mechanism for de-locating knowledge from the primary research field and re-locating in the sphere of education where the unthinkable becomes thinkable (Bernstein, 2000, p. 29). In the recontextualisation field, knowledge produced through research is made accessible to teachers through a range of policies and programs, some of which are developed by governments or systems like Catholic Education, as well as by some by private enterprises. The recontextualising field is seen by Bernstein (2000) as paramount in providing "autonomy of education" (p. 33). This is because agents operating in this field transform research into programs and resources for teachers to use; it becomes pedagogised. These agents interpret the research and make choices; some research is selected or rejected based on the beliefs held by those doing the recontextualising. Sometimes, recontextualising takes the form of government mandates, such as curriculum, that teachers are required to implement, and sometimes it takes the form of programs and resources that teachers can choose to use. Bernstein identified two

subfields within the recontextualising field: the *official recontextualising field* (ORF) and the *pedagogic recontextualising field* (PRF). These are outlined below,

Official recontextualising field (ORF). The state and selected agencies of the state are responsible for transforming knowledge into policy, curriculum, and assessment to enable it to be reproduced by teachers in classrooms (Chen & Derewianka, 2009). As such, Bernstein (1996) labelled this the ORF. CEM is part of the ORF, as is the Victorian DET. These bodies undertake a form of official recontextualising of research undertaken by the academy. In practice, this could be seen in CEM's mandated and prescriptive approach to literacy teaching and assessment (1998–2012) and currently through the Australian Government's National Assessment Program (NAP), which is described as "the measure through which governments, education authorities, schools and the community can determine whether or not young Australians are meeting important educational outcomes'" (ACARA, n.d.-c, para. 2).

ACARA is the independent authority commissioned by the Australian Government responsible for the development and management of NAPLAN. Under ACARA and NAPLAN, teachers in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 are required to administer the literacy and numeracy assessments. School results can be freely accessed by the community via the My School website, which is also managed by ACARA.

Pedagogic recontextualising field (PRF). The other subfield of the recontextualising field is PRF. Here, research knowledge and policy is recontextualised for teachers through mechanisms with less official status or power than those operating in the ORF. For example, professional journals, think tanks such as the Centre for International Studies or the Grattan Institute, commercially produced publications and resources, teaching associations such as the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA), and independent professional learning providers, can be seen as forming part of the PRF. The ALEA, for example, facilitates professional learning for teachers on teaching and assessing literacy.

Conflict can occur within and across the recontextualising fields as "a range of ideological pedagogic positions . . . struggle for control" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 115). An example of such conflict is currently evident between the Australian Government's Department of Education, part of the ORF, and the ALEA, which plays a role in

pedagogising official policy for teachers, with their opposing views in relation to a formal phonics assessment proposal for children in Year 1 of school. ALEA is vocal in opposing the assessment and is seeking support for rejecting the assessment (Honan, Connor, & Snowball, 2017). However, also within with the pedagogising field exists another vocal group, many members of which were on the government's advisory panel making recommendations on the Year 1 phonics assessment. This group advocates for the phonics check and is active through the media and working with agents in the government to support the introduction of the assessment. Both groups have a pedagogising role in making literacy materials and ideas accessible to teachers. Both groups have opposing views and are vying for support for their ideologies and ultimately control over the PRF—a clear example of the struggle Bernstein described.

According to Chen and Derewianka (2009), the recontextualising of knowledge, in the official or pedagogic fields, is fraught with difficulties due to "policy formation [being] subject to the limitations of the policy-makers and to external pressures from politicians, the media and the community" (p. 230). In fact, in the current climate, a collusion between the government and media has resulted in a loss of confidence in literacy educators and a discourse of "literacy crisis" (p. 230). They stated, "In a mutually beneficial relationship, journalists and policy-makers joined forces to create a climate of failure in literacy" (pp. 231–232). This is currently seen within the Australian context, with the media reporting Australia's low levels of literacy attainment compared to other countries (Munro, 2016) and, in the same article Munro (2016) reporting the Minister for Education's push for the Year 1 phonics assessment.

The tensions arising in the official and pedagogic subfields of knowledge recontextualisation are particularly prevalent in the area of language and literacy teaching (Chen & Derewianka, 2009; Exley, 2015). This is due to the contested nature of language and literacy education and the vast and sometimes conflicting research emanating from the university and academic research constituting the production field. Understanding the ideologies that dominate the production of knowledge is vital as this affects the recontextualising fields and subfields as noted by Chen and Harris (2008). They stated that whoever is doing the recontextualising determines what is selected and whose interests are being served. In the current educational context with a focus

on neoliberal policy and what can be measured counts, there has been a "shift towards an assessment and accountability culture" (Rawolle & Lingard, 2008, p. 729), and this has become the dominant pedagogic discourse by those who have an official role in literacy and assessment policy development and those who make this policy readily available to teachers.

The shift towards an assessment and accountability culture is evident in the official focus on assessment in policy documents such as the AITSL standards and in the reporting of data through ACARA's My School website. According to Loughland and Sriprakash (2014), the ORF is dominated by neoliberal discourses illustrated with the My School initiative, which in turn has constrained teachers in terms of pedagogy. It has resulted in a narrowed teacher-centric approach with a focus on measurable literacy skills, which Chen and Derewianka (2009) stated limits

> teacher autonomy by prescribing a strongly framed pedagogy, which dictates sequencing, pacing and timing of literacy activities . . . And it controls these developments through mandatory, standardised testing in the name of transparency, choice and accountability. (p. 237)

Once knowledge has been recontextualised in both fields, it is made accessible to teachers via the evaluative rules in the reproduction field as described in the next section.

2.3.4 Evaluative Rules in the Reproduction Field

Evaluative rules control what happens at the classroom level in terms of pedagogic practice: "The evaluative rules act selectively on content, the forms of transmission and their distribution to different groups of pupils in different contexts" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 115). Many researchers discuss how teachers interpret and translate policies and programs from the recontextualising field into the reproductive field. Ball, Maguire, Braun, Hoskins, and Perryman (2012) described the process as a decoding of policy (interpretation) and a process of recoding for classroom practice. Bernstein referred to this process as reproduction. In the reproduction field, teachers interpret and reproduce the messages from the recontextualising field in their classrooms through their teaching and assessment practices. As noted, this can be

difficult when the policy space is “dense” and filled with competing messages and agendas. Harris and colleagues (2007) asserted that teachers do not merely reproduce policy; their interpretation and response to policy is influenced by other experiences in their lives, which they referred to as “texts-of-life”, which

> comprise an evolving archive of what individuals have read, viewed, heard and lived. In organisational settings, such as schools, individuals’ texts-of-life intersect and encounter other influences beyond their setting. Of interest in these intersections are who and what are brought together and in what kinds of relationships; and what is maintained, transformed, added and omitted in the passage across literacy research, policy and practice, and through what means. (p. 5)

The pedagogic device was selected as a framework for my research as it aligned closely to my focus on the connection between policy and practice as early years teachers responded to a policy change that afforded them greater assessment autonomy through the CEM policy change. However, this policy change also occurred in an era characterised by a range of other assessment accountability mechanisms and policies that impact the early years. How the pedagogic device relates to my research is represented visually in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Pedagogic Device Linked to the Research

Rules	Fields	What	Who	This Research
Distributive rules have control over what is considered acceptable knowledge.	Production	New knowledge created through research	Researchers	How neoliberal ideology impacts literacy and assessment policy is discussed in Chapter 2.
Recontextualising rules select discourses and appropriates them into pedagogic discourse.	Recontextualising Two subfields	1. Official: Policy formation (ORF)	Official: Government and bodies given a mandate by government	A brief overview of the key assessment policies at national, state, and system levels is given in Chapter 2. How teachers responded to these policy documents is discussed in the results, analysis, and discussion Chapters 4, 5, and 6.
		2. Pedagogic: Knowledge is made accessible to teachers (PRF)	Pedagogic: Curriculum writers, publishers, teaching organisations, media outlets, think tanks, teachers	How early years teachers use resources from the PRF in their literacy assessment practices is explored in the results, analysis, and discussion Chapters 4, 5, and 6.
Evaluative rules regulate practice at the classroom level.	Reproduction	Pedagogic practice Teaching and assessment	Teachers	The data gathered in the two phases of this study explore early years teachers' assessment practices, and this is discussed in the results, analysis, and discussion Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

2.3.5 Roles in the Pedagogic Device

Bernstein (2000) described the fields of the device as being firmly held by those who operate and control the fields, using a religious analogy to discuss the fields: "The 'prophets' are producers of knowledge, the 'priests' are the recontextualisers or reproducers and the 'laity' are the acquirers". He also declared that "one can only occupy one category at a time" (p. 37). However, contemporary researchers highlight that in the current climate, agents can operate within all three fields simultaneously, such as when teachers participate and engage in research, are involved in the development of policy and programs, or participate as active members of teaching organisations (Jones, 2017). Further, Harris et al. (2008) stated that recontextualisation can occur in all three fields, "such as when researchers review research studies in a new context of inquiry, or when schools recast national or systemic policy in view of their own particular contexts" (p. 58). In my research, I was interested in exploring the latter point—that is, how did early years teachers respond to systemic policy affording them greater autonomy in their own contexts?

Bernstein (2000) also cautioned there is often more at play when knowledge is pedagogised than merely reproducing this knowledge for students and teachers in schools. He argued there is a political element involved, whereby schools function as institutions to maintain and cement current class relations; those who have control over what is taught and assessed in schools and how it is taught and assessed have political authority and ultimately control over society (p. 114). He declared that the government is taking more control in its official role in education and is thereby attempting to weaken pedagogic discourse (p. 33). This is juxtaposed with the situation of devolution of authority that the CEM made possible and which my research explored: The devolution had the potential to disrupt central authority and control. In this study, this was important, as whoever has control over literacy assessment in the early years holds the power.

2.3.6 Situating the Pedagogic Device: Current Assessment Landscape

Early years teachers in Australia draw on a range of assessment and language and literacy policies that are influenced by a range of theories and perspectives, and these

are reproduced in their classroom literacy assessment practices. These policies, theories, and perspectives are many and varied and could cause a level of anxiety for teachers trying to discern which approaches to literacy teaching and assessment are best suited to their students and school setting.

Masters (2013a), a key assessment researcher, critiqued the demands the government places on teachers through official policies such as requiring teachers to assess and report against standards. He stated that in the current climate,

> The role of students is to learn what teachers teach, and the role of assessment is to establish how much of what they have been taught students have successfully learnt. Students who demonstrate most of the expectations for their year level are rewarded with high grades; students who demonstrate few of those expectations receive low grades and may be judged to have "failed". (Masters, 2013a, p. 2)

Those responsible for recontextualising draw on a range of perspectives in relation to the purposes of assessment, which are summarised by Churchill and colleagues (2011):

> Assessment can have multiple roles and this affects assessment design. It can be used primarily to provide learning feedback to individual students, to track a student's progress or to measure them against some external standard or population. It can be informal or formal and high stakes, designed solely for the benefit of the students or to meet accountability needs at a system level. (p. 390)

The complex and changing approach to assessment can be challenging for teachers to reproduce in their classrooms, as Masters (2014) noted: "Assessment concepts and terminology introduced in the past half-century sometimes now function as impediments to clear thinking and good practice. And worse, the field itself is in a mess" (p. 1). The various policies and approaches to assessment often compete against each other and provide an excellent example of the recontextualising field in action, whereby different stakeholders compete to have their ideologies included in policy and programs so that ultimately, they can be enacted by teachers in their practice.

2.4 Bernstein's Pedagogic Device and This Research

Bernstein's pedagogic device is used in this research to identify and explain how early years teachers responded to assessment policy and priorities from the recontextualising field and to explore teachers' interrogation, innovation, resistance, or acceptance of policy and how this was reproduced as part of their classroom literacy assessment practices.

Early years teachers have the responsibility of making sense of what is produced from both the official and pedagogic recontextualising subfields. This is not an easy task in terms of literacy teaching and assessment, particularly when there are so many competing ideologies at play. Both Singh (2002) and Maton (2007), in discussing Bernstein's work, highlighted the integral role assessment plays in sending strong messages about what is valid in terms of knowledge. The role of assessment cannot be understated.

Bernstein's pedagogic device has been used by many researchers in the field of education to explore "the link between the micro-level of interaction between teachers and learners in the classroom and the macro-level policy and state control" (Bourne, 2008, p. 42). Jones (2017) used the device to investigate the links between curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy at the secondary level through a newly introduced national health and physical education curriculum. Chen and Derewianka (2009) used the device as a framework to explain conflict and change in the field of literacy education in the past few decades, and Harris (2010) used the device to explore how one primary school teacher's approach to teaching reading reproduced research from the knowledge field and recontextualised policy.

Harris (2010) noted that teachers do not always adopt policy, and they may even resist it or exercise their own judgement. Additionally, Terhart (2013) and Coburn (2001) stated teachers may question, innovate, withstand, or even ignore policy change. Moreover, Harris et al. (2008) noted many diverse factors determine how a teacher responds to research and policy: "Individuals may adopt proactive or reactive stances, and engage in practices ranging from replication to interrogation and innovation" (p. 58).

In the results, analysis, and discussion in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, Bernstein's pedagogic device is used as a theoretical framework to explore how teachers responded to both previous and current assessment priorities, including those found in policy produced by national and state governments and the Catholic system.

2.5 Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature used to support the answering of the research questions. The chapter explored three key areas. First, literature relating to assessment in an era of neoliberalism was identified, and key issues including teacher accountability and autonomy, issues related to standardised assessment, and the complexities of assessment in the early years were explored. Given this study investigates early years teachers' responses to significant policy shift relevant policy literature in relation to national, state and system-level policy was discussed in the context of literacy assessment in the early years. Finally, I outlined Bernstein's (1990, 1996, 2000) pedagogic device and discussed how this device was used to support my research. The pedagogic device provided a mechanism for exploring the connections and tensions in the fields of research, policy, and practice across time and space.

This chapter also reported on the findings of a range of local and international quantitative and qualitative research carried out in the area of assessment and the early years. Overwhelmingly, these studies all reported the negative impact of standardised assessments on teachers' work, including the findings from the large-scale quantitative research on NAPLAN by Polesel and colleagues (2012). Additionally, a more recent research explored the impacts of NAPLAN on the health and well-being of early years teachers in Western Australia; Barblett and Robinson's (2019) qualitative research indicated that NAPLAN was impacting negatively on the health and well-being of the 38 early years teachers they interviewed for the research. Hesterman's (2018) large-scale mixed-methods research investigated the impact of system-imposed assessment in the early years in Catholic schools in Western Australia, and the results showed a narrowing of literacy teaching and a privileging of teaching the basics. The findings from Campbell et al. (2014) also indicated a basic approach to the teaching in the early years with a reliance on commercially produced materials. Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes (2018)

found that the effects of standardised testing were filtering down and impacting negatively on teaching in the early years.

The outlined studies provide important insights into assessment. My research investigated early years teachers' beliefs and approaches to literacy assessment within a changing policy paradigm. While other studies have illuminated issues around standardised assessment and matters in relation to assessment in the early years, my research fills an important gap, it specifically looked at a process of devolution and schools being offered greater decision-making power. However, this research acknowledges that the devolution occurred in a period when teachers were more accountable than ever due to a range of mandated assessment and curriculum policies. Previous studies have not investigated what a system of assessment devolution means for early years teachers' literacy assessment practices, and therefore, this research fills a void, or as Wagner (1993) noted, fills a "blank spot" in terms of research: "What we know enough to question but not to answer" (p. 16). Additionally, this research uses Bernstein's pedagogic device as a lens to identify and report on the influences on early years teachers' literacy assessment beliefs and practices. To explore literacy assessment in the early years and teachers at work in a changing policy paradigm, a robust research methodology was required, and this is discussed in the Chapter 3.

Chapter 3. Methodology

A Pragmatic Approach

> Pragmatism offers a third choice that embraces the subordinate ideas gleaned through the consideration of perspectives from both sides of the paradigm debate. (Teddlie & Tashakori, 2009, p. 73)

The primary purpose of this research was to explore the literacy assessment beliefs and practices of early years teachers in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese following a significant policy change in 2012, and to explore what this strategy of literacy assessment devolution and autonomy ultimately means for early years educators' current assessment practices.

Given the contemporary high-stakes assessment environment, characterised by heightened levels of teacher accountability and coupled with increased autonomy around literacy assessment decision-making returned to schools, the overarching questions that underpinned the study are reiterated as follows.

Research Question 1

1. What are the current literacy assessment beliefs and practices of teachers in early years classrooms (F–2) in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese?

Research Question 2

2. In what ways do devolved responsibility and increased autonomy for literacy assessment allow early years teachers to interrogate, innovate on, resist, or accept both previously mandated and current literacy assessment priorities and practices?

To answer these questions, a comprehensive and rigorous research design was required. This chapter initially provides a discussion of the pragmatic paradigm that

underpinned the research. Additionally, the use of a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design as part of the research process is explained and justified. A discussion of the case study approach is then provided, drawing on the work of key theorists to justify the approach. Following this, the instruments used for data collection are presented and the procedures used for data analysis are described. I also discuss the theoretical framework and how it was used to assist in reporting the findings. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the quality of the research, including a discussion of ethical considerations

3.1 Research Approach

This section describes the research paradigm, methodological approach, and methods used in the research process.

3.1.1 Paradigm

A researcher's approach to research is underpinned by a particular belief system or worldview (Kankam, 2019). Theorists have identified four main worldviews:

a. interpretivism, where truth is seen as socially constructed and the researcher relies on participants' views in the research process (Creswell, 2003);

b. positivism, which is identified as a truth-seeking paradigm (Kankam, 2019), and to seek the truth, researchers adopting this worldview take on a more scientific approach that involves the collection and analysis of quantitative data (Aliyu, Bello, Kasim, & Martin, 2014);

c. post-positivism, which emerged in response to the limitations of positivism and an understanding that in social research, there can be no absolute truths. Post-positivist researchers recognise that knowledge is socially constructed, and they are therefore not opposed to combining quantitative data with qualitative data collection methods (Creswell, 2009; Kankam, 2019); and

d. pragmatism, which is not fixed to any one idea of reality (Creswell, 2009) but takes into account different aspects of the worldviews, and according to Teddlie and Tashakori (2009), "embraces the subordinate ideas gleaned through the consideration of perspectives from both sides of the paradigm debate in interaction with the research question and real-world circumstances" (p. 73).

Morgan (2014) stated that pragmatism as a paradigm "replaced the older philosophy of knowledge approaches (e.g. Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln, 2010), which see social research in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology" (p. 1). Pragmatists are more concerned with choosing the best approach to answer the research question(s), and this may include employing a range of methods that would traditionally not be mixed because of a researcher's firmly held worldview.

Additionally, Morgan (2014) opined that "pragmatism concentrates on beliefs that are more directly connected to actions" (p. 7). As my study investigated teachers' literacy assessment beliefs and practices, and understanding and exploring their lived experiences of a policy shift, my worldview as a researcher is one of reality being something experienced differently by different people in different contexts and I therefore adopted a pragmatic approach to my research.

In line with a pragmatic approach, the research questions in my research were paramount to the research design, selection of methods, and data analysis, and I therefore employed a case study approach, incorporating a predominantly qualitative mixed-methods sequential explanatory design that involved a range of data collection methods to enable the research questions to be answered more fully. This is discussed in the following sections.

3.1.2 Case Study

A case study approach, as defined by Yin (2002), Stake (1995), and Merriam (1998), is an analysis of a bounded system. Specifically, Merriam (1998) stated that it is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process or a social unit" (p. xiii). This research resonates with Merriam's ideas, by investigating the impact of a system change on an assessment program—that is, Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM), in the Melbourne archdiocese, which can be seen as an institution. Further, this research aligns with Merriam's (1998, pp. 29–30) defining characteristics of a case in that it is

1. particularistic in that it focuses on something specific—that is, the approach to literacy assessment of early years teachers;

2. descriptive in that the researcher provides rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon being studied—that is, participants' beliefs and approaches to early years literacy assessment are presented;
3. heuristic in that through thick description, it illuminates the reader's understanding of the phenomenon being studied—that is, the literacy assessment practices and beliefs of early years teachers within the current educational climate.

The research also supports Yin's (2002) idea that a case study enables the researcher to address the "how" and "why" questions related to the phenomenon being studied. In this instance, the research investigated how early years teachers responded to the literacy assessment devolution, how the current educational climate impacted the literacy assessment practices of early years teachers, how they responded to contemporary literacy assessment policy and priorities, and why early years teachers adopted certain literacy assessment practices.

Ultimately, Creswell (2007) asserted that the function of a case study is "providing an in-depth understanding of a case or cases" (p. 78). For this reason, this research is a case study as it aimed to provide a detailed account of the case to enable the research questions to be answered fully.

3.1.3 A Mixed-Methods Sequential Explanatory Design

Using a range of methods for one study has gained popularity over the past 20 years (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006; Teddlie & Tashakori, 2009). It is based on the belief that a researcher should be able to use whatever tools are required to answer the research question (Cohen et al., 2018; Teddlie & Tashakori, 2009) and "is grounded in the fact that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient by themselves" (Ivankova et al., 2006, p. 3). Purpose is the driving force in terms of design, methods, data collection, analysis, and reporting data (Patton, 2002). Further, Cohen et al. (2018) noted the practical approach of pragmatism and described it as a "matter of fact approach . . . oriented to the solution of practical problems in a practical world" (p. 36).

A diversity of approaches should be embraced and seen as a strength. As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) contended, “Epistemological and methodological pluralism should be promoted in educational research so that researchers are informed about epistemological and methodological possibilities and, ultimately, so that we are able to construct more effective research” (p. 15). In fact, in critiquing methodologies, they proffered, “Epistemological beliefs should not prevent a qualitative researcher from utilizing data collection methods more typically associated with quantitative research and vice versa” (p. 15). The approach for my research aligns with the ideas of Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005), who posited that the research questions should guide the research design and analysis.

I used a predominantly qualitative mixed-methods approach consisting of two phases to investigate the literacy assessment practices and beliefs of early years teachers in Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese. Theorists have identified a range of hybrid approaches to mixed-methods research and have acknowledged that approaches to mixed methods have become more eclectic and fluid (Green and Preston, 2005; Bryman, 2006; Mason, 2006). Morse (2017) discussed the affordances of a predominantly qualitative mixed methods research and noted it allows the researcher to explore the “essence of the phenomenon” and “permits the researcher to use the most appropriate tools, to understand the research problem, and to measure what can and should be measured” (p.133). A predominantly qualitative approach aligns with the pragmatic philosophy whereby the researcher determines the approaches to data collection based on the research questions.

The research consisted of two data collection phases. Phase 1 was implemented to gather broad data on the literacy assessment practices of early years teachers in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese since the assessment devolution, and Phase 2 was designed to elicit in-depth information about the assessment practices of early years teachers in eight carefully selected and demographically different schools.

As there is no available research on the impact of the literacy assessment devolution, I wanted to first gain data from as many Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese as possible on how they had responded to being given greater literacy

assessment autonomy; therefore, a questionnaire consisting of both closed and open questions was implemented in Phase 1 of the research, which would be completed by a large number of literacy leaders in schools in the Melbourne archdiocese.

My research consisted of a two-phased, predominantly qualitative mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (Ivankova et al., 2006). The benefits of this design are that the two data collection phases built upon each other (Creswell, 2015). The sequential explanatory design method has been identified as popular with beginning researchers, but it is also recognised as challenging to conduct as it takes time to implement the two stages in sequence. A further challenge is identifying the results from the initial phase that require further explanation (Creswell, 2015, p. 38). Other considerations for the researcher using a sequential explanatory design involve how the researcher prioritises the different data collection and analysis methods, how the two phases are connected during the research process, and how the results of both phases will be integrated to answer the research questions (Ivankova et al., 2006 p. 4).

Advocates of a sequential explanatory design approach recommend using a visual representation:

> Such graphical modelling of the study design might lead to better understanding of the characteristics of the design, including the sequence of the data collection, priority of method and the connecting and mixing points of the two forms of data within a study. (Ivankova et al., 2006, p. 4)

Figure 3.1 represents graphically the study design for my research.

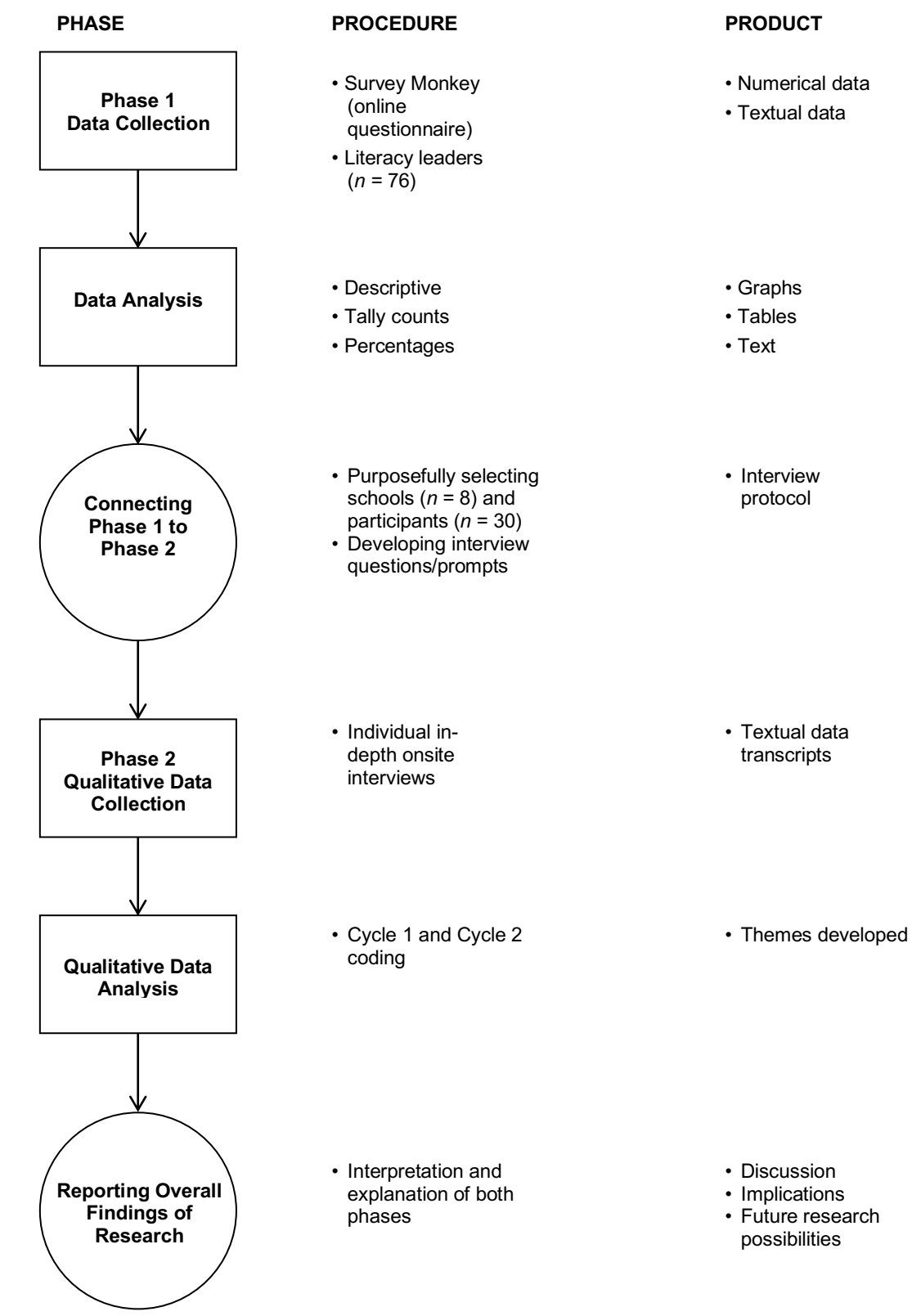


Figure 3.1. Visual model for the two phases of the sequential explanatory design model.

3.2 Methods of Data Collection

This section outlines and justifies the tools and methods of data collection for Phases 1 and 2 of the research.

3.2.1 Procedures

The data were collected in two phases. Participants for both phases were drawn from Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese. The aim of Phase 1 was to find system-wide information via an online questionnaire about the impacts of assessment devolution and what this meant in terms of literacy assessment practices in the early years in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese. Phase 2 involved qualitative data collection in the form of semistructured interviews with literacy leaders and early years teachers in eight schools to enable a more refined explanation (Ivankova et al., 2006, p. 5) of the questionnaire results from Phase 1 by exploring participants' views in relation to literacy assessment in the early years in greater detail.

3.2.2 Research Participants

As noted in section 2.4, Bernstein's pedagogic device (1990, 1996, 2000) was used as a framework for my research as it aligned closely to my focus on the connection between policy and practice as early years teachers responded to a policy change that afforded them greater literacy assessment autonomy. I felt it was necessary to include participants of important influences from the pedagogic recontextualising field to understand how schools had responded to the assessment devolution and to gain an insight into the early years teachers' beliefs and literacy assessment practices. Literacy leaders and teachers are different agents/actors working in the pedagogic recontextualising field and were well placed to provide insights into the assessment devolution.

In Phase 1, I selected literacy leaders from Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese as the target audience for the questionnaire because of the emphasis CEM placed on these leaders, as noted in Chapter 1. Literacy leaders had played an important role during the mandated assessment period in leading teachers to reproduce the official assessment requirements as set out by CEM. They also provided leadership for teachers as they navigated the assessment devolution, giving schools

greater literacy assessment autonomy. Literacy leaders had been empowered by CEM in its official recontextualising role and they played an important role in recontextualising and relaying official assessment policy directives from CEM, making these directives accessible to early years teachers to reproduce at the classroom level. Literacy leaders, because of their responsibilities at the school level, were ideally suited to speak about the classroom assessment practices of early years teachers. As such, they were targeted for recruitment to the study.

In Phase 2, I conducted semistructured interviews with seven purposefully selected literacy leaders and 23 early years teachers in eight schools (see Table 3.1). Interviews with both the early years teachers and literacy leaders were conducted to gather in-depth, thick descriptive data from participants around their assessment practices and beliefs after the mandated and prescriptive assessment period (1998–2012).

Table 3.1

Phase 2 Purposefully Selected schools and Teachers

School	Demographic	Teacher Participants Interviewed
School 1	Inner north, mid–high SES, low–mid EAL background school; enrolment 150 students	• Desi (literacy leader): > 20 years' teaching experience • Chrissy (Foundation): < 10 years' teaching experience • Elly (Year 1/2 teacher): > 10 years' teaching experience • Simone (Year 1/2 teacher): < 10 years' teaching experience
School 2	Outer east, high SES, low EAL background school; enrolment 330 students	• Ellen (Literacy Leader): > 20 years' teaching experience • Jane (Foundation): > 20 years' teaching experience • Jen (Year 1/2 teacher): > 20 years' teaching experience • Marcia (Year 1/2 teacher part-time): > 20 years' teaching experience
School 3	Outer north regional, mid SES, low EAL background school; enrolment 310 students	• Kay (literacy leader): > 20 years' teaching experience • Janine (Foundation): > 20 years' teaching experience • Sue (Year 1 teacher): > 10 years' teaching experience • Dave (Year 2 teacher): < 5 years' teaching experience
School 4	Inner city, low SES, high EAL	• Chrysanthi (literacy leader): > 20 years' teaching experience

School	Demographic	Teacher Participants Interviewed
	background school; enrolment 110 students	• Annie (Foundation): < 10 years' teaching experience • Lyly (Year 1/2 teacher): < 5 years' teaching experience
School 5 .	Outer west, mid–high SES, low EAL background school; enrolment 230 students	• Benita (Foundation and acting literacy leader): > 20 years' teaching experience • Giulia (Year 1/2 teacher): < 10 years' teaching experience' • Emma (Year1/ 2 teacher): < 10 years' teaching experience
School 6	Inner north, high SES, low EAL background; enrolment 290 students	• Mel (literacy leader): > 20 years' teaching experience • Jem (Foundation): < 5 years' teaching experience • Cat (Year 1/2 teacher): < 10 years' teaching experience • Dan (Year 1/2 teacher): < 10 years' teaching experience
School 7	Western, low SES, high EAL background; enrolment 500 students	• Kirsty (literacy leader): > 20 years' teaching experience • Isabella (Foundation): < 10 years' teaching experience • Nat (Year 1 teacher): > 10 years' teaching experience • Nick (Year 2 teacher): > 10 years' teaching experience
School 8	Outer north, low SES, high EAL background. Enrolment 160 students	• Mercy (literacy leader): > 20 years' teaching experience • Nelly (Foundation): < 5 years' teaching experience • Kelly (Year 1/2 teacher): > 20 years' teaching experience • Mia (Year 1/2 teacher): > 20 years' teaching experience.

3.2.3 Data Collection Phase 1 Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was developed to collect as much information as possible on the impact of the devolution of assessment for schools in the Melbourne archdiocese. Questionnaires are also an appropriate way to gather data from a large cohort (Bell & Waters, 2014; O'Leary 2014). The questionnaire consisted of open and closed questions. Moreover, rather than distinguishing between qualitative or quantitative data, de Vaus (2014) asserted it more helpful to look at the data as being structured or unstructured. In line with this idea, questions in the questionnaire were designed to gain demographic information as well as more detailed textual and numerical information about each school's early years literacy assessment practices.

The Phase 1 questionnaire was administered through the Survey Monkey software tool and consisted of 19 questions (Appendix B). The questionnaire sought to probe the extent to which the devolution redefined the relationship between the official and pedagogic recontextualising fields and that of classroom reproduction.

The questions were carefully designed to provide answers to the two research questions. Information was elicited from the literacy leaders in first instance into their school's assessment practices and to determine what, if any, changes they had made to their assessment since the 2012 literacy assessment devolution.

The initial questions were designed to find out demographic information on the schools and literacy leaders. This information was important to enable me to explore if school demographics such as size, location and the experience of the literacy leader were factors in how the schools recontextualised and reproduced official assessment policy.

My second research question sought to find out if the assessment devolution provided schools with opportunities to interrogate, innovate on, resist, or accept both previously mandated and current literacy assessment priorities and practices. I therefore devised questions to enable me to gather this information from the literacy leaders through the online questionnaire. The literacy leaders were asked to identify the literacy assessments they had maintained from the mandated assessment period and those they no longer used. Literacy leaders were also asked to identify any additional assessment they used since the assessment devolution, this provided insights into how innovative schools had been as a result of the devolution.

I asked literacy leaders to identify the CEM literacy assessment professional learning activities they had engaged with as part of the literacy assessment devolution to gain insights into how official messages form the system were recontextualised and reproduced at the school level. Additionally, I asked the literacy leaders for their opinions on the support the system provided schools with the transition from the highly mandated assessment period to the period allowing schools much greater literacy assessment autonomy.

Question 1 of this research sought to find out the current literacy assessment beliefs and practices of teachers in early years classrooms (F–2) in Catholic primary

schools in the Melbourne archdiocese, to enable this question to be answered I asked the literacy leaders to comment on how often they spent time discussing literacy assessment and how they managed these discussions. They were also afforded the opportunity to provide additional discursive comments in relation to literacy assessment in the early years, the responses provided key insights into the assessment beliefs and practices of the literacy leaders.

The online questionnaire was designed to be completed by participants with ease and was trialled with a group of five teachers before being administered. Draugalis, Coons, and Plaza (2008) recommended trialling a questionnaire, stating, "Pretesting is critical because it provides valuable information about issues related to reliability and validity through identification of potential problems prior to data collection" (p. 11). Trialling the tool resulted in fine-tuning the questions.

To gain a systemic picture of the devolution's impact, a high response rate to the questionnaire was required. O'Leary (2017) recommended that to facilitate this, the questionnaire's purpose should be made clear to potential participants, and to achieve this, a plain language statement was prepared and sent to each school principal. In line with the ethical requirements of both the University of Melbourne and CEM, ensuring all research carried out in a Catholic school had the principal's approval, I sent an outline of the research to the principals of 110 Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese, including a consent form seeking the schools' involvement in both phases of the research. I also asked for support from the Catholic Education regional managers who promoted my research through their contact with schools.

Ninety-three principals responded with their permission to contact the schools' literacy leaders to seek their engagement with the research. The literacy leaders were contacted and the research outlined to them through a plain language statement (Appendix A), and they were invited to complete the online questionnaire. A link to the questionnaire was emailed to the literacy leaders in the 93 schools. Of the 93 literacy leaders who expressed interest, 76 completed the questionnaire. Having worked in Catholic Education Melbourne over a 10-year period, working with a range of primary schools to support them with literacy, I was well known by many of the principals and literacy leaders, which may have contributed to the high response rate. Costley, Elliott,

and Gibbs (2010) also posited, "When researchers are insiders, they draw upon the shared understandings and trust of their immediate and more removed colleagues with whom normal social interactions of working communities have been developed" (p. 1). This insider perspective may have contributed to the high response rate.

The questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Bell and Waters (2014) and O'Leary (2017) posited that Survey Monkey software is a versatile tool in terms of both administering questionnaires and compiling data. The Survey Monkey software tool enabled data to be collected and analysed easily using the tools provided through the premium version; this included generating charts, graphs, and tables from the data (Appendix C). Textual data were analysed using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) in the form of NVivo; this is described in Section 3.3.2.

To determine participants for Phase 2 of the research, the questionnaire asked the literacy leaders if they were willing to participate in a face-to-face interview, which would include interviewing three teachers from the early years classrooms in their schools. Fifty-eight respondents expressed an interest in participating in Phase 2 of the research. A second question to determine the schools to be involved in Phase 2 asked literacy leaders to identify the extent to which their assessment literacy practices in the early years had changed since the 2012 policy change that allowed schools greater autonomy over literacy assessment. Respondents identified their assessment practices as having changed either *significantly*, *moderately*, or *not at all*. The aim was to identify schools that fell into these three categories initially and then to reduce this number to a manageable number of schools to engage in the research.

3.2.4 Purposeful Sampling Schools for Phase 2

Purposeful sampling involves studying information-rich cases to yield insights and in-depth understandings (Patton, 2002, p. 230) and enables the researcher to gather relevant and substantive data (Yin, 2011, p. 88). Purposeful sampling is recognised as a legitimate technique in research (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Smith & Osborne, 2003), and there are many different categories (Palinkas et al., 2015). The purposive sampling used in this research could be described as heterogeneous or maximum variation sampling as participants were selected based on the diversity they could offer to the research. In this instance, schools were selected based on both their responses

to the questionnaire and their diversity in terms of students' socioeconomic background, school size, and school location. In consultation with my supervisors, I decided to focus on eight schools; interviewing the literacy leaders and up to three early years teachers from each of these schools would be not only manageable but also provide rich data to build on the findings from Phase 1. Eight diverse schools were selected from the 58 schools that had indicated an interest in participating in Phase 2 of the research. Of these eight schools,

- four literacy leaders identified their schools as having made significant changes to their literacy assessment since the 2012 devolution;
- three literacy leaders identified their schools as having made moderate adjustments to their literacy assessment since the 2012 devolution; and
- one literacy leader identified that the literacy assessment practices of their school had not changed since the 2012 devolution.

In total, seven literacy leaders and 23 early years teachers were interviewed for the Phase 2 data collection.

3.2.5 Data Collection Phase 2 Interviews

Interviews are a useful tool to explore issues in depth and to provide additional insights into survey data (Cohen et al., 2018), and this was the case with my research. There are many different types of interviews that can be used as part of the research process (Cohen et al., 2018). In Phase 2 of the data collection, semistructured interviews were conducted with literacy leaders and early years teachers to enable thick, descriptive data to be gathered in relation to the literacy assessment practices of early years teachers in the current educational climate. Gannon (2013) explicitly stated that numbers can tell a story, whereas the "more subjective elements of narrative . . . are suppressed" (p. 18). Gannon called for research to provide thicker description of data, noting quantitative data are impoverished by a vocabulary of numbers. In evaluating research, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) also noted the limitations of numerical data alone, and Yin (2011) likewise called for thick, descriptive data, noting, "The thicker the description the more selectivity might be said to have been reduced" (p. 12).

Using a semistructured approach to interviewing literacy leaders and early years teachers allowed for rich dialogue between me and the interviewee. Interviewees' responses were often used to determine the next question to be asked, which is a much more conversational approach compared to a structured interview. This is substantiated by Smith and Osborne (2003) who posited that semistructured interviews provide opportunities for the initial questions to be modified based on the participant's responses and enable areas that the participant may highlight to be explored, unlike more structured interviews.

There is a great deal of skill required on the interviewer's part to facilitate an effective semistructured interview. The interview commences with an interview schedule with a few predetermined questions. Active listening is required, which is no easy task according to Seidman (1991):

> This type of active listening requires concentration and focus beyond that we do in everyday life. It requires that, for a good part of the time, we quash our normal instinct to talk. At the same time, interviewers must be ready to say something when a navigational nudge is needed. (p. 57)

There are many advantages to conducting semistructured interviews, including opportunities for building rapport with the interviewee, providing greater opportunity for flexibility, and obtaining rich textual data. Conversely, some theorists have noted semistructured interviews can be difficult to manage and rely on the interviewer's skill to maintain some sort of focus; they can take a long time to facilitate, and therefore data produced from the interview can take a long time to transcribe, analyse, and interpret (Smith & Osborne, 2003).

To overcome these possible limitations, I prepared an interview schedule and trialled it beforehand, which provided an opportunity for me to anticipate issues that may arise during the interview and plan for any difficulties (Turner, 2010). Kervin, Vialle, Herrington, and Okely (2006) advocated trialling and revising the tool prior to use as a means of ensuring reliability and validity. Subsequently, trialling interview questions with a small group of teachers led to minor revisions to the questions, as well as an awareness of which questions may require further prompting.

When using the semistructured interview technique, it is important to be prepared to modify and discard questions as the participants begin to share their stories; therefore, interviews remained as conversational as possible and began with social interaction based on a few general topics (Moustakas, 1990). In terms of conversation, it is important to have prepared prompts that will elicit conversation. In respect to this, Vagle (2014) offered some words of advice to ensure that "no stone is left unturned" (p. 81), advising the use of some key phrases such as "Tell me more about that" and "I have an understanding of that phrase you just used, but can you tell me what it means to you?" (p. 81). The conversational elements of the interview are paramount, whereby a mixture of questions and statements promote dialogue (Vagle, 2014).

I devised the questions for phase 2 of the research to build upon the results from the phase 1 questionnaire. The questions were also framed by both Bernstein's theoretical framework and the literature used to inform the study.

Bernstein's (1971) described three interrelated message systems of schooling: (a) curriculum—that is, what is to be taught; (b) pedagogy—that is, how it gets taught; and (c) evaluation—that is, how the learning is assessed. I asked participants questions to find out about these areas; I asked about the aspects of literacy they thought were important to teach and assess and how they used the data gathered from their literacy assessments.

As discussed in section 2.3, knowledge produced through research is made accessible to teachers through a process of recontextualisation and made available to teachers in a range of policies and programs, some of which are developed by governments or systems like Catholic Education, as well as by some by private enterprises. The recontextualising field is seen by Bernstein (2000) as paramount in providing "autonomy of education" (p. 33). I therefore asked questions to ascertain who and what influenced the early years teacher's assessment beliefs and practices.

The literature described how a range of neoliberal policies including, high-stakes testing, a curriculum based on standardised expected achievement, and school data, have constrained teachers' autonomy. I consequently asked questions to explore teachers' interrogation, innovation, resistance, or acceptance of these neoliberal

policies to determine how the early years teachers reproduced these policies as part of their classroom literacy assessment practices.

As my research explored the CEM policy change affording early years teachers greater literacy assessment autonomy, I asked questions to find out about how this policy change impacted the participants' literacy assessment beliefs and practices.

3.2.6 Interview Process

The interviews took place at each school, and literacy leaders selected both the early years teachers to be involved and the locations. I felt this was the best method as schools would be aware of teachers' availability, and it ensured schools felt part of the research process. All participants were provided with a plain language statement and consent form. Interviews were recorded using the Voice Memos software on an iPhone 6 (IOS version 12.4.5 Voice Memos; Apple LTD, 2016). The interview consisted of six main questions. The questions were developed around six areas: demographic information, assessment practices, assessment influences, using assessment, the needs of the learner, and sociocultural politics, as shown in Appendix D.

3.3 Data Analysis

In line with the sequential explanatory design model, the data were analysed at the conclusion of each collection phase. Once each set of data had been analysed and reported on individually, key findings from both phases were identified and reported on.

3.3.1 Phase 1 Questionnaire

Many theorists refer to the reduction of data as part of the data management process (O'Leary, 2017), but some recognise this as a deficit view of managing data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; O'Leary, 2017). The term data condensation is used by Miles et al. (2014) to describe the data management and coding process. They discuss the condensation process as occurring throughout the life of a research project and not just at the analysis stage: "Even before data are actually collected, anticipatory data condensation is occurring as the researcher decides (often without full awareness) which conceptual framework, which cases, which research questions and which data collection approaches to use" (p. 12). In this research, the condensation process began

long before the data were collected in terms of the development of the Phase 1 questionnaire.

As each questionnaire was returned, it was read several times and notes on the responses were taken. When all questionnaires had been returned, the quantifiable questions were analysed, including the literacy leaders reporting such things as demographic information and indicating the types of literacy assessment tools they were using. Maxwell (2010) acknowledged that the use of "quasi-statistics", including simple counts, as a credible method for a predominantly qualitative mixed methods study (p.475). The quantifiable data from phase 1 were summarised initially using tally counts and percentages. Each questionnaire response was then analysed and coded. The codes were revisited and revised throughout the iterative coding process.

Once coding of both the open and closed questions was completed, the data were looked at holistically, and two key themes were identified:

1. Literacy Assessment in a Time of Policy Shift: This theme explores how schools responded to the 2012 policy change in terms of the literacy assessment tools and processes they used.
2. Literacy Assessment: Indications of Change: This theme details how schools approached literacy assessment in the early years as a result of devolution of responsibility to the schools.

3.3.2 Phase 2 Interviews

Interviews were transcribed verbatim after interviews were completed (Appendix E). I spent time initially immersing myself in the data through listening to the recordings and taking notes. The transcripts were read several times and summarised before any coding occurred. This allowed me to become familiar with the content. I decided to use NVivo 10 (2012) software to assist with analysing the large amount of data, although I was mindful of Weitzman's (2000) caution against putting faith in a software analysis package. The NVivo 10 (2012) software provides tools for managing the coding of the 30 in-depth interviews but does not replace the need for researcher analysis (see Appendix F for a screenshot of NVivo coding). QSR (2012), the developers of NVivo 10, note the benefits of the program in enabling the organisation and display of a range of

data. However, the program is only as good as the data entered, and this still required me to engage in a systematic and detailed analysis to generate codes (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000). The software also enables the manipulation and visualisation of data, which would have been much more difficult without the software. Additionally, Miles et al. (2014) asserted the benefits of CAQDAS, noting, "Their search and retrieval functions permit rapid access to construct categories and allow you to test hunches, hypotheses and queries" (p. 48).

The six semistructured interview questions were used as an organisational tool for the initial coding of each question for Phase 2 data analysis. Analysis of Phase 2 data was recursive in that it involved moving backwards and forwards through the data, even when it had been coded. Miles et al. (2014) described coding as heuristic, a mode of discovery whereby the researcher searches for meaning through careful reading, re-reading, and reflection. This describes the process of coding for this research. The interview data were analysed question by question and then coded. However, it is important to note that coding is not a precise science (Miles et al., 2014) and requires interpretation by the researcher.

Miles et al. (2014) described over 25 different approaches to coding. My approach aligns with what Miles et al. described as "elemental methods". Two elemental approaches to coding were used as part of the data analysis process: (1) Descriptive coding summarises the data in a short word or phrase and (2) in-vivo coding uses words or phrase from the interviewees' own language and honours participants' voices. These elemental coding approaches have been described as foundational (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2013).

The codes emerged progressively as each question was analysed, which is referred to as inductive coding (Miles et al., 2014). The codes were revisited and revised throughout the coding process.

As a result of rigorous, systematic reading, re-reading, sorting, and coding the data, four overarching themes were identified based on their "keyness". V. Braun and Clarke (2006) noted that the "'keyness' of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question" (p. 82). This type of analysis is referred to as

thematic analysis and is driven by the data analysis process. Namey, Guest, Thairu, and Johnson (2008) described the validity of a data-driven analysis process as being "more flexible and open to the discovery of themes and ideas not previously considered, resulting in the theory that is 'grounded' in the data" (p. 139). The first three themes related closely to the teachers' literacy assessment beliefs and practices, and the fourth related to factors both within and outside the school that were influencing the literacy assessment practices of the early years teachers. The Phase 2 themes are as follows:

1. Engaging with Assessment: This theme reports on the range of literacy assessment tools the teachers identified using. How assessment has changed as a result of the devolution is explored, and the process of authentic assessment as identified by the Phase 2 participants is discussed.
2. Assessment Expertise: This theme explores the early years teachers' reporting of their expertise in engaging with the data gained from the literacy assessments and what they identified as influencing their literacy assessment practices.
3. Assessment Conceptions: This theme reports on the Phase 2 participants' beliefs and understandings related to literacy assessment in the early years as well as the contextual factors that influenced the unique literacy assessment practices in the Phase 2 schools.
4. Sociocultural Politics: This theme reports on current issues, debates, and practices that occurred outside the school that the Phase 2 participants identified as influencing their literacy assessment practices.

According to Saldana (2013), a theme captures what a unit of data is about and what it means. Further, Butler-Kisber (2010) stated that it involves the researcher interpreting the data and clustering the interpretation into organised themes, then providing a rich written description to elaborate the themes (pp. 50–61). The data interpretation in this study aligns with Butler-Kisber's (2010) approach; once themes had been developed, they were elaborated with rich written descriptions using participants' verbatim quotations and theory from key literature to support the discussion of each theme. Sometimes more than one quotation is used to illustrate a comparison between participants' ideas when discussing a theme, and at other times, more than one quotation is used to contrast participants' ideas.

3.3.3 The Use of Bernstein's Pedagogic Device as a Theorising Tool

Following the initial coding of the data to determine themes, Bernstein's pedagogic device (1990, 1996, 2000) was used as a theoretical lens to examine the data further. Bernstein's framework provided a mechanism for exploring the connections, complexities and tensions in the field of early years literacy assessment. Application of this theoretical lens assisted with the identification and analysis of teachers' literacy assessment beliefs and practices. Additionally, it provided a language for discussing how these beliefs and practices were shaped and influenced by different agents. In earlier research, Chen and Derewianka (2009) likewise applied a Bernsteinian lens to their research around literacy policy shift, arguing it provides a mechanism for exploring the "forces at work in this period of change" (p. 235).

Figure 3.2 illustrates how the pedagogic device informed the theorisation of my research. The figure depicts the recontextualising of knowledge made accessible to teachers in classrooms through the relaying of knowledge across the various fields of the pedagogic device.

The top tier of Figure 3.2, "Forms of Knowledge", shows disciplines such as psychology, sociology, linguistics and literary studies that, through research, contribute to the knowledge base of language and literacy education. Research that is produced within these disciplines typically leads government and government endorsed bodies, such a Catholic Education, to recontextualise knowledge into language and literacy policy and ensuing programs that are then made available for to school leaders and teachers for implementation, and this is identified in the next tier of the diagram in the recontextualising field . In discussing the themes, I ascertained the influences from Bernstein's reproduction field and described how agents operating in this field affected the participants' assessment beliefs and practices.

The recontextualising field illustrated in Figure 3.2 consists of two sub-fields. The first sub-field is the official recontextualising field where government and government endorsed bodies create policy and programs to be enacted in schools. This official recontextualising section of the diagram illustrates the potential scope of the three core interrelated areas of my research in terms of policies and programs: literacy, assessment and early years (as discussed in the previous chapter). For example, in the

area of literacy there are policies and allied programs can be informed by a socio-cultural view of literacy (whereby a pluralised view of literacy is understood – multiliteracies, essentially) or by a more back to basics approach to literacy. Similarly, the area of assessment might promote practices based on rich assessment tasks that require teacher judgment and/or assessment with a focus on standardised assessment and testing. The conception of the early years of learning might be situated within the primary years of schooling or as part of a developmental phase from birth to 8 years of age. Applying Bernstein's pedagogic device to the data I identified how school leaders and teachers make sense of the informing principles of policies and programs that are produced by the government and government endorsed bodies. This sense making is supported by those agents working in the pedagogic recontextualising sub-field as discussed next.

The second sub-field illustrated in figure 3.2 is the pedagogic recontextualising field, consisting of agents such as educational publishers and the corporate media; they work to support teachers with interpreting and enacting what is produced in the official recontextualising field. While these entities may be seen to have less official power and status than those in the official recontextualising field, they can still exert significant influence over the literacy assessment beliefs and practices reproduced by teachers.

Bernstein described the competition and alliances that can occur in and across the two recontextualising sub-fields as quite critical (see Section 2.3), as it is those agents who hold the power who have the greatest influence around what gets implemented or reproduced by teachers in schools, in terms of their classroom practices and procedures.

Examination and coding of the interview data which generated themes also revealed clear examples identified by the participants of the influences from the two recontextualising sub-fields on their literacy assessment beliefs and practices. In the presentation and analysis of the themes, a Bernsteinian lens is applied to identify influences which emerged in the generated data. This involved the identification and discussion of examples of policy produced in the official recontextualising field, such as the national testing, and discussion of how participants viewed this as impacting on their literacy assessment beliefs and practices. Additionally, a detailed discussion of the

overt influence of agents in the pedagogic recontextualising field as identified by the participants such as publishers of commercially produced assessment tools and the media, is also considered.

In analysing and reporting on the data collected, Bernstein's pedagogic device provided an invaluable lens to investigate the research questions posed by this study, to examine the connections, complexities and tensions in the field of early literacy assessment as identified by the participants, and a robust means to explore who and/or what is influential on the literacy assessment beliefs and practices of teachers in the early years.

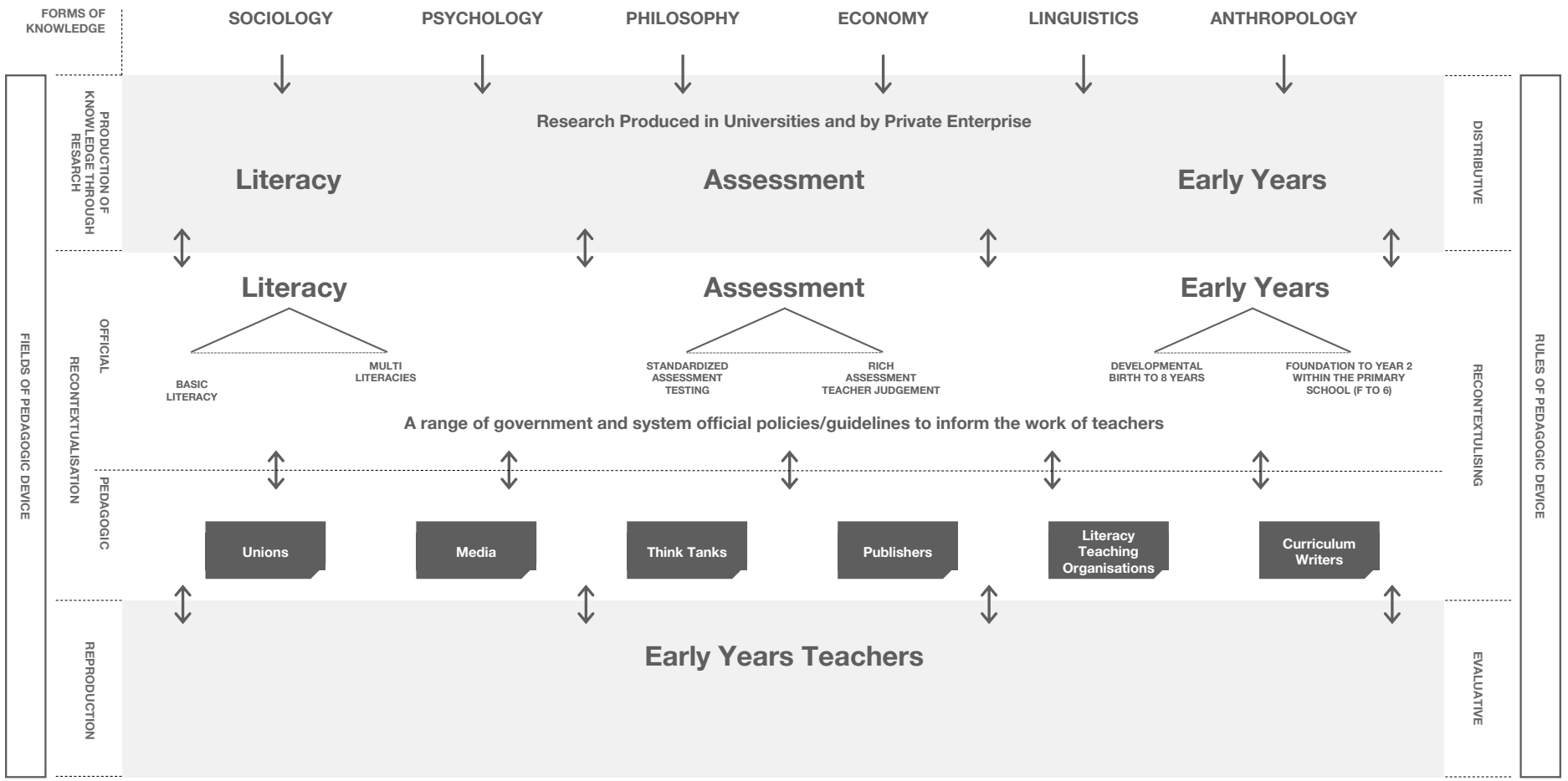


*Figure 3.2.*Recontextualisation in the field of early years literacy assessment.

3.4 Quality of the Research

This section explores the criteria used for assessing the quality of the research.

Zitomer and Goodwin (2004) reported on five key criteria that qualitative research is usually assessed against: (a) reflexivity, sometimes referred to by researchers as transparency; (b) credibility, sometimes referred to as trustworthiness; (c) resonance; (d) significant contribution; and (e) ethics. I applied these criteria to assess the quality of my research.

3.4.1 Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves the researcher engaging in evaluative processes throughout the research. This includes being reflective on methods as well as on the participants' needs throughout the process. According to Hibbert, Coupland, and MacIntosh (2010), it requires more than just thinking about the research process; it requires the researcher to be critical and engage in self-questioning throughout the research. To this end, as a researcher, I kept a journal throughout the research process, noting my thoughts, questions, and reactions. My supervisors also acted as critical friends (Deuchar, 2008) throughout the process, fulfilling this role by affirming but also challenging me. I also joined a doctoral research support group as recommended by Rossman and Rallis (2003) who advised using a "community of practice" made up of knowledgeable colleagues to engage in "critical and sustained discussion" (p. 69). These practices ensured a reflexive approach to the research.

3.4.2 Credibility

The notion of research having credibility was discussed by Stake (2010), who stated that it is not just about the final product being credible but what happens throughout the research process: "It gains credibility by thoroughly triangulating the description and interpretation, not just in a single step but continuously throughout the period of the study" (pp. 443–444). A range of methods, including two phases of data collection, with the large amount of Phase 1 data collected and reported on being used to go deeper in Phase 2 through in-depth semistructured interviews, contribute to the research's credibility.

To ensure the credibility of my research, I also engaged in member checking Phase 2 data. Member checking is a critical technique for ensuring reliability and validity (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2010). Several different approaches can be taken, but I chose Creswell's (2013) approach, thereby convening a focus group with the participants and asking them to reflect on the accuracy of the themes and descriptions. Creswell suggests asking participants if the report captures what they said and if anything is missing (p. 252).

3.4.3 Resonance

It is important for the researcher to provide rich, transparent accounts of participants' stories, as well as interpret them honestly, which enables the reader to relate to the research and "evaluate transferability to persons in contexts which are more or less similar" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2010, p. 51). Through my analysis and interpretation, I aimed to provide rich, honest accounts of the data to enable the research to impact readers by "meaningfully reverberat[ing] with them, expanding their appreciation and understanding of the phenomena investigated and [enable] their ability to transfer study findings to their contexts" (Zitomer & Goodwin, 2004, p. 210).

3.4.4 Significant Contribution

There is currently much research around assessment, both Australian and international, but as Pyle and DeLuca (2013) stated, research in the area of early years literacy assessment is lacking, particularly around issues of centralised and devolved responsibility. This research therefore fills a void, and as Wagner (1993) noted, fills a "blank spot" in terms of research—that is, "what we know enough to question but not to answer" (p. 16). Theoretically, the research aimed to build on existing knowledge and heuristically encourage further research in the area (Zitomer & Goodwin, 2004).

3.4.5 Ethical Considerations

Tracy (2010) developed a framework to assess the quality of research. Part of the framework includes four criteria researchers should use to ensure their research is considered ethical. My research meets Tracy's (2010) four criteria for being considered ethical:

1. Procedural: The research met the ethical guidelines set out by the University of Melbourne and CEM, including a clear outline of the research for participants and obtaining informed written consent.
2. Situational: The researcher engaged in ethical practices when liaising with participants. This included following the procedural guidelines of providing a plain language statement to each participant, outlining the research (Appendix A) and gaining written informed consent, and being aware and respectful of each school's circumstances. This included allowing the school to determine the most appropriate time and location for the interviews.
3. Relational: The researcher was aware of her actions and how these could impact participants. For example, the interview protocol allowed time for each participant to feel more relaxed when answering the questions by engaging in general conversation before the interview and making sure participants were aware they could stop at any stage.
4. Reporting: This involves how the results are shared. To ensure this aspect was fulfilled, I have used pseudonyms for both schools and participants, engaged in focus group member checking, and used thick descriptions to report the data supported with relevant literature.

3.4.6 Coherence

Tracy's (2010) framework for quality additionally identified that research needs to be coherent. My research meets the criteria of being coherent as it is clear and consistent in achieving its stated purpose, in this case researching early years teachers' literacy assessment beliefs and practices within a changing policy paradigm. It should be methodologically sound, with interconnectedness between the literature review, methods, and findings.

3.5 Summary

This chapter outlined the research process and design of this two-phase predominantly qualitative mixed-methods case study research. A pragmatic approach consisting of a range of methods was justified in terms of being able to answer the research questions and provide an in-depth understanding of the literacy assessment

practices of early years teachers in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese following a significant policy change in 2012, and to explore what this strategy of literacy assessment devolution and autonomy ultimately means for early years educators' current assessment practices. The chapter provided a summary of the methods used as well as a discussion around the quality of the research. Chapter 4 presents the results, analysis, and discussion from the Phase 1 data collection.

Chapter 4. Phase 1 Questionnaire: Results, Analysis, and Discussion of Assessment Devolution

Embracing Autonomy

> I would love that we invest in teacher knowledge about assessment and what it indicates instead of reaching for programs for assessment. (Literacy Leader, School 33)

4.1 Assessment Devolution and System-Wide Change

The primary purpose of this research was to explore the literacy assessment practices of early years teachers in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese following a significant policy change in 2012, and to investigate what this strategy of literacy assessment devolution and autonomy ultimately means for early years educators' current assessment practices. This study also sought to inquire into the extent to which teachers took the opportunity to interrogate, innovate on, resist, or accept both previously mandated and current literacy assessment priorities and practices.

A predominantly qualitative mixed-methods case study approach consisting of two phases of data collection was used in the research process, as outlined in Chapter 3. Here, in this current chapter, I report on the Phase 1 data, which gained system-wide insights into the impact of the 2012 assessment policy change. Seventy-six leaders from 76 primary schools completed the Phase 1 online questionnaire (Appendix B), consisting of both closed and open-ended questions. Data from these questionnaires were analysed to gain insight into system-level trends. This analysis resulted in the purposive selection of eight schools for Phase 2 of the research, which entailed in-depth semistructured interviews with early years teachers and literacy leaders. Phase 2 further investigated Phase 1 data, which afforded additional insights into the literacy

assessment practices of 23 early years teacher from each of the eight schools. I present and discuss the results from Phase 2 of the research in Chapters 5 and 6.

A key finding from the data collected in Phase 1 of the study revealed that of the 76 schools identified, 75 had changed their literacy assessment practices as a result of the devolution, thereby leaving only one school who maintained the same literacy assessment practices from the compulsory and mandated assessment period (1998–2012). It was evident that although 75 schools identified changing their literacy assessment practices, there was still a prevalent use of many of the literacy assessment tools mandated for early years teachers prior to 2012, but the schools were using them in more flexible ways, that is they were choosing certain tools to use from the original suite of tools mandated during the prescriptive assessment period and choosing the timing of when they would use these tools. It was also evident that schools in the devolved policy context were privileging "evidence-based" formal published literacy tools to assess literacy in the early years. Initially, this chapter reports demographic information about the literacy leaders, including their additional roles, the time fraction they worked, and the professional learning they had undertaken. Subsequently, the findings are explored based on the two key themes that emerged from the analysis of the data collected in Phase 1:

1. Literacy Assessment in a Time of Policy Shift: This theme explores how schools responded to the 2012 policy change in terms of the literacy assessment tools and processes they used.
2. Literacy Assessment: Indications of Change: This theme details how schools approached literacy assessment in the early years as a result of devolution of responsibility to the schools.

4.2 Literacy Leaders

There was an exceptional level of participation from the literacy leaders invited to be part of this research, with 76 literacy leaders completing the Phase 1 online questionnaire. The online questionnaire revealed that the 76 literacy leaders were diverse in terms of their professional experience and current roles. As discussed in Chapter 1, since 1998, Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) has invested heavily in school-level literacy leadership, providing schools with a grant for literacy leaders to be

released from the classroom to facilitate on-site literacy professional learning for early years teachers through coaching and modelling in the classroom, as well as regularly facilitating literacy-focused meetings. The literacy leader role in Catholic primary schools is positioned as pivotal in enacting literacy policy and supporting teachers with this enactment. Most literacy leaders in this study had an allocated weekly time fraction of 0.5 or more dedicated to their literacy leadership role, the equivalent of 2.5 days per week. In larger schools, the literacy leader had a greater time fraction for this role. The literacy leaders also often engaged in other school leadership roles, including deputy principal, learning and teaching leader, and reading recovery specialist. Some of the literacy leaders combined their role with classroom teaching duties. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 provide an overall picture of the participants.

Table 4.1

Literacy Leader Time Allocation

Time Fraction	Number	Percentage
< 0.2 (< 1 day equivalence)	6	8
0.2–0.4 (1–2 days' equivalence)	24	32
0.5–0.8 (2.5–4 days a week)	35	46
Full time	11	14
TOTAL	**76**	**100**

Table 4.2

Literacy Leaders' Experience in the Role

Time Fraction	Number	Percentage
< a year	3	4
1–5 years	30	39
6–10 years	23	30
11–15 years	5	7
16+ years	15	20
TOTAL	**76**	**100**

The data indicated the literacy leaders were varied in their additional roles, and this research offered the opportunity to hear from their diverse viewpoints and perspectives.

The 76 participants were asked about their involvement in CEM professional learning focused on supporting schools with literacy assessment autonomy. The questionnaire results illustrated that 27 respondents (less than half) participated in the key literacy assessment professional learning after the mandated and prescriptive assessment period from 2013 to 2016, with a focus on building literacy assessment capability in the early years, as indicated in Table 4.3. Of these 27 literacy leaders, 16 indicated their school had participated in one of the professional learning programs since 2013, one school had participated in four of the professional learning programs, two had participated in three programs, and five had participated in two programs. Therefore, of the 76 schools, 49 literacy leaders indicated they had not participated in any of the professional learning programs aimed at supporting schools with the transition from the mandated and prescriptive assessment period to having greater autonomy over literacy assessment in the early years.

As explained in Chapter 1, CEM invested heavily in training the school-based literacy leaders. Specific professional development opportunities were provided to literacy leaders and early years teachers during the period of mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment (1998–2012), and this continued beyond this period with targeted professional learning in literacy assessment. Participation in this professional learning was optional during the period from 2013 to 2016; some schools participated in a range of options, while the majority did not participate in any. This might be seen as an example of schools resisting official support from CEM and embracing the autonomy afforded them by the assessment devolution to engage in their own decision-making.

Table 4.3

Participation in Professional Learning Focused on Building Literacy Assessment Capability in the Early Years (2013–2016)

Professional Learning Program	Year of Program	Number of Schools That Participated in the Program
Literacy Assessment Progression of Reading Development	2013	5
Literacy Assessment for Literacy Learning and Teaching	2013	4
F–2 Assessment	2014	8
F–2 Building Literacy Assessment Capability	2015	4
Assessment Capability	2016	16

In addition to the suite of professional learning programs aimed at building assessment capacity, CEM recognised that schools might need additional support transitioning from the mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment period (1998–2012) to having greater autonomy and therefore prepared an online resource for schools to access. This online resource included professional reading and a PowerPoint presentation for literacy leaders to use to facilitate on-site professional learning with their early years teachers. Each school principal was notified by email of the online professional learning resource, and literacy leaders were informed about the resource through termly off-site literacy clusters facilitated by CEM. The respondents were asked to indicate whether they had accessed the online resource and used it with their early years teachers. Of the 76 respondents, 75 answered this question, with 44 respondents stating they had not used the online tool. More than half the respondents therefore did not access the tool designed to support them with transitioning from the mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment period, which is perhaps another example of schools resisting official support from the system and embracing their newfound assessment autonomy.

Many literacy leaders were allocated a significant amount of time to support early years teachers with literacy teaching and learning, and the literacy leader role was often combined with other key leadership roles within the school. There was also diversity in terms of the professional learning they had engaged in to support them with the transition from mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment (1998–2012) to having greater autonomy. The literacy leaders were well placed to discuss literacy within their schools and how the devolution of literacy assessment had impacted their schools' literacy assessment practices. This is discussed in the following theme.

4.3 Literacy Assessment in a Time of Policy Shift

The online questionnaire asked respondents to state if they thought their school's early years literacy assessment practices had changed *significantly*, *moderately*, or *not at all* since the policy of literacy assessment devolution in 2012. Only one literacy leader identified their school's early years literacy assessment practices as being the same as those of the mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment period. Table 4.4 illustrates the extent of change to literacy assessment practices since 2012 and the degree to which respondents felt their assessment practices had changed.

Table 4.4

Extent of Change to Literacy Assessment Practices Since the 2012 Policy Change

Extent of Change	Number	Percentage
Significant	41	54
Moderate	34	45
No change	1	1
TOTAL	**76**	**100**

The remaining 75 literacy leaders identified their early years literacy assessment practices as being different compared to their practices prior to the 2012 assessment devolution, a clear indication of schools embracing the assessment autonomy afforded them by the devolution. Harris and colleagues (2008) discussed that recontextualising involves schools recasting policy in view of their own particular contexts (p. 58); as a result of the devolution, schools were making contextual decisions. Singh (2002)

suggested that recontextualising also affords opportunities for a change in power and control. Bernstein (2000) described the power and control nexus and posited, "Control carries the boundary relations of power . . . control is double faced for it carries both power of reproduction and the potential for its change" (p. 5). During the mandated and prescriptive assessment period (1998–2012), CEM held the power and control; however, the recontextualisation of CEM's policy allowed schools greater autonomy, and the devolution provided the potential for change in this power and control, which the schools appear to have embraced.

While it was subjective in terms of the literacy leaders determining what they felt was significant or moderate, in subsequent questions they were asked to specifically identify their current literacy assessment practices. This additional information illuminated how these measures of change were interpreted and reflected how different the practices were to those prescribed by CEM during the mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment period.

From a list of all the assessments given at the beginning of the year during the mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment period, respondents were asked to identify the assessments that they still administered at the beginning of the year. This determined how different schools' assessment practices compared to those that were mandated by CEM prior to 2012.

The responses indicated that the *Observation Survey*, which was mandated during the prescriptive assessment period (1998–2012), was still used widely in all 76 schools to assess students in their first year of school at the beginning of the year, with all respondents indicating they continued to use aspects of the *Observation Survey* at the beginning of the year, as indicated in Table 4.5. However, the major change was that schools had adopted a much more flexible approach to using the Observation Survey, indicating that they selected which assessment tasks from the Observation Survey they used, and it was only used in its entirety by one school—that is, the school that identified it had not changed its assessment practices.

A total of 96% of respondents used the Letter Identification assessment (a component of Clay's *Observation Survey*) to assess children when they commenced school; however, the other assessment tasks that formed part of the *Observation*

Survey were used to a lesser degree to assess students when they commenced school, as indicated in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Tools From the Observation Survey Used at the Beginning of Year

Tool From Observation Survey	Foundation Percentage	Year 1 Percentage	Year 2 Percentage
Letter Identification	96	55	13
Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words	56	46	12
Writing Vocabulary	39	29	11
Concepts About Print	73	33	11
Word Test	37	22	9

Respondents were also asked to identify whether they still used the BURT Word Reading Test that was compulsory during the mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment period (1998–2012). The BURT Word Reading Test was still used at the beginning of the school year to assess at each year level, as indicated in Table 4.6. The BURT Word Reading Test usage was similar at the end of the year to the beginning of the year, as indicated in Table 4.7.

Table 4.6

Percentage of Respondents Using the BURT Word Reading Test at Beginning of School Year

Foundation	Year 1	Year 2
37%	49%	47%

Table 4.7

Percentage of Respondents Using the BURT Word Reading Test at End of School Year

Foundation	Year 1	Year 2
39%	43%	46%

Prior to 2012, all schools assessed students in Year 2, the third year of school, using the Peter's Dictation task. Forty-seven percent of respondents indicated they still

used the Peter's Dictation task. Although prior to 2012 this was only compulsory for Year 2, 16% of respondents indicated they used it to assess students in Year 1 at the beginning of their second year at school. The Peter's Dictation task was not administered to children at the beginning of their first year at school.

Across all year levels, there was a decrease in using tools from the Observation Survey at the end of the year, as shown in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8

Tools Used From the Observation Survey Administered at End of Each Year

Tool From Observation Survey	Foundation Percentage	Year 1 Percentage	Year 2 Percentage
Letter Identification	75	31	9
Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words	54	24	6
Writing Vocabulary	37	17	5
Concepts About Print	46	20	8
Word Test	25	14	6

The Peter's Dictation task was used by 42% of respondents at the end of the year; this was slightly lower than at the beginning of the year. As previously noted, prior to 2012, this tool was only mandated for use with children in Year 2, their third year at school. Two respondents indicated they used it to assess children at the end of their Foundation, and 16 respondents indicated they used it with children at the end of Year 1.

The data illustrate that the assessment tools from the mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment period (1998–2012) were still being used. Additionally, when given the opportunity to be innovative, schools did not seize this opportunity but opted to maintain many of the previously mandated tools, although in more flexible ways, such as choosing which tools to use and to which children to administer them. The strong influence of the system was still apparent. After over 12 years of following system mandates, schools may have found it difficult to fully embrace assessment autonomy. Bernstein (2000), when discussing autonomy and change, identified a point where you can be in the "prison of the past" or a boundary as a "tension point which condenses the past yet opens the possibility of futures" (p. 206). It appears that schools were at

the boundary point, holding onto many literacy assessment tools of the past, although the Phase 1 participants also identified an additional range of literacy assessment tools, thus demonstrating a freeing of the past and embracing future possibilities.

4.4 Literacy Assessment: Indications of Change

A significant change from the mandated and prescriptive assessment period was the use of formal commercially produced assessment tools to assess reading comprehension. All schools identified purchasing and using a range of formal commercially produced literacy assessment tools.

It became clear from the data collected through the online questionnaire that schools, following the mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment period, began to use a range of commercially produced tools to assess comprehension, illustrated in Table 4.9. Further information on each tool can be found in Appendix G.

Table 4.9

Published Tools Used to Assess Comprehension

Comprehension Assessment Tool	Number of Schools Using the Tool
PAT-R	36
BAS Fountas & Pinnell	30
PM Kit	13
ARCOTS	8
PROBE	6

In some cases, schools used more than one of the commercially produced literacy tools to assess reading comprehension, as indicated in Table 4.10. Researchers have identified this overreliance on commercially produced assessment packages as an area of concern; Paris, Paris, and Carpenter (2001) discussed effective literacy assessment involves making judicious choices and being selective about which tools are used for which purposes and for which students. In their research, they found teachers frequently added too many new assessments to existing assessments and identified this as a burden for both teachers and students (p. 14). This was the case for many of the schools that participated in Phase 1 of this research, as they reported a heavy reliance on commercially produced literacy assessment tools. Implications for teachers in terms

of workload, particularly in those schools that were using multiple formal tools to assess reading and comprehension, needs to be considered. One literacy leader from a school that was using multiple commercial literacy assessment tools echoed this dilemma, stating in a reflective discursive comment on the questionnaire, “Are we collecting too much ‘broad’ data that is difficult to analyse? Should our focus be on collecting minimal but concise data that will assist in setting a learning and teaching plan?” (Literacy Leader, School 17).

Table 4.10

Number of Schools Using More Than One Commercially Based Reading Comprehension Assessment Tool

Tool	Tool	Tool	Tool	Total Number of Schools
		Fountas and Pinnell BAS	PM Kit	3
		Fountas and Pinnell BAS	PAT-R	8
		PROBE	PAT-R	2
		PM Kit	PAT-R	5
	PM Kit	Fountas and Pinnell BAS	PAT-R	1
PROBE	PM Kit	Fountas and Pinnell BAS	PAT-R	2

The PAT-R assessment was one of the main commercially produced assessment tools used by 36 respondents to assess reading comprehension. The use of the PAT-R tool has drawn criticism due to the alliance between the publishers of the assessment, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the creators of the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Spina (2017) noted, “ACER is an organisation with substantial involvement in the production, delivery and analysis of NAPLAN through contractual arrangements with ACARA” (p. 200). Spina further stated that many government policies and initiatives, such as the National School Improvement Project, a cross-sector project commencing in 2012 with a focus on improving literacy outcomes in schools where NAPLAN data were identified as low (ACARA, n.d.-b), mandated the use of commercially produced literacy assessment

programs, including PAT-R. Spina described this as “deeply enmeshed intertextuality of edu-business, government and departmental institutional texts that form ruling relations” (p. 200).

The “enmeshed intertextuality” identified by Spina (2017) reflects Bernstein’s (1996, 2000) theory, that those who gain control over the recontextualising fields of the pedagogic device have the greatest control over what teachers reproduce in their classrooms. Teachers adopting commercially produced reading comprehension assessments, one of which has received government endorsement, illustrates the government working with publishers to strongly influence teachers’ practices, in this case the reproduction of reading assessments in schools. This concern was reiterated by Au (2008) when discussing the U.S. context, describing official education policy as creating opportunities for the alliance via increased opportunities for publishers who create and market testing materials to teachers. Bernstein (1996) discussed this type of collusion, which can occur between those responsible for official policy and those who recontextualise materials, in this case “evidence-based” literacy assessment tools for teachers. Bernstein proffered that this alliance creates an autonomy over pedagogic discourse. In the current climate, Bernstein’s ideas are realised through a prevalence of neoliberal discourse around the importance of quantifiable data, which influences the types of literacy assessment that schools adopt. Ultimately, teachers are influenced by the official messages from the government and the less official messages from the publishers. Ball (2012) identified how the private sector is strongly influencing policy:

> In effect, to different extents in different countries, the private sector now occupies a range of roles and relationships within the state and educational state in particular, as sponsors and benefactors, as well as working as contractors, consultants, advisers, researchers, service providers and so on and both sponsoring innovations (by philanthropic actions) and selling policy solutions and services to the state, sometimes in related ways. (p. 112)

Ball (2012) highlighted the “murky” relationship between the government and those in the private sector who are gaining financially from their involvement in policy. This is exactly what Bernstein (2006) described when he discussed the two subfields that make up the recontextualising field; he stated that tensions can occur between the

subfields, but alliances can also occur both within and between the subfields. The government engages in neoliberal discourse around schools failing, and publishers produce materials that enable schools to provide evidence of learning.

Teachers could possibly see the government-endorsed PAT-R assessment as more valid than other nongovernment-endorsed assessments. Masters (ACER, 2018) cited that of 9,444 schools across Australia, more than 7,000 are using PAT-R. Almost half the schools in this research identified PAT-R as an assessment tool they used. Masters further stated that teachers need to recognise there are multiple ways of assessing, thereby acknowledging that PAT-R on its own is insufficient, and that teachers need to use a range of assessment tools.

Although commercially produced, standardised tools are popular with schools, as shown in the Phase 1 data, they have drawn criticism from some theorists. Jones (2003), building on the work of Shepard, Kagan, and Wirtz (1998), explicitly denounced the use of formal standardised assessments with children in the early years of school, instead encouraging the use of teacher judgement and a more informal approach to assessment for this age group. David Berliner, an eminent educational psychologist, took this further in an online article for the *Washington Post* (see Strauss, 2011), criticising the use of formal assessments with young children:

> Often [the assessment] provides unreliable scores and therefore invalid inferences about the abilities of children are made too often. Potentially more valid information, at least as reliable as the tests themselves, and unlikely to elicit anxiety on the part of teachers or students can be obtained from professional educators much quicker and for drastically less money. (para. 23)

While many researchers have criticised commercially based teaching programs (e.g., Allington 2005; Duncan-Owens, 2010; Lingard, Sellar, Hogan, & Thompson, 2017), similar attention to teachers' use of commercially based assessment tools is needed. The focus on quantifiable data as a form of evidence of learning has given rise to commercially produced literacy assessment packages that enable the production of this type of numerical data. The commercially produced literacy assessment tools identified by the literacy leaders provide numerical data to measure growth over time. Students complete these assessment tools, such as PAT-R and the Assessment Research Centre

Online Testing System (ARCOTS), using an online portal. Teachers are not required to mark the assessments as this is done via the computer program. The increased use of computer-based assessment tools has been directly attributed to the datafication of education (Lingard et al., 2017), and Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier (2013) asserted that this will continue to grow in an era where data that can be quantified are highly valued. These commercially produced assessment programs often have software that allows generation of quantitative data in the form of graphs and tables; these at-a-glance numerical data are often appealing to schools, especially when presenting reports to the community.

One literacy leader discussed the limitations of using commercially based assessment tools, stating in a discursive comment, "I would love that we invest in teacher knowledge about assessment and what it indicates instead of reaching for programs for assessment" (School 33). Further, through his research, Hardy (2018) noted that even though teachers may interrogate commercially produced assessment processes, they still engage with them and cautioned, "They potentially narrow teachers' attention to more standardized measures of students' learning" (p. 1). G. Moss (2017) stated that in the current climate, a focus on assessment also results in assessment driving curriculum: "Taken to its logical extreme, instead of building the curriculum and then deciding how it can be best assessed, the assessment tools themselves become the curriculum" (p. 62). The prevalence of published literacy assessment tools is a significant difference to the mandated and prescriptive assessment period (1998–2012).

The Phase 1 questionnaire data revealed schools were using a range of assessments in relation to the modes of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. However, the literacy leaders identified reading assessment tools more so than writing; only 13 participants identified writing as a formally assessed area. These 13 schools noted that they engaged in such things as writing analysis and writing moderation using the curriculum standards. Interestingly, more literacy leaders identified that they assessed spelling compared to writing. Twenty-seven participants identified spelling as an area that was formally assessed mostly using a range of formal published tools, as identified in Table 4.11. Spelling was identified as a skill necessary for writing, but it is acknowledged in the literature that it needs to be balanced with children's

understanding of text construction, sentence construction, and vocabulary knowledge and use, skills often referred to as authorial skills (Daffern & Mackenzie, 2015; Mackenzie & Scull, 2018).

Table 4.11

Tools to Assess Spelling

Spelling Assessment Tool Assessment	Number of Schools
South Australian Spelling Test (Westwood, 2005)	9
Spelling (no specific tool named)	8
Words Their Way (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2008)	4
Single Word Spelling Test (Sacre & Masterson, 2000)	3
SoundWaves (Firefly Education, n.d.)	2
PAT Spelling (ACER, 2015)	1

Key sociocultural theorists have lamented how literacy in more recent times has been reduced to a fragmented set of reading skills (Derewianka & Chen, 2009; Ewing, 2006; G. Moss, 2017), and these skills are often reproduced in commercially produced literacy teaching and assessment programs for teachers to use, as seen currently with the focus on the teaching and assessment of phonics being reported as a panacea for the teaching of reading in the early years.

The low response to the assessment of writing could be attributed to the fact that a formal writing assessment tool was not mandated during the prescriptive assessment period (1998–2008), but it also could be attributed to a more recent focus on the component skills identified as necessary for reading development. Derewianka and Chen (2009) identified that a backlash to the whole language movement of the 1980s resulted in an inquiry into the teaching of literacy, which they noted was revised to an inquiry into the teaching of reading (Rowe, 2005). The report from this inquiry highlighted, “Findings from the research evidence indicate that all students learn best when teachers adopt an integrated approach to reading that explicitly teaches phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge and comprehension” (p. 11). Although the excerpt highlights an integrated approach, it is used by some to

support the explicit and decontextualised teaching and assessing of phonics (Derewianka & Chen, 2009).

The reading assessments identified by participants reflected the five key areas that have been identified as facilitating reading development by the National Institute of Child Health and Development (2000) in the United States and the National Inquiry Into the Teaching of Reading (Rowe, 2005) in Australia. These five areas are

- phonemic awareness;
- phonics;
- fluency;
- vocabulary;
- comprehension.

Oral language competence has also been recognised as a fundamental factor in literacy development (Dougherty, 2014; Raban, 2014; Richgels, 2004), and Konza (2014) asserted that it should be added to the list of the key five identified by Rowe (2005). The assessment of oral language was a requirement during the mandated and prescriptive assessment period and is still required by CEM. One literacy leader, in a discursive comment, expressed concerns over the tool mandated by the CEM to assess oral language: "The Marie Clay ROL [record of oral language] is long winded and was never designed for use with EAL [English as an additional language] learners. There are much better and more succinct oral language assessments available now" (Literacy Leader, School 9). This is a clear example of a literacy leader interrogating policy. Although the Record of Oral Language (ROL) is still compulsory in all Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese to assess oral language in the early years, some respondents interrogated its mandated use. Many literacy leaders also identified other ways to assess oral language, as illustrated in the following:

> Our school has begun investigating oral language and the language abilities that the children have when they begin at school. We have data about receptive and expressive language competencies in our children when they begin school. We are using this information to plan for the learning experiences. (Literacy Leader, School 27).

Schools with larger cohorts of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds highlighted the importance of assessing oral language competence; 27 respondents were from schools with EAL students, identifying that they used tools in addition to the mandated ROL to assess aspects of oral language.

Literacy leaders acknowledged that the six key areas identified by Konza (2014) contributed to reading success and were important in terms of teaching and assessment, some were identified more than others as illustrated in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12

Number of Literacy Leaders Identifying Key Areas

Big Six	Number of Literacy Leaders Identifying As an Assessed Area
Oral language	76
Phonics	76
Fluency	76
Comprehension	62
Phonemic awareness	23
Vocabulary	10

Interestingly, the debates in the media around literacy often centre on the teaching and assessment of phonics. The data gathered from the 76 schools indicated that all schools assessed phonic knowledge.

The final question asked respondents if they were willing to participate in Phase 2 of the research, and 56 respondents consented. These 56 schools were grouped according to their response as to whether they thought their assessment practices had changed *significantly*, *moderately*, or *not at all* since 2012. As only one school identified that its assessment practices had not changed since 2012, this school was automatically invited to be one of the eight schools to participate in Phase 2 of the research and accepted the invitation. Four selected schools identified moderate changes to their literacy assessment in the early years, and three selected schools identified significant changes to their assessment practices since the devolution. These eight schools were also invited to participate for their demographic diversity, as well as the specific responses to the questionnaire that set them apart from other schools. This selection of

eight diverse schools provided insight into the range of literacy assessment practices of early years teachers in the Melbourne archdiocese. Further information on the schools can be found in Appendix H.

This theme illustrates that schools used the autonomy afforded them through the policy change of 2012, which allowed greater autonomy over literacy assessment in the early years, to adopt an additional range of commercially produced tools to assess a range of literacy skills. Schools embraced the opportunity to assess comprehension in more formal ways, which was lacking during the mandated and prescriptive assessment period.

4.5 Summary

The questionnaire used in Phase 1 to gather information from the 76 school literacy leaders on literacy assessment practices in the early years provided a broad range of information through the open-ended and closed questions. Emerging from this was that after devolution of decision-making around assessment to schools by the system, most schools still used many assessment tools that were mandated prior to 2012 but made changes to those specific aspects they used. From the responses, it was evident most schools engaged in more assessment than in the mandated prior to 2012, including the use of a range of commercially produced literacy assessment tools.

The devolution of assessment to schools enabled greater autonomy, although it appeared for the most part that the same types of literacy skills and understandings were being assessed as during the mandated and prescriptive assessment period, such as letter knowledge, word knowledge, and decoding. It also seemed that these skills were being assessed using multiple tools. The schools had also added several formal, evidence-based tools in the form of commercially produced literacy assessment packages to assess literacy in the early years, and these varied from school to school, although many schools identified they were using multiple formal tools to assess decoding and comprehension.

It is evident that schools were assessing across the modes of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, although reading assessments seemed more prevalent than other assessments. The assessment autonomy afforded schools appeared to be highly influenced by current neoliberal discourse around quantifying literacy learning. The role

of publishers in recontextualising this neoliberal discourse was evident with schools using formal, evidence-based literacy assessment tools produced by publishers as part of their assessment routine.

The Phase 1 data indicated that schools, when offered the opportunity of literacy assessment autonomy, did not engage in an assessment revolution; rather, it could be described as more of a shifting of the sands. Bernstein, in discussing the politics of recontextualisation, asserted, “The positions remain but the players change” (p. 68). The Phase 1 data indicated the system still had an official role, but the new “players” could be identified as the publishers and their commercially produced literacy assessment tools that teachers used to assess literacy in the early years.

The Phase 1 results were used to purposefully select eight schools for Phase 2 of the research. Phase 2 involved semistructured interviews with the literacy leaders and early years teachers from the eight schools selected, and it investigated what literacy assessment devolution and autonomy ultimately meant for the early years educators’ current assessment practices. Phase 2 explored further the literacy assessment beliefs and practices of early years teachers and the extent to which teachers took the opportunity to interrogate, innovate on, resist, or accept both previously mandated and current literacy assessment priorities and practices. The results of Phase 2 of the research are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 5. Phase 2 Interviews: Results, Analysis, and Discussion of School-Level Issues

A Complex Narrative

> If you're working with children, you should be able to find out as much—even more information than if you're testing them. (Janine, Foundation, School 3)

Chapter 4 presented an analysis and discussion of the data from Phase 1 of the research gathered through an online questionnaire consisting of both open-ended and closed questions completed by 76 literacy leaders from 76 Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese. I designed the questionnaire to elicit information on schools' literacy assessment practices in the early years and to determine if these had changed since a Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) policy change in 2012 that allowed schools greater autonomy in terms of decision-making and implementing literacy assessment. The questionnaire, as discussed in Chapter 4, was used to elicit information on system-wide trends around schools' responses to the assessment devolution and to determine which eight schools would be invited to participate in Phase 2 of the research. The questionnaire revealed that schools had retained many aspects of the previously mandated and prescriptive literacy assessments, although they were using them in much more flexible ways, choosing which tools to use and when and with whom they would use them. An increased use of formal evidence-based assessments was also apparent, particularly commercially produced literacy assessment packages. The influence of educational publishers was clear, as illustrated by teachers' wide-ranging use of formal literacy assessment tools produced by publishers such as Pearson, Corwin, Cengage, and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

Phase 2 involved conducting 30 semistructured interviews with 23 early years teachers and seven literacy leaders[1] from eight purposefully selected schools to find out how these teachers responded to the opportunities that came with devolved decision-making. This phase of the research sought to inquire into the extent to which participants took the opportunity to interrogate, innovate on, resist, or accept both previously mandated and current literacy assessment priorities and practices. Further, Phase 2 sought to find out what this strategy of literacy assessment devolution and autonomy ultimately meant for the early years educators' assessment beliefs and practices.

The purposive selection of the eight schools was based on the degree to which literacy leaders identified their assessment practices had changed following the devolution of authority to schools, as well as demographic factors including school size, location, and students' socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds. Further information on each school can be found in Chapter 3 (Table 3.1) and in Appendix D.

In this chapter, I analyse and discuss the data collected in Phase 2 of the research. A systematic analysis of the data established four themes that can be described as "grounded" in the data (Namey et al., 2008). In line with Butler-Kisber's (2010) ideas around interpreting data, this chapter provides a rich written discussion of the themes. I discuss each theme and illuminate them with participant quotations to honour their voices. I also make links to relevant literature to support the findings and provide further validity. This chapter explores the first three themes: (1) Engaging with Assessment, (2) Assessment Expertise, and (3) Assessment Conceptions. These themes relate specifically to teachers' experiences of assessment at the school level. The fourth theme is addressed in Chapter 6 and looks at how current sociocultural politics impact early years teachers' literacy assessment.

First, the theme of "engaging with assessment" is addressed. The early years educators' literacy assessment practices are discussed, and how they engaged with literacy assessment to support learners' needs is highlighted. In the second theme "assessment expertise", early years educators' assessment expertise is explored in

[1] In one of the schools, the literacy leader was on extended leave and was unable to participate in the interviews, but the Foundation teacher was acting as literacy leader in her absence.

relation to how they used the data gathered through literacy assessments and how they managed the current accountability agenda while supporting students' needs in the early years. Finally, the theme "assessment conceptions" is investigated, including early years educators' beliefs and understandings in relation to literacy assessment and the types of language they used to discuss literacy assessment. This theme also explores how schools differentiated their literacy assessment practices based on the school context. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the key influencers impacting early years teachers' literacy assessment.

5.1 Engaging With Assessment

> This professional capacity to integrate and utilize assessment to effectively facilitate student learning has long been characterized as teachers' "assessment literacy," or more recently "assessment competency," and "assessment capability". (DeLuca et al., 2019)

Data analysis in this section relates to the theme of "engaging with assessment" and illustrates the early years teachers' rich and complex narratives. Clear findings concerning teachers' literacy assessment practices in a devolved assessment landscape are evident. Phase 2 data reveal patterns of acceptance of existing forms of assessment coupled with examples of innovation. In some instances, there are examples of teachers taking a critical stance and engaging in an interrogation of contemporary literacy assessment requirements in the early years, although evidence of resistance of current system, state, and national assessment policies and priorities is not as forthcoming.

5.1.1 Assessment Practices

Apparent across the eight schools was consistency in many literacy assessment practices. These practices showed an acceptance and reproduction of the principles outlined in key policies from CEM, state education departments, and the national association overseeing teaching standards (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL]). I discussed the key features of these policies in the literature review, Chapter 2. Overall, these policies call for teachers to engage in six essential assessment practices, which are to

1. engage in the assessment of the modes of speaking, listening, reading, and writing;
2. engage in a range of assessments including formal, informal, formative, diagnostic, and summative;
3. use assessment to provide feedback to students;
4. engage in moderation processes to ensure consistent judgements are made;
5. interpret data to monitor and modify teaching and learning;
6. use data gathered to report to key stakeholders.

As well as teachers reproducing these six key assessment practices, there was also general agreement from the 30 participants in terms of what literacy knowledge was essential to assess; this aligned with the key areas set out in the Australian and Victorian English curriculums. Teachers reported assessing the modes of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This demonstrates that teachers accepted key curriculum mandates from the government and Catholic system. However, a more nuanced analysis revealed that the devolution of assessment had resulted in a range of views and approaches to literacy assessment across the eight schools. These views and approaches are discussed in turn.

5.1.2 Critique and Use of Literacy Assessment Tools

As discussed in the Phase 1 data analysis, there was an increased use of commercially produced tools to assess literacy in the early years. When viewed through the lens of Bernstein's (1996, 2000) pedagogic device the influence from educational publishers in recontextualising pedagogic discourse for teachers to use is evident. In this instance, publishers produce literacy assessments that allow teachers to produce numerical data as evidence of learning. This was investigated further in Phase 2. All teachers involved in this phase identified using commercially produced reading assessment text level kits for running records, although not all schools were using the same kits or were using them as frequently. Some of the teachers who used commercially produced running records spoke about levels and monitoring growth over time. Nick, a Year 2 teacher, noted that early years teachers should be keeping up with

tracking text levels through the use of a commercially produced literacy assessment resource throughout the year for each child: "We do a running record monthly to work out their text level and see if they are ready to move up a level" (Nick, Year 2, School 7). This comment indicates a more summative approach to assessment with the focus on text level attainment rather than students' needs.

Another teacher questioned if using the commercially produced tools was about finding out the student's needs or whether it was more a summative approach used for reporting: "So, that's where I struggle; is it for the student or is it for me to be able to report under a framework or something?" (Benita, Foundation, School 5).

All teachers interviewed identified a range of commercially produced tools they used as part of their assessment routine. The literacy leaders spoke about these tools in a very positive way, noting it allowed them to have visible quantifiable data to track the children and to track change over time. Mercy, a literacy leader, noted the importance of adding value to children's learning and stated:

> We've been doing PAT-R for about 3 or 4 years, and our biggest work is with our value added. So, every year, we sit with the data and we look at where the child was last year and what did we value add. And the message that I give teachers is, "It's our job to add 12 months, but let's look at the kids that we did value add 12 months. Let's look at who we value added more than 12 months. Let's look at what we did there to help value add 12. And let's look at the kids who didn't make 12 months". (Mercy, Literacy Leader, School 8)

However, many of the classroom teachers spoke about these commercially produced tools as being a school-based mandated requirement and expressed frustration with their use. They questioned the use of these tools in terms of the time they took to administer and not feeling supported with using the data from the assessment to inform future teaching, as the following two quotations indicate:

> We're a Visible Learning school and that has a requirement that we have to put in the PAT testing results at the end of each year. I don't personally use it for my teaching and it doesn't inform of my teaching and I'm not sure if the result—I think the results are passed on from prep to the Grade 1 and 2 teachers. I'm not sure how much they use them though. (Jem, Foundation, School 6)

> We do PAT testing and that was brought in the beginning of last year, and if I'm brutally honest again, I haven't really used that to any degree. (Giulia, Years 1/2, School 5)

It is clear that most of the teachers in Phase 2 of the research did not find the commercially produced tools useful. One Foundation teacher questioned the use of such formal tools for children in their first year at school. She was mandated by the school's leadership team to administer a standardised, commercially produced literacy reading assessment tool to her Foundation students and described it as "horrendous". She went further, saying, "They [the students] had no concept of how to complete something like that, and what was expected of them, or to even listen to it. It was a waste of time" (Janine, Foundation, School 3).

The differing views of the teachers to the literacy leaders concerning these commercially produced literacy assessment tools could be attributed to their differing roles; the literacy leaders were responsible for tracking and managing school-wide literacy data and for the overall big picture, reporting this to the school leadership team and often to the school community. One literacy leader compared using the commercially produced literacy assessments to teacher judgement, stating,

> So, the standardised [assessments] helps us know how we're travelling in relation to everybody else, and the teacher judgement ones that we do along the way helps teachers to know what they're doing and to inform their daily practice. So, that's how I see it. (Mercy, Literacy Leader, School 8)

Conversely, a classroom teacher at a different school, although not dismissive of the school's mandated use of the commercially produced assessment tool used to assess reading, spoke about its limitations:

> I take a lot of notes and looking at the behaviour of the child as well as what they deliver at the end, like with the testing, you get a number at the end of it, but it's not showing you what their thinking was or what they were doing at the time. Were they distracted? I think that there's a relevance to it [the published assessment tool], but there's got to be more to the picture than looking at the percentages. (Sue, Year 1, School 3)

The data indicated that literacy leaders in schools were making decisions about the commercially published tools they would use as part of the school's literacy assessment. It was evident that most schools had mandated their own school level assessments. These were sometimes documented in the form of a school-based assessment schedules (Appendix I), or sometimes, the teachers relied on being told what assessments were required by the literacy leader or leadership team. It was also evident that teachers were complying with school-based mandates for administering these types of assessments. The teachers were doing what the school required, but they did not always appear to understand why they were using the school-mandated tools, or identified that they did not know how to use the data obtained from these assessments, or expressed dissatisfaction with these commercially produced literacy assessment tools.

It appears that the pressure to have quantifiable data had given rise to the publishers having a level of autonomy over the literacy assessment practices of the early years teachers in this research. Chen and Derewianka (2009) stated that teachers' fear and mistrust of the media's reporting of poor literacy standards could lead to collusion between the government and educational systems who have an official responsibility for recontextualising knowledge to be reproduced by teachers and those with less official power but who also have a strong recontextualising role, such as publishers. The neoliberal discourse around the importance of quantifiable data has provided a marketing opportunity for publishers. This research revealed that publishers appear to have a high degree of influence on schools in terms of schools buying and using commercially produced literacy assessment tools that provide this quantifiable data. Netolicky, Andrews, and Paterson (2019) discussed the emphasis on numerical quantifiable data that has led to education being seen as a commodity by publishers, and they, too, identified the media's role in creating a distrust of teachers, which in turn has created a climate in which "corporate data solutions are increasingly being peddled in the Australian context" (p. 2).

This research revealed that the devolution of assessment has resulted in teachers questioning and reflecting on the remaining system-mandated assessment practices. Many teachers expressed concerns about the mandated tool used to assess oral language and had investigated new and innovative ways to gather information on their

students' oral language skills. Teachers discussed the importance of engaging with children through one-to-one interactions and noted this gave them much richer data than more formal oral language assessments:

> We have a one-on-one conference time with the children. And it's those days where I actually tap into that one specific child to figure out their sentence structure, see what they're like with actually turn taking and things like that and I find that's the time where I actually focus in on their oral language. I find out much more than any test. (Isabella, Foundation, School 7)

The data illustrate that many teachers valued oral language in line with many theorists (S. Hill & Launder, 2010; Konza, 2014; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) and engaged in assessing it in both formal and informal ways. One school had innovated and developed their own assessment tool to assess oral language that required engaging in real conversations with students. The following two excerpts illustrate teachers valuing engagement with children in conversations to assess their oral language:

> We did develop our own Speaking and Listening Assessment Tool which we called SLAT, Speaking and Listening Assessment Tool, where we used that notion of having a child talk around a set of pictures. (Chrysanthi, Literacy Leader, School 4)

> Probably their language sample that comes completely from them [the children]. That's where you're getting the richest information rather than the Record of Oral Language where they've been given a sentence to repeat. (Nelly, Foundation, School 8)

Passive resistance to the remaining system's mandated record of oral language (ROL) assessment was evident as teachers sought or designed innovative alternative assessment practices that they saw as more effective and relevant.

5.1.3 Then and Now: Responding to Official Policy

The introduction of the Australian Curriculum (AC) in 2012 provided teachers with a clear mandate for what was to be taught and assessed in terms of literacy. It is evident that the new curriculum had resulted in new aspects of literacy being assessed

that had not been assessed during the mandated and prescriptive assessment period (1998–2012). One such area was related to phonological awareness.

Teaching and assessing phonological awareness was an innovation across the eight schools, with many teachers identifying it as an essential aspect of literacy that needed to be both taught and assessed. One teacher noted that the school had used research to help them with making decisions about introducing phonological awareness: “So obviously, the phonological stuff has a lot of research backing it. So, if we’re going to spend a lot of time doing something, we need to know it works” (Nelly, Foundation, School 8).

Annie, a Foundation teacher from School 4, and Nelly, a Foundation teacher from School 8, described phonological awareness as the building block for reading and writing development. This reflects the robust research evidence demonstrating a link between phonological awareness and the ability to learn to read and spell; S. Hill (2012) described it as a necessary precursor to decoding. Annie also described what aspects she assessed using a tool she had come across during professional development. She had a clear understanding of the aspects of phonological awareness that needed to be assessed: “Whether they can hear consonants in words, vowels and words, syllables, rhyme, the number of words in a sentence, things like that” (Annie, Foundation, School 4).

The increased interest in phonological awareness from the schools appeared to be influenced by contemporary policy shifts. Since 2012, there have been some major changes in Australia’s educational landscape. In 2012, a new national Australian curriculum was established, which sets out what is to be taught and the expected standards for each year level from Foundation to Year 10. A change in government resulted in a review of the AC in 2014, which resulted in the “strengthening” of phonics and phonemic awareness as part of the early years curriculum. This “strengthening” came about after consulting selected experts in the field and using available research (Primary English Teaching Association [PETAA], n.d.). The PETAA outlined this change, stating, “The sound and letter knowledge sub-strand of the language strand has been strengthened and renamed phonics and word knowledge, comprising three threads:

phonological and phonemic awareness, alphabet and phonic knowledge, and spelling" (PETAA, n.d.).

The review of the AC provides a good example of the tensions prevalent in the recontextualising field of the pedagogic device. Those charged with recontextualising hold the power, and in the case of the review, the newly elected liberal government selected two reviewers who held particular views on the English curriculum; the review enabled them a platform for those views. The reviewers, after consulting with so-called "experts", called for a renewed emphasis on the early years and stated a need for a "back-to-basics" approach, with a focus on literacy and numeracy. They discussed literacy in limited terms, calling for an emphasis on the teaching of reading, with a focus on phonics in the first 2 years of schooling. The conflating of literacy teaching with the teaching of reading in the early years is part of the back-to-basics approach that is, as discussed in the literature review, a cause of ongoing tension for researchers in the literacy field. It appears that the advocates for a back-to-basics approach may be gaining greater authority in terms of recontextualised policy, as seen with the revisions made to literacy in the early years in the AC.

The so-called "research" that filtered through the AC review was called into question by Zyngier, who was critical of the reviewers' limited use of empirical research (see Adoniou, Louden, Zyngier, and Riddle, 2014). In the same article, Adoniou noted the AC reviewers' criticism of the whole-language approach to literacy teaching was unfounded as the AC made no mention of whole language and noted the AC already focused on phonics (Adoniou et al., 2014). The reviewers used neoliberal discourse to support their claim for a back-to-basics approach, citing Australia's declining performance in international and national testing, a clear example of Iorio and Tanabe's (2015) concepts of the readiness chain being pushed right down to the early years. Adoniou was also critical of the call for a back-to-basics approach, stating that schools in Australia were getting the basics right, as evidenced in the Year 3 NAPLAN (National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy) data, and called for a reconceptualisation of education beyond the basics to ensure that our students have the necessary literacy skills. She stated,

> It's time to change tack. Our attention needs to focus on developing the deep comprehension skills of our upper-primary and high school students. And our teachers need—and want—the resources and the professional learning to help them do this . . . It isn't the basics that are missing in Australian education; it is challenge and complexity. (Adoniou, 2017, para. 26)

The review of the AC promoted a pedagogic discourse around a back-to-basics approach through strengthening the teaching of phonics in the early years. Although the AC does not state how phonics should be taught or assessed, this pedagogic discourse among those doing the recontextualising has enabled publishers and professional learning providers a platform to promote their ideologies and sell their wares to schools for teachers to reproduce in the classroom. This provides teachers with a sense of confidence that they are complying with the expectations of the AC. It is a clear example of those with an official and less official role in recontextualising knowledge gaining greater autonomy through policy (AC) and product (published literacy assessment tools) over what is reproduced by teachers in schools. The official discourse on the importance of phonics and phonological awareness in the early years was recontextualised in the revised curriculum and appeared to be impacting the literacy assessments that teachers in this study were reproducing.

The influence of new policy directives was also evident in the teachers' approaches to writing assessment. There was no specific writing assessment for schools to use during the mandated and prescriptive assessment period (1998–2012), although teachers were encouraged to engage in ongoing assessment and monitoring of students' writing. This research revealed that most teachers felt more confident speaking about their reading and oral language assessment compared to writing assessment. One teacher went as far as saying, "We don't really do any proper writing assessment, like we do in reading" (Jem, Foundation, School 6).

Teachers, in discussing writing assessment, identified writing moderation as a form of writing assessment:

> With the writing, it's just at mid year and end of year, and we do the moderating. We usually come up with a common task through all the grades—a link—a prompt, whether it be a picture or writing and we have a discussion with our own grade and then they write from that, and then we come together with the teachers and moderate those pieces. (Marcia, Years 1/2, School 2)

Once again, this shift to a more formal writing assessment can be directly linked to the introduction of the AC and national standards, which are used for teaching and reporting. There is an expectation that teachers assess and report against these standards with accuracy and consistency twice a year. ACER was commissioned in 2007 to investigate teachers' reporting based on standards. The ensuing report by Meiers, Ozolins, and McKenzie (2007) highlighted the need for consistency in teacher judgement within and across schools:

> Teachers' judgements against standards provide information that is used for a range of purposes, and it is essential that there is consistency in these judgements between teachers in the same school, across different schools, and over time. Approaches to developing such consistency are therefore seen to play a vital role in strengthening assessment practices, and in increasing the validity and reliability of reporting against curriculum and standards frameworks. (p. iv)

The ACER report also highlighted the critical role of teachers engaging in moderation meetings to support consistent judgement, noting that this type of collaboration leads to meaningful professional learning. The importance of consistent judgement is reflected in Lyly's comment: "I like to moderate because you get an idea of what other students are doing and you sort of talk to your colleagues because sometimes I might be harder on marking my students than my colleagues" (Lyly, Years 1/2, School 4).

An official key message from the government and Catholic system is the requirement for teachers to report against curriculum standards. There is an expectation that teachers assess consistently, not only within the school but across schools, systems, and states. All teachers interviewed commented on moderating processes they used for writing to facilitate the process of reporting against standards.

Connolly, Klenowski, and Wyatt-Smith's (2012) research highlighted this, noting that most teachers were positive about moderation to determine a student's progress but there could be contextual differences in terms of teachers' attitudes. To overcome this, they suggested, "It is vital that the particular context of teachers is considered in efforts to promote teachers' professional learning, develop their assessment capacity and provide them with an opportunity to participate in system-level standards-referenced reporting" (p. 613). One of the teachers interviewed in Phase 2 reiterated this:

> I think writing moderation is really important especially with teachers with different—not expectations, but different views, because we've had—when we moderated it the middle of the year last year, and we had—looking at AusVELS [Australian Victorian Essential Learning Standards] and other standards where we thought and some teachers had the progression point 2.5 where another teacher had the same writing piece down at 1.5. So, I think that's really important too, for reporting, to make sure that we're all on the same page of where we see students are at. (Elly, Years 1/2, School 1)

All schools had moderation processes in place, but these were mostly spoken about in terms of reporting and therefore occurred twice a year for the mid year and final year reports. This type of assessment emulated the NAPLAN writing assessment, whereby children were expected to write based on a prompt they had not seen before and write under test-like conditions. The current state review of NAPLAN identified that the NAPLAN approach to writing assessment has led to a formulaic rehearsed approach to writing (Carey & Baker, 2019). In need of further attention is the contradiction between teachers' discussions concerning NAPLAN, as outlined in Chapter 6; teachers were critical of NAPLAN assessment and yet they reproduced this style of assessment themselves. Darling-Hammond and Adamson (2010) identified the emulating of test-like conditions for school-based assessments as a product of a neoliberal climate with a focus on high-stakes testing. Many teachers articulated that moderation was done for reporting purposes. The following comment reflects this:

> We do two moderated assessments. If there's a particular genre we're looking at for writing, we end up, at the end, a unit or a series of writing, we'll have to do an independent task and then from there, we moderate it. So, we look at what we think is our standard and what we think maybe is at the low standard and above standard and—that's mainly for our reports. (Jem, Foundation, School 6)

Teachers also spoke about assessing writing in an ongoing way by looking at children's writing and engaging in conferences with them. One teacher, Elly, was very comprehensive in explaining her approach to writing assessment, which included writing assessment, conferences, and the use of rubrics:

> We're looking at their sentence structure. We were looking to see also what the verb choice they're using in the writing, present and past tense, whether they're using complex or compound sentences, whether they're using a capital letter, full stop at the end of a sentence. Also, from this year, we looked at whether they're using appropriate prefixes and suffixes, and whether they know "ing" at the end and the sounds that they make. I just annotate their writing. (Elly, Years 1/2, School 1)

It was evident that although teachers had increased autonomy through a devolution of assessment, other government-based policies and priorities, including the AC and national testing, had resulted in schools refocusing their literacy assessment to align with these policy directives.

5.1.4 Authentic Assessment

Teachers articulated feeling confident in their own ability to assess the students through authentic contextualised literacy assessment obtained through planned teaching and assessment opportunities. In the following excerpt, the teacher discussed how running records taken on texts used during guided reading, if used well, could provide more information than the formal published running record tools used to determine a text level:

> When done well and thoroughly, running records work very well because you can use it to assess a whole lot of different things. Everything—even concepts about print can be assessed in the running record. Comprehension can be assessed with running record. Fluency can be assessed with running record. So, if that's done well and analysed, then that's a really good tool. (Nick, Year 2, School 7)

Clay (2013) stated running records are a highly accurate way of measuring reading through teachers engaging in error and self-correction analysis and engaging in conversations with children around the text they are reading. Janine, a Foundation teacher, reiterated Clay's point:

> I think it [the running record] tells you more than what their level is and particularly as you're assessing them, you might be looking at what strategies the children are using. So, those children that might need more assistance with how to sound out words or decoding or whatever. So, it's observing what they're doing during that assessment. (Janine, Foundation, School 2)

Nat's following comment illustrates the belief that embedding assessment within the teaching process is the most authentic and strategic way to gather comprehensive data on students as opposed to using a range of fragmented, commercially produced standardised assessments:

> I mean, I just can't go past guided reading sessions. They're not formal assessment but they give me more information in a 20-minute period or a 15-minute period than I would get doing every single one of those tests simply because those tests are so—they look at—the tests are almost narrow, if that makes sense. They look at only one aspect of what the child's doing, not the whole picture, whereas when—especially with a running record or in a guided reading session, when they're actually reading a text in context . . . So, I'm looking at their use of punctuation, their decoding, their comprehension, their fluency, their expression—I'm able to almost tick off so many different parts of assessment that I would have to implement six different tests for. (Nat, Year 1, School 7)

Janine was critical of the use of formal published tools for assessment in the early years and noted she had openly expressed her dislike of these types of tools at school staff meetings:

> I'm not very popular at staff meetings, but I've said it before at staff meetings, if you're having to find out all the information from a Fountas & Pinnell test, about your kids, you don't know them at all. If you're working with children, you should be able to find out as much—more information than if you're testing them. (Janine, Foundation, School 3)

Janine, like Nat, stressed the need for teachers to build relationships with the students and to use teaching opportunities to gain as much authentic information as possible about a child rather than using a commercially produced assessment tool.

Other teachers described how analysing a piece of writing produced by a child provided authentic information about their strengths and needs and helped determine the next teaching point:

> I look for their hearing and recording sounds in words, I look at their level of independence, their use of high-frequency words, whether their spelling attempts are plausible, the composition of their sentences, whether they're able to reread their work as well as part of the editing. And of course, with the focus on punctuation for juniors. (Benita, Foundation, School 5)

> We're always analysing to see where we need to go, so who is not adding those extra details to the sentences, trying to get them to write more complex sentences, so that they're grabbing the reader's interest and it's making clearer pictures for the readers of their work and what's happening in the story. Also, looking at punctuation and spelling. (Kelly, Years 1/2, School 8)

It was evident across the schools that teachers and literacy leaders were investigating approaches to more authentic approaches to assessment. Some discussed this in relation to reading and gathering data, through teaching situations, oral language, and finding out about a student's strengths and needs through interacting in conversations with the students, and in writing, by looking at a piece of writing to

determine a range of skills, including knowledge of letters, sounds, and spelling patterns as a form of assessment.

Phase 2 participants identified authentic assessment catering for the diverse needs of learners as important, particularly assessing the oral language needs of students for whom English is an additional language/dialect (EAL/D). The acronym EAL/D refers to those students whose home language is a language or dialect other than Standard Australian English (SAE) (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2014). One teacher expressed concern at the lack of tools to assess EAL students: "In terms of EAL learners, I don't know if there's anything that I could say; 'Yep, that really helps me with identifying the EAL knowledge or needs' or what you have to do" (Lyly, Years 1/2, School 4).

Many teachers spoke about how they adapted their teaching and assessment to meet the oral language needs of EAL/D children. In School 7 where there was a high proportion of EAL/D students, this was clearly a focus:

> I have six children on the EAL/D continuum this year, so when I'm walking around, I listen to the conversations that they're having with the students and I go in, I provoke a bit of discussion and then I leave and then I listen to what they're saying. So, it's more of an informal way of doing it but that's probably been the most effective of monitoring their oral language. (Isabella, Foundation, School 7)

This comment reveals this teacher's understanding of the critical role of oral language in the EAL/D contexts. For many teachers, the mandated assessment for oral language was no longer appropriate. Rather, authentic assessment of the EAL/D learner, entailing more intuitive, informal assessment obtained through classroom experiences, provided them with more valid understandings about their students and their needs.

5.1.5 Summative Comment: Engaging With Assessment

As the assessment landscape changes, with a focus on accountability and standards-based teaching and an expectation for teachers to enact student-centred pedagogies and student-directed assessments, educators are required to employ

assessment for a variety of purposes and use a variety of assessment practices (DeLuca & Bellara, 2013; DeLuca & Johnson, 2017). It was evident that teachers across the eight schools were employing a variety of literacy assessments for a range of purposes. They were aware of the importance of assessment to inform teaching and learning, but they also were generally compliant with collecting data for accountability purposes, whether this was mandated by the system or by the school. Some teachers, particularly the more experienced, questioned the mandated data requirements, but this was more in the form of passive resistance. There was a difference in how teachers saw the mandated standardised assessments compared to the literacy leaders.

Many factors impact teachers' capacity to assess literacy effectively, both within and outside their control. Looney, Cumming, van der Kleij, and Harris (2017) reiterated this point, drawing on the work of others:

> Assessment is seen as a sociocultural activity that involves social interactions among stakeholders and the nature of learning itself (Broadfoot, 1996; Gipps, 2012). It occurs in a social context, influenced by national and state policies, expected learning (curriculum), pedagogical directions, and community expectations. Teacher assessment knowledge is therefore a complex structure rather than a simple set of delineated skills that can be implemented in any context. (pp. 444–445)

Teachers traversed the literacy assessment landscape in a variety of ways. There is clear evidence of their assessment showing acceptance of current government and system assessment mandates and policies, with teachers assessing across the modes of literacy as outlined in both the Australian and Victorian curricula. There is also evidence of teachers being influenced by commercially based standardised assessment, with teachers referring to a broad range of tools they used as part of their literacy assessment repertoire. However, teachers were very clear in identifying teacher judgement as being crucial in terms of authentic assessment.

5.2 Assessment Expertise

> Assessment is an integral and essential component of effective learning, teaching and educational decision-making. (Masters, 2013a, p. 64)

This theme explores the early years teachers' reporting of their expertise in engaging with the data gained from the assessments and what they identified as influencing their assessment practices.

5.2.1 Engaging With the Data

Timperley's (2008) inquiry and knowledge-building cycle, and the clinical teaching model, as discussed by Kriewaldt, McLean Davies, Rice, Rickards, and Acquaro (2017), highlighted teachers needing to have the expertise to act upon data gathered. Many teachers discussed feeling confident with gathering the data but needed greater support with using the data:

> It's fine collecting it but then doing something with it. So, I think it's really important that we have something that can help us a little bit more about what to do with these data because we're expected to do it, collect it. I don't know there's been a lot of support doing that [using the data]. (Mia, Years 1/2, School 8)

Hattie (ACER, 2018), in an interview conducted by the ACER for its *Teacher Magazine*, noted teachers do not need another assessment tool or data set; they need support with interpreting the data. Many teachers reiterated this point, as illustrated in Mia's previous comment and this from Jen: "But I think in analysing the data that we collect, it's all great to collect it all. I'd like to use it more effectively in my teaching. We need more knowledge" (Jen, Years 1/2, School 2).

The literacy leaders discussed having a school culture around professional learning teams (PLTs) that enabled teachers to engage with the data, as illustrated by the following two comments:

> We always look at the data and ask the questions, "Is this right? Do we think this is a true indication of where this child is?" (Ellen, Literacy Leader, School 2)

> I mean that's something else we've developed all the years but we're all learners, so in our learning communities, so it's a learning culture, and being really focused about what we do. (Chrysanthi, Literacy Leader, School 4)

One method of engaging with the data required teachers coming together to share and discuss the data. This is discussed next.

5.2.2 Collaboration

All schools said they had mechanisms in place for teachers to work collaboratively to share the data. This was usually through facilitated planning that occurred in dedicated planning sessions, during the school day when teachers were released to meet to look at the data, or at PLT meetings that occurred after school. These meetings took place at regular intervals, usually fortnightly, and were facilitated by the school's literacy leader. One teacher in describing these PLT meetings stated,

> The PLTs are very clear and we get regular updates on what's coming up, and what we need to prepare for, or what the PLT next week is going be focusing on this. "Can you bring 10 samples of different kids' work that will show the focus?" (Simone, Years 1/2, School 1)

There is strong evidence to support building teachers' expertise by using data through collaborative, school-based, and classroom-embedded professional learning (DeLuca & Bellara, 2013; DeLuca & Johnson, 2017; Jimerson & Wayman, 2015). The teachers interviewed spoke very positively about opportunities to work in PLTs to analyse the data, as indicated by Mercy, a literacy leader:

> It's definitely at a PLT and we would definitely spend most of the first term and little bit of second term still grouping and talking about the information that that data has given us as a way of what to focus on for the year, things to put into our program. (Mercy, Literacy Leader, School 8)

Teachers discussed the many ways data were used at regular PLT meetings to inform teaching. They spoke about the meetings having a clear purpose and structure, which assisted them in building an understanding of how to use the data, as Desi discussed:

> But it's getting into that habit of bringing data and using their photos of students' work, their videos, their focus books on a weekly basis to go, "Right. This is what we observed this week. How are we going use it in the following week?" (Desi, Literacy Leader, School 1)

There was consensus among the teachers that opportunities to come together to analyse and discuss the data were beneficial to them as teachers. Teachers saw these meetings as opportunities to discuss the data and future learning opportunities based on the data. They discussed the collegial approach as supporting them to develop as professionals. This idea aligns with Earl (2005) who stated,

> When educators come to the planning process as investigators, wanting to understand and interested in working together and with others to find the best solutions, they find themselves engaged in a very different kind of organisation that values dissenting voices and is determined to generate and share knowledge, even when the new knowledge may mean having to make dramatic changes and even reinvent themselves. (p. 9)

Collaborative approaches to analysing the data appeared to support the teachers in building assessment capacity and enabled them to share knowledge and support each other in terms of working out the next steps for students' learning.

5.2.3 Frustration

Teachers' frustration was evident in terms of embracing autonomy while being constrained by working in an era characterised by high levels of accountability. A teacher who had been teaching for over 20 years and had experienced a great deal of professional autonomy early in her career stated,

> Because I've been in the education for over 20 years, and I've seen things come and go, I sometimes wish that we didn't have to do quite as much assessment and we could concentrate on the teaching. So, I get a little frustrated. I know we need to be accountable and I think we are, but sometimes I think there is too much assessment and not enough teaching. (Kelly, Years 1/2, School 8)

In Australia, teachers had greater autonomy throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Teachers, not an external organisation, created the curriculum and decided what

was taught and how, and teachers were responsible for monitoring and reporting on children's progress (Chen & Derewianka, 2009). As a neoliberal agenda arose, teachers' autonomy decreased, and governments and education systems had considerable influence over what was taught, how it was taught, and how it was assessed. Some teachers in this research were cynical about the current educational climate with an emphasis on assessment, particularly a focus on numerical data:

> I've got some children on [level] 66 for BURT which is amazing but I know that's good but I then want to find out what does that correlate with? What does that mean? Where should they go? So, I think the formal assessment, I think we need to make sure that we're using it properly and analysing it because it's there for a purpose. It's telling us something but I think at the moment, it's just looking at the scores unfortunately. (Isabella, Foundation, School 7)

The emphasis on numerical data has been criticised by many. Netolicky et al. (2019) asserted this focus is an oversimplification of assessment: "We value spreadsheets, numbers, box-ticking, percentages, test scores and quantitative data over the complexities of the individual, of teaching, of learning, and of schools" (p. 3).

The early years teachers in Phase 2 mentioned creating the right balance between assessment and teaching as being important. There was a general feeling of being overwhelmed by the data. The teachers recognised that, as professionals, having autonomy was important and felt they were best placed to make decisions about assessment, as described in this comment: "I think that we are the professionals; we know our cohort of kids better than anybody else, so why not allow us to make those decisions on what would best suit the needs of our kids and what I think works?" (Janine, Foundation, School 3).

Some of the early years teachers indicated a relinquishing of responsibility and stated that they relied on the school's literacy leader to tell them what to assess and how to assess it, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

> But for me, like as the classroom teacher, I just get told. The literacy leader will tell me and I'll be like, "Okay. Well, thanks". Now I know that's what I have to do. (Lyly, Years 1/2, School 4)

> The English leaders might say, “Okay, we all need to upload our level of text”, and they might say, “Okay, well for our professional learning team meeting, can everyone please bring along the students’ text level”. (Isabella, Foundation, School 7)

It appeared that the devolution of responsibility to schools had not decreased data requirements; rather, schools were setting their own mandates for literacy assessment, and many teachers articulated they felt frustrated with the pressure to administer and collect the school’s mandated data, particularly the more formal data. True autonomy appeared elusive; as Ball (2003) posited, there is only an appearance of freedom in a devolved environment (p. 217)

Teachers spoke about higher levels of expertise that came with an increase in accountability and how this sometimes led to feelings of frustration as assessment had become all consuming. Janine, a Foundation teacher from School 3, stated she felt the school-based mandated literacy assessment requirements were excessive describing it as “death by assessment”. This is noteworthy; some of the early years teachers interviewed as part of the Phase 2 research felt assessment was hindering teaching rather than enhancing it.

The participants from Phase 2 expressed a need for greater support with professional development to ensure they could use the data effectively. This comment illustrates this:

> I think we’re just becoming so much more accountable every year. I notice it myself from year to year. We’re just so much more accountable to the parents. They want more information. I think they’re entitled to that information. And I think it’s just putting more pressure on us too. So, I believe in it. I think that we need to have that pressure, but at the same time, we need the professional support. We need professional development to support us. And we need time. (Jen, Years 1/2, School 2)

Many of the Phase 2 early years teachers did not feel they had any real autonomy. With a devolution of responsibility to the school from the system, many literacy leaders and leadership teams had set up school-based mandates in terms of literacy assessment that seemed to be motivated by the neoliberal accountability agenda of

having quantifiable data to demonstrate success. The datafication of literacy, as discussed in Section 2.1.5, is a term to describe this process of using quantifiable data to demonstrate success. It is "a complex process where data has increased, and this affects the practices, values and subjectivities in a setting" (Bradbury, 2019, p. 8). Many of the formal commercially produced literacy assessment tools that schools were using provided visible and quantifiable data that could be monitored and tracked over time.

It appeared that many teachers had a certain level of autonomy, but most leadership teams in schools had introduced their own mandated literacy assessments that teachers were required to follow. Many of the experienced teachers interviewed, such as Janine in School 3, Nat in School 7, Jen in School 2, and Kelly in School 8, were outspoken and questioned the demands the school-mandated assessment placed upon them, seeing it as undermining their professionalism and autonomy.

Teachers engaged in what could be identified as a range of both formal and informal assessment practices but felt most comfortable with collecting data based on their own teaching and observations. This is discussed next.

5.2.4 Reclaiming Autonomy: Assessment Through Observation

Teachers interviewed in Phase 2 of this research engaged in a range of literacy assessment practices and used a range of tools. However, it was clear that teachers also believed teacher judgement in literacy assessment was essential. Many stated they felt teacher judgement obtained through less formal assessment practices, such as observations recorded anecdotally, were more beneficial than the data from formal tools. A participant who noted that the data from formal assessment could result in a narrow view of the students illustrated this:

> I think the anecdotal stuff, just the day-to-day things that you pick up in the classroom is probably the most important, and of course, when you don't know the children as well at the start of the year, getting all that information from testing can put them in a pigeon hole. But it's the anecdotal stuff that is important. (Simone, Years 1/2, School 1)

Many theorists support teacher judgement as a valid assessment method. Allal (2013) described teacher judgement as being comparable to clinical judgement in the

medical profession, stating that this type of judgement requires two types of knowledge:

> 1. Singular—this is the knowledge the assessor has on everything about the individual; and
>
> 2. General—the more formal professional knowledge that includes the norms and rules for the profession. (p. 22)

Allal's (2013) depiction of these two types of knowledge came through strongly in the data. Teachers spoke passionately about needing to know the child but were also aware of the requirements of the profession in terms of assessment. As professionals, they could engage in a discourse around literacy assessment and had a metalanguage to describe their literacy assessment practices. This is discussed further in the theme "Language of Assessment" (Section 5.3.4).

As part of using teacher judgement for assessment, all teachers discussed the importance of engaging in observational assessment. Goodman (1978) coined the term "kid watching" in relation to assessing students. She asserted that teachers, through having a detailed knowledge of language development, engage in observing children as a more authentic form of assessment. Prioritising observation as a valid assessment practice by teachers has been identified in other research (e.g., DeLuca & Hughes, 2014; Wragg, 2001). The teachers in my research stated,

> In the early years, it's a lot of observation and writing your notes down because it's happening there and then. (Sue, Year 1, School 3)
>
> It is about "noticing". (Simone, Years 1/2, School 1)

Twombly (2014) called for teachers to spend time getting to know a child's strengths and needs through interacting and observing the child. She stated, "Information gathered from personal contact and close observation of students will help teachers to recognise strengths in children who do not test well or struggle with some skills" (p. 46). She posited that this way of gathering data enables a more complete picture of the child to be achieved. Many teachers highlighted how important

observational assessments were and discussed the recording of these observations through anecdotal notes, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

> When I'm doing guided reading, it just has their name, whatever their focus is, and then there's a spot for a running record—a spot to write any words that they've found difficult, there's a spot for comprehension, and there's a spot to write the next step. (Emma, Years 1/2, School 5)

> We have an anecdotal recording book for each student. So, we keep it there. And we have their individual files, where anything—anything that we record, it goes into their file. (Jen, Years 1/2, School 2)

All teachers identified that they used anecdotal notes to record the assessment they gathered while interacting with students and found this form of assessment highly valuable. Seely Flint, Kitson, Lowe, and Shaw (2017) stated, "Teachers value more authentic assessment gathered through teaching interactions because they are less public, and less visible to parents and other stakeholders…because authentic assessments more closely identify the individual student's strengths and weaknesses" (p. 325). Teachers identified with this point and discussed teaching opportunities as the best way to find out about a student's strengths and needs.

5.2.5 Summative Comment: Assessment Expertise

It was evident that the teachers had a great deal of expertise when it came to assessing literacy; however, teachers' literacy assessment practices were often constrained by external structures or controls in the form of official curriculum mandates from not only the government and Catholic systems but also those who engage in pedagogising assessment discourse for teachers in the form of publishers' assessment programs. School-based leadership decisions were also impacting teachers' autonomy.

Teachers' engagement with literacy assessment came from an understanding of what was required from current literacy assessment policy mandates, knowing what to assess and drawing on a variety of formal standardised tools as well as their own teacher knowledge, which was based on their beliefs and understandings of literacy assessment. The role of colleagues and the importance of being professional in terms of

assessment were highlighted through teachers acknowledging the importance of coming together with colleagues to discuss and explore ways of enacting assessment. Teachers' beliefs and understandings around literacy assessment, as well as contextual influences, are discussed in the next section.

5.3 Assessment Conceptions

> It is what teachers know, do, and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation. (Hattie, 2003, p. 2)

Barnes, Fives, and Dacey (2015) used the term conception to describe a construct that combines teachers' knowledge and beliefs about assessment (p. 285). In this research, which explored teachers' assessment practices in a devolved landscape, it was clear that participants had strong views when it came to discussing literacy assessment, and these views reflected their personal beliefs and understandings. What follows is an analysis and discussion of data related to the Phase 2 participants' conceptions of assessment, specifically relating to the first research question in this study which asked what are the current literacy assessment beliefs and practices of teachers in early years classrooms (F-2) in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese? Additionally, the discussion includes an exploration of the contextual factors that the Phase 2 early years teachers identified as influencing their literacy assessment practices.

5.3.1 Beliefs and Understandings

Researchers have found that teachers' beliefs are not static and are influenced by myriad factors, including the situation a teacher is faced with, the context the teacher is working in, and prior experiences (Borg, 2006; Brown, Chaudhry, & Dhamija, 2015; Fives & Buehl, 2012). In terms of this research, teachers were faced with a situation whereby the Catholic system had provided schools with the opportunity for greater autonomy over decisions relating to literacy assessment tools and procedures, following a long period of mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment. This autonomy, however, occurred in a high-stakes context where teachers' work and students' results were constantly scrutinised. The school context, including personnel and demographics, also played a role in assessment beliefs and practices.

There can be conflict between what teachers claim to do, want to do, and actually do (Szőcs, 2017, p. 142). It is essential for teachers to be able to articulate their beliefs, according to Mockler (2011), but additionally, teachers need opportunities "to systematically reflect on their practice, and to develop strategies for reflection and learning located within an understanding of who they are and why they do what they do" (p. 526).

Many teachers described the importance of not just being a technician but having a clear understanding of why specific assessments were chosen: "I am a better teacher because it's now not just, 'Oh, this is what we're going to do,' but 'This is why we're going to do it' and how it's going to improve outcomes" (Kelly, Years 1/2, School 8).

Taggart and Wilson (2005) described the importance of teachers operating beyond the technical level and moving to contextual decision-making. When teachers engage in contextual decision-making, they demonstrate an understanding of making decisions based on knowledge, values, and students' needs, as opposed to merely following mandates. Kelly, in the above excerpt, demonstrates making decisions beyond the technical level. Other teachers spoke about asking questions, a clear indication that they were prepared to question mandates:

> We have to prioritise and we have to ask, "Why are we using it and what do we want to get out of it?" (Mel, Literacy Leader, School 6)

> If you can't give me a purpose for implementing something or if I can't see the immediate impact of how this data is going to drive my future teaching then I suppose my question back to the person telling me that I have do it is well, "Why? Where's the research telling me that this is going to actually have an impact and help me improve the learning for this child?" (Nat, Year 1, School 7)

Although many participants engaged in a critique of their own assessment practices as well as current mandates, this appeared more prevalent with teachers who had been teaching for a longer period. It also seemed that this critique did not lead to resistance. Teachers were prepared to verbally question mandates but did not go further in resisting these mandates. Overall, it appeared that the participants were very compliant even when they did not agree with mandates. I infer that in the current climate, where teachers' work is under "surveillance" through a range of performativity

measures, teachers felt compelled to comply with mandates and had little opportunity to resist these mandates. It was also evident that teachers believed strongly about assessment not just being about a score: “If you just collect it and have a number, it’s useless” (Nick, Year2, School 7).

Many teachers reiterated the criticism of using numerical data and rejected the datafication of literacy. Bradbury (2019) described the effect of datafication: “What matters is what can be measured; and in early years if there is nothing that can be measured, practice must change so that scales, statements and norms can be applied” (p. 17). There was, however, a real sense from the teachers in this research that they were aware of the limitations of using numbers in measuring and reporting on literacy. Although they were mandated to produce some numerical data, this was in conjunction with the detailed knowledge they had of their students, which was obtained through a range of assessment processes based on both qualitative and quantitative data.

Barnes et al. (2015) noted the differences in beliefs based on the contexts in which teachers operate. Those working in a high-stakes accountability context compared to a low-stakes accountability context will view assessment differently. Barnes and colleagues specifically described Australia as low stakes in terms of accountability compared to other systems, such as the United Kingdom, and therefore its conceptions of assessment are accordingly different, although as noted in the literature review in Chapter 2, not everyone would agree that Australia is a low-stakes accountability context.

The Phase 2 teachers identified that scores were not enough in terms of using the data for informing their teaching and discussed the need for assessment to be purposeful:

> If it’s going to give me immediate information that I can then use to drive my future teaching, then it’s a good piece of assessment. If I’m going to sit there and think, “What is this actually telling me?” Then, I mean, I can’t see the purpose behind it. (Nat, Year 1, School 7)

Part of assessment being purposeful was being able to use it to inform teaching, as discussed by Elly and Kelly:

> I find the ongoing conferencing the most useful because I think when you're sitting down and meeting with students at least once a fortnight for both reading and writing, you can get an idea of where they're at, but also, they're setting the goals with you and you're having the conversation with them. (Elly, Years 1/2, School 1)

> But as you go along and you spend more time in a classroom, you realise that you've got to know where those kids are to give them the best chance of moving forward. (Kelly, Years 1/2, School 8)

The teachers believed in the importance of using the data to inform the next steps in teaching and learning. This required having a good understanding of the developmental nature of learning, as illustrated in the following two excerpts:

> I know exactly what the students are doing. I think I also have a pretty good understanding of the development of reading and the development of writing. (Janine, Foundation, School 3)

> I always find it's pinpointing exactly where that child's needs are and knowing exactly what it is that is either inhibiting them from learning or what extension they need. (Jen, Years 1/2, School 2)

Griffin (2009) discussed the importance of teachers having not only content knowledge but also an understanding of the developmental progression of learning. He sees this as more important than reporting against curriculum standards as the focus is on the learner's needs and what they are ready to learn next—in other words, what they can do rather than what they cannot do. The teachers shared Griffin's belief, discussing how important assessment was in determining what they were ready to learn next.

It was evident from the Phase 2 data that participants had a lot to say about their current literacy assessment practices. They possessed clearly articulated beliefs, although these articulated beliefs were not always congruent with their practices. All participants acknowledged how important assessment was in terms of teaching and knowing students' needs.

A key finding from this research is that teachers felt confident sharing their clearly articulated beliefs when it came to discussing literacy assessment. They shared a language for talking about assessment, as well as articulating the importance of not only knowing what to assess but also having clearly articulated beliefs about why they assessed the way they did.

5.3.2 The "Good" Teacher

All participants interviewed acknowledged that being a "good" teacher meant engaging in robust literacy assessment practices. Teachers consistently used the term "evidence" to describe why assessment was important, with participants stating that teachers' assessment showed evidence of learning. Sometimes this was discussed in terms of demonstrating student learning for reporting purposes and to inform teaching. One literacy leader described her school operating on an evidence-based model and noted this was heavily promoted to the parent community. She stated,

> We pride ourselves here on being an evidence-based school; we collect the data, we use that data. When I stand up and promote our school, that's the first thing I say, "We are an evidence-based school". We use our data to improve our children's learning. (Ellen, Literacy Leader, School 2)

The use of data has become very visible in education, with schools providing numerical data across a range of measures, as discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2. Schools also provide this data on their school website for the school community through an annual report, and these data are also reported through the My School website, which is available to the public. School 2 could be described as having "good data". This school did not face some of the other contextual factors the other research schools faced. The students from School 2 were drawn from predominantly middle-class homes where English was their first language. School 2 was one of the schools that had been involved in all CEM's literacy assessment professional learning workshops, and the literacy leader was one of the longest standing literacy leaders who, through sponsored study, had completed a Master of Literacy Leadership at the University of Melbourne. She felt very confident with gathering and using literacy data and supporting teachers with the use of data. I argue that when schools have good

data, like School 2, it is easier to promote these data to the school community and be identified as an “evidenced-based school”.

Participants spoke about the importance of teacher knowledge, specifically teachers’ necessity to possess a repertoire of informed practices in literacy assessment that could be strategically drawn upon for a specific cohort of students. One early years teacher argued it was the teacher’s role to know how to assess: “I think that it’s the job of good teachers to try different assessments and see what works for your group of kids” (Jem, Foundation, School 6).

The idea that good teachers employ a range of assessment practices is an interesting one and aligns with the current surveillance (Page, 2017) of teachers’ work as teachers find themselves being judged against government-based performance standards. In terms of assessment, the government, at both the federal and state level, have clearly set out what good teachers do in terms of standards, as discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2. AITSL Standard 5 clearly defines the teacher’s role in terms of assessment, and the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET; 2018) sets out practice principles to enable teachers to engage in a “close analysis of their practice” (p. 24). Practice Principle 6 clearly defines what is required by teachers in terms of assessment. Ball’s (2003) seminal article discusses the notion of neoliberalism leading to a culture in education of “performativity”, whereby governments have established standards for teachers to be measured against. He questioned who has the right to judge and measure teachers against these standards. Page (2017) elaborated, using the term surveillance to describe teachers’ work being watched over by an assemblage of practices now existing at the school level, including classroom observations, learning walks, visible data shared through practices such as data walls, and PLT meetings. This takes the notion of performativity further, with teachers being judged not only at the official government level through teaching standards, but also at the school level by leaders and teachers making judgements about themselves and colleagues. Although I could argue that teachers have always judged each other, this judgement is now firmly based on both student and teacher data, which is much more transparent today through the assemblages that Page (2017) identified.

Teachers positioning themselves as good teachers by having good student data resonates with the work of Lewis and Holloway (2019) who noted that seeing "oneself as an effective teacher through data has become of central importance, both for system-level accountabilities and for knowing and expressing one's own worth as a teacher" (p. 38).

Good teachers were described by the teachers in this research as also engaging in systematic assessment processes to support teachers with learning and teaching: "We need to know what children know and don't know and need to know next. So, I just think it has to be ongoing" (Kay, Literacy Leader, School 3).

The belief that teachers need to know how to assess and use the data is supported by Tompkins, Campbell, Green, and Smith (2018) who identified teachers as having a professional imperative to assess and monitor the literacy development of students (p. 71). Similarly, the AITSL (2014) professional learning standards state that teachers need to engage in assessment to provide feedback, inform teaching and learning, and engage in data analysis. The teachers in this research clearly articulated the core requirements as set out in official government policy documents for teachers and recontextualised in their literacy assessment practices. In articulating the essential need for literacy assessment, teachers demonstrated an acceptance of current official mandates set out by both the government, in terms of teaching standards, as well as CEM's requirements. The teachers in this research identified their professional obligations and the need to fulfil these requirements outlined by the government.

5.3.3 Data for Grouping

Teachers universally held the belief that data were essential in assisting them to group students for instruction. They discussed that the data enabled them to differentiate their literacy instruction to meet students' needs. This was particularly evident when they discussed reading instruction and using text level data to group students, as described in the following two excerpts:

> These kids need the same targeted teaching. There's no point me trying to do it for one and you trying to do it for two or—let's put all four together and really target them properly rather than having this massive spread. (Nat, Year 1, School 7)

> The classroom next door to me, he has the highs, I have the lows, and then we swap, so we get to see all the kids throughout the year. (Cat, Years 1/2, School 6)

Grouping students based on data was strategic, enabling the teachers to focus more on meeting students' needs, and had a managerial focus, as noted by Nat; she articulated that it was easier working with groups of "like" children rather than mixed-ability groups. There was consensus across the Phase 2 participants about the benefits of using data to group children for instruction. Grouping students using data was described by Barnes, Fives, and Dacey (2017) as having a pedagogical focus but also an accounting tone or a surveillance tone. Teachers must account for children's data, and many teachers believed that ability grouping enabled them to provide more focused instruction based on students' needs and thereby improve the data.

Although teachers spoke positively about the data supporting them with grouping students by ability, particularly for reading, not all researchers see this as beneficial. Bradbury (2019) described grouping students based on ability as a direct result of the "datafication" of schooling and cited a range of authors who identify grouping students according to perceived abilities, based on data gathered, as problematic. She stated, "Thus data and grouping work together, mutually reinforcing the dual ideas of fixed 'ability' and reliable measurement" (p. 17). Moreover, Pratt (2016) stated that the concept of ability is linked to school assessment and is one that "locks in" those students identified as low attaining as being of low ability: "This tends to replicate itself as they move through the system" even though these students may have the potential to "rise further" (p. 899). Grouping students according to ability, based on literacy assessment data, seemed to be a consistent belief across the eight schools. I am not aware of how fixed or flexible this grouping was or whether the teachers used other grouping in addition to ability grouping. Bradbury (2018), drawing on U.K. research on grouping children based on mandated assessments, questioned the validity of using data for this type of ability-based grouping.

Drawing on a range of research based on teachers' beliefs and understandings of assessment, Barnes et al. (2017, p. 108) created a continuum to document teachers' assessment conceptions, which is illustrated in Figure 5.2. The continuum describes the

purposes of assessment from being student focused in order to advance learning at one end, and at the other, accountability focused. To the extreme right, just outside the continuum, is where teachers merely comply with requirements or see assessment as irrelevant.

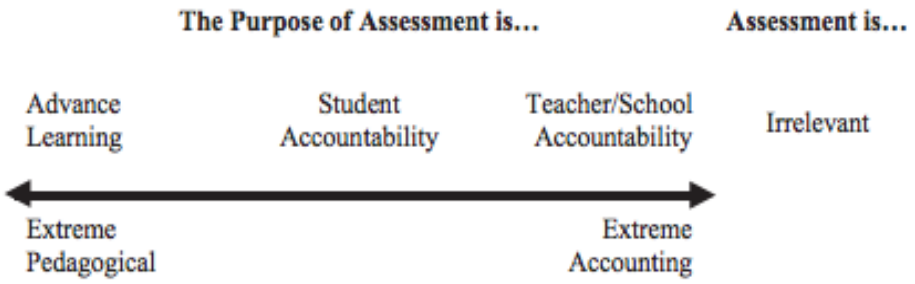


Figure 5.2. Purposes of assessment.

Note. From "U.S. Teachers' Conceptions of the Purposes of Assessment" by N. Barnes, H. Fives, and C. Dacey, 2017, *Teaching and Teacher Education, 65,* p. 108. Copyright (2017) by Elsevier Ltd. Reprinted with permission.

Phase 2 participants' assessment conceptions can be identified as operating at different points along the continuum. When teachers discussed using the data gathered from assessment to plan for future learning, there was a clear pedagogical focus; teachers saw the connections between literacy assessment, teaching, and learning. As noted, the use of data to group students based on ability operates in the middle of the continuum, with a focus on both the learning and data and teachers having to account for student results. Teachers also discussed school mandates and having to engage in more formal assessment using commercially produced literacy assessment tools mandated by the school's leadership. As discussed in Section 5.1.1, teachers often identified these commercially produced literacy assessment tools as not providing enough information to inform their teaching and felt that the data they gathered through teaching interactions provided them with more meaningful data that they could use. Thus, teachers' conceptions of these mandated commercial assessment tools operated at the extreme other end of Barnes et al.'s (2017) continuum, with most teachers using them because the school required it. That is, commercial literacy assessment tools were used for accountability purposes so the school could have "visible" data to share with the wider community. Some teachers, as discussed in

Section 5.1.1 said they did not use the data from these mandated commercially produced literacy assessment tools and therefore identified the tools as "irrelevant". To follow is a discussion related to the language the participants used to discuss assessment.

5.3.4 Language of Assessment: Mantras

The teachers participating in Phase 2 of the data collection appeared confident in discussing their approach to literacy assessment. One teacher summarised it succinctly, describing enthusiastically how the school approached assessment: "We know how to use it; we know how to interpret it and apply it. I don't know what to say. It's the school mantra, that's it—that's all I can say" (Annie, Foundation, School 4).

Many common shared mantras came through when teachers discussed assessment, although it was often unclear as to whether these mantras aligned with teacher practices. In fact, sometimes it was clear there was a lack of congruence between teachers' espoused beliefs and their practices. One of the key mantras teachers espoused was the notion of identifiable growth. Both the literacy leaders and classroom teachers discussed how 12 months' growth should occur for each student per year, and that the assessment tools should measure this growth: "But I think assessment now is playing a more meaningful role with some of our teachers and not just doing a test just to get a level. Doing assessment to see the growth and—yeah—that shift in thinking" (Desi, Literacy Leader, School 1).

The classroom teachers at School 1, when discussing assessment, appeared to engage critically with their assessment practices. The school focused on literacy assessment through being involved with CEM's literacy assessment projects. Teachers clearly articulated their literacy assessment beliefs, and these appeared to match their practices. The school had moved away from using Clay's Observation Survey with children starting school; in relation to this, the Foundation teacher stated,

> If it's just to enter data into the system, it's serving no purpose but if it's in smaller amounts of data that are actually being analysed and therefore used in teaching on a class level, at a year level at a school level, that's fantastic. (Chrissy, Foundation, School 1)

Isabella, a classroom teacher at another school, also described that all children deserved 12 months' growth: "I kind of try and focus on incorporating the higher end in that as well because they deserve their 12 months' growth too" (Isabella, Foundation, School 7).

A range of theorists, including Goss, Hunter, Romanes, and Parsonage (2015), Hattie (2015), and Hattie and Masters (as cited in ACER, 2018), have reported the notion of growth for every year at school. It was apparent from my research that teachers had appropriated the language from these theorists and researchers and reproduced it as part of their own mantras, thus illustrating their influence. It is more difficult, however, to ascertain if the mantras aligned with the teachers' beliefs, understandings, and practices or were a mere reproducing of language.

The growth mantra promoted by Hattie and Masters (as cited in ACER, 2018), for example, has become common in teachers' assessment discourse; its presence in teachers' responses in this study was therefore not surprising. It included the Phase 2 participants using mantras such as "growth", "value added", and "visible learning". The filtering down to teachers of key notions through such mantras across the various layers of researcher, publisher, and professional learning providers suggests a refocusing of what is a quite complex concept. Essentially, the end point of "effect size" has been recontextualised to become the focus rather than what might inform growth or impact it. The findings from Hardy's (2018) research also revealed teachers' preoccupation with "effect size". He argued that this focus reduces teachers' "data literacy, rather than enhancing it" (p. 17) and Wrigley (2018) additionally stated that a focus on "effect size" . . . homogenises learners, teachers and schools in the interest of 'effectiveness' and making schools manageable" (p. 374).

Once again, Bernstein's notion of those who gain control over the recontextualising field hold the power is evident, with researchers, publishers, and professional providers actively promoting measuring growth and applying an effect size. It is evident that teachers were reproducing a specialised discourse in discussing literacy assessment, a clear indication of literacy in the early years being "datafied" (Bradbury, 2019).

Duxdator (2019) offered an alternate viewpoint and was critical of the growth mantra; he saw it as another neoliberal push, describing it as "mechanistic". He cited the work of Milne (2009) who cautioned against a relentless focus on technical achievement, calling for a more nuanced approach to judging academic achievement. Likewise, Lewis and Holloway (2019) were critical of the current focus on growth; they stated that it positions educators in a state of "perpetual imperfection" (p. 47) and compels teachers to believe there is always "some deficiency to address" (p. 47). This results in teachers feeling they could always have done more to support a student's learning.

Participants from Phase 2 of the research used other more technical terms to describe their assessment processes, such as validity and triangulation. Participants articulated the importance of not judging a student on one piece of evidence but collecting a range of evidence, describing this as essential for assessment to be valid. The following literacy leader specifically uses the term "triangulation" to describe how the early years teachers' literacy assessment processes are valid:

> So, we try and aim for three pieces of assessment for triangulation when we make decisions about students. Anecdotal notes are a must for teacher judgement. PAT, Fountas & Pinnell, On-Demand, Alpha, one of those four areas, any of those we choose to use, "Let's look at it and let's make a decision from there". (Mel, Literacy Leader, School 6)

Although Mel mentioned assessment based on teacher judgement, she also identified the formal commercially produced literacy assessment tools; these were the same tools that the teachers at her school described as not providing information for their teaching and begrudged the school's mandate to use them as they did not find the data from these assessments useful. The use of the term triangulation by the literacy leader did not appear to match the practices of the teachers at the school described. They explicitly stated that they complied with administering these commercially produced literacy assessment tools but did not use the data from these tools to inform their teaching.

Teachers, although not using the term triangulation explicitly to describe their processes of valid assessment, did discuss the importance of using more than one piece

of evidence, as illustrated in the following excerpts from two teachers from different schools:

> You can't base your assessment on one piece of evidence. (Dave, Years 1/2, School 6)

> It is one set—data set, whereas if you were doing data statistics as a statistician, you wouldn't just use one data set. (Nick, Year 2, School 7)

There are other examples of teachers' espoused beliefs not matching with practice; teachers identified using one piece of evidence from a "cold write" to assess students' writing for reporting to parents twice a year. The result was obtained through moderation processes. Yet teachers discussed the importance of using more than one piece of assessment to make judgements about students, as well as articulating a belief in a growth approach to assessment, which some would see as not aligned to reporting against standards (ACER, 2018).

The participants used a language for discussing assessment that often took the form of mantras, and these were often recontextualised from theorists, although again, these mantras sometimes did not align closely to practices. At times, participants expressed strong opinions in relation to assessment and verbally rejected some of the current mandates, although in practice, they complied with them.

5.3.5 Contextual Localised Assessment

Many teachers articulated that they were pleased they did not have to do the same literacy assessments as other schools and could make choices based on their own context because of the devolution of literacy assessment responsibility to schools. Fehring and Nyland (2012) affirmed the importance of localised assessment, stating that formative, local, school-level assessment practices cannot be undervalued (p. 12).

It appears that contextual differences related to school populations, particularly in terms of the children's cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, impacted the literacy assessment choices made by schools. This is highlighted in the following:

> Each school's different and all the needs of different schools are very different. So, at our school, a lot of families have a low socioeconomic level and kids have a lot of different experiences, and I think that a lot of it would be useless, for the use of a better word, to do the same assessments as another school. (Jem, Foundation, School 6)

Schools 4, 7, and 8 had the highest proportion of children from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and all participants from these three schools identified making literacy assessment choices based on these needs:

> Our African population is growing and we know that their oral needs are great and we're seeing that impacting on their reading and writing so we are very happy with CEM policy change. I think it's great because different settings have different needs. (Kirsty, Literacy Leader, School 7)

Wiliam (2016) identified that schools need to reflect on what works in their own context: "Just about everything works somewhere, and nothing works everywhere" (p. 63). Additionally, Wrigley (2018) stated that the question should not be "What works?" but rather "where it might work, for whom and under what conditions" (p. 370).

G. Moss (2017), in discussing literacy assessment, posited that a more "bespoke" approach to school-based literacy assessment can "bring about lasting change" (p. 61). This principle can be applied to the literacy assessment practices in the eight research schools. Although it was evident that schools had maintained several assessments from the mandated and prescriptive assessment period (1998–2012), it is evident that through the devolution, schools had adapted and adjusted the previously mandated assessments to meet their own contextual needs. Sometimes this was with the timing of assessments, with School 4 deciding not to do any formal assessments in Term 1 due to their students' social and emotional needs and focusing on teachers getting to know the children at the beginning of the year.

School 7 was the only school in the Phase 1 questionnaire that had not changed their formal assessment practices since the devolution; however, through the interview process, it became apparent that this school was in the process of making major changes to their literacy assessment as a result of changes in school leadership, including a new principal and literacy leader. The new leadership had begun working

with staff on catering to the diverse needs of their community. They were exploring assessment tools that would yield relevant data based on their school population that could be used to inform teaching and learning. The literacy leader spoke about introducing a new play-based approach to oral language in the early years in which teachers spent time planning experiences for the students, listening to their oral language structures, and recording their observations anecdotally. These anecdotal notes would be used as evidence to support future literacy learning planning based on the identified oral language needs. The early years teachers in School 7 also spoke about catering to students' diverse needs and a new focus on oral language:

> We've gone through a lot of different changes in models of what we do in English this year, which has been a bit of a challenge but at the same time, I think we're constantly taking into consideration the different groups of children that we have and making sure that anything we plan caters to all of them. (Isabella, Foundation, School 7)

> So, that's where that free-talking type of assessment is important because you can see how deep—how much vocab they have or—can they put a sentence together or do they know how to respond to a question because there's no point reading and writing if you can't put that together. So I think—yeah, oral language for us is probably the biggest thing. (Nick, Year 2, School 7)

Van Kraayenoord (2003) set out seven fundamental principles for assessment. Principle 1 states that assessment should be based on the values of the school community (p. 276). It is clear that schools were making decisions about literacy assessment based on their values. P. Johnston and Costello (2005) also described the localised nature of assessment and how context plays a crucial role in assessment. This was evident in School 7 where decisions were made based on catering to students' language needs. Most schools had their own approach to assessment that reflected their own contextual needs.

In analysing how teachers responded to key messages as part of a reform process Friend (2002), identified that messages from the system were interpreted and enacted in significantly different ways across school sites: "Some messages are not heard, others are transmogrified, but some are heeded. These variations are influenced by the local

conditions operating at each school site and the cultures that pervade the school community" (p. 26). Friend attributed the variation in interpretation and enactment to a school's culture and how open to reform teachers were. Highlighted by Friend (2002) was the need for "cohesive strategic leadership [that] supports an active professional learning community" (p. 26). Griffin (2009) reiterated the importance of mid-level literacy leadership, specifically discussing the literacy leader role as leading assessment in schools. The literacy leader's role and influence in each school in this research was evident. I discuss this and other key influencers in the following section.

5.3.6 Influencers

It is evident that the professional communities in which teachers worked influenced their literacy assessment decision-making. Datnow and Hubbard (2016) discussed the professional communities, professional learning, and interactions with coaches, consultants, and principals as influencing teachers' beliefs and practices (p. 7). As examined in Section 1.2, CEM had invested heavily in literacy leaders as mid-level instructional leaders to support teachers with literacy learning, teaching, and assessment. Literacy leaders' role and influence were evident in my research. Some teachers used the literacy leader as the ultimate source of authority, as illustrated in the following comment from Lyly who described the literacy leader as someone who told her what to do. In terms of Taggart and Wilson's (2005) model, Lyly acted as a technician being told what to do without reflecting on it or questioning it:

> So, I think there is an assessment schedule, but for me, like as the classroom teacher, I just get told. I just follow the school schedule and so, go, "Well, that's what I have to do. That's what I have to do". (Lyly, Years 1/2, School 4)

The teachers at School 3 identified not having input into the literacy assessment decisions and expressed a level of frustration with both the types of assessments they were asked to administer by the school's leadership and how many assessments they had to complete:

> It feels like forever testing to me. (Janine, Foundation, School 3)

> So, we were told what to—what assessments to carry out and we did it. (Sue, Years 1/2, School 3)

Conversely, teachers from other schools spoke about the literacy leaders engaging in collaborative approaches with staff to determine assessments, as Isabella's and Kelly's comments highlight:

> One of our PLTs was discussing the assessment schedule and what we thought was really important and what we thought probably could be either done at a different time or left out based on if it was the start or the end of the year. (Isabella, Foundation, School 7)

> But the literacy leader is always checking in with this and it's quite clear about, "Well, this is what we're doing". And at the beginning, we knew what we were going to be doing. It wasn't just "Okay, we need to this". (Kelly, Years 1/2, School 8)

It was evident that the leadership in schools was impacting the early years teachers' literacy assessment practices, as Lingard and Rizvi (2010) noted: "Policy is also mediated by the leadership practices within a school" (p. 5).

It was clear that teachers were no longer relying solely on CEM for support with language and literacy teaching and assessment. As noted in Chapter 1, during the mandated and prescriptive assessment period (1998–2012), CEM facilitated professional learning for teachers and literacy leaders, which required a more prescriptive approach to teaching and assessing literacy. With the devolution of responsibility for literacy assessment, schools were drawing on a range of resources to build their capacity for literacy teaching and assessment. Many local factors influenced schools' approaches to literacy assessment. Xu and Brown (2016) posited that the sociocultural contexts within which teachers work influence assessment practices, including policy, cultural values, and social norms, which in turn impact teachers' assessment practices (p. 150).

The teachers from School 8, with its large proportion of EAL students, had implemented an innovative approach to literacy assessment. They had identified oral language as a high priority; however, unlike other schools, they had decided to focus more closely on oral language and build their whole approach to literacy learning and assessment around phonological awareness after working with an independent speech pathologist. All the teachers from School 8 discussed how Beatrice (pseudonym), the

speech pathologist, had influenced their understanding of the importance of oral language, and thus, their whole approach to literacy teaching and assessment had changed, a clear example of innovation:

> That was the door opener for oral language [working with the speech pathologist] because before that, I'd—you hear the words oral language sort of thrown around a bit and you don't know what it means and I think people still do that a bit. So, she [the speech pathologist] opened my eyes to that whole side of what kids are saying and listening to them, how they were expressing themselves. (Nelly, Foundation, School 8)

School 4, the school with the highest proportion of EAL students, also discussed the importance of phonological awareness, describing it as "the building blocks to decoding words in terms of reading and writing" (Annie, Foundation, School 4). Additionally, the teachers in School 4 described the benefits of working with an external speech pathologist who supported them with linking oral language with play and described this as being positive.

The influence of external commercial professional learning was also evident. School 6 identified as a "visible learning" school. Visible learning is a term that has been made accessible through the work of Hattie (2008). School 6 was involved in a professional learning project, which was a collaboration between CEM and the publisher Corwin Press. This project entailed schools engaging in professional learning and working in clusters to enable every student to experience at least 12 months growth over one school year. The schools involved in this project were mandated to use commercially produced assessment tools to measure growth. The literacy leader at School 6 spoke positively about the school's involvement in the project and the mandated commercially based assessment tool the school used to measure literacy growth; however, the teachers at the school had a very different view to using the mandated assessment tool and described it as a "waste of time", noting it was only used as a summative assessment and, as classroom teachers, they never looked at or discussed the data.

The devolution of responsibility for literacy assessment encouraged Schools 4 and 8 to explore different approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment and to choose

to engage with external speech pathologists to develop their own approach to literacy teaching and assessment, thus demonstrating a level of autonomy. Schools such as Schools 4 and 8 appeared to embrace the opportunities a devolution of responsibility provided. Other schools, such as School 6, engaged in a project facilitated by a publishing company in conjunction with CEM and used the mandated assessment tools required through involvement in this project. These are all examples of external commercial providers, influencing teachers' literacy teaching and assessment practices through the process of recontextualisation.

5.3.7 Summative Comment: Assessment Conceptions

Teachers' conceptions of literacy assessment varied, depending on the types of assessments they were discussing, and were congruent with Barnes et al.'s (2017) continuum. It was evident that teachers valued student-focused assessment that involved using teacher judgement; however, they were critical of the commercially produced standardised assessments that were often mandated by school leadership. It was evident there were differences between the way classroom teachers spoke about assessment compared to the literacy leaders. The literacy leaders were more in favour of using a range of tools, including commercially produced literacy assessment tools, compared to the classroom teachers and could articulate why they were using these tools. Classrooms teachers were much more critical of commercially produced, standardised literacy assessment tools mandated by schools and expressed a preference for assessment that required teacher judgement.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, I analysed and discussed the results from Phase 2 of the research—that is, the interviews. Three themes were discussed that had emerged in relation to literacy assessment and school-level issues: (1) Engaging with Assessment, (2) Assessment Expertise, and (3) Assessment Conceptions.

My research set out to understand the impact of a policy of devolution allowing schools greater literacy assessment autonomy within the contemporary climate characterised high-stakes assessment and heightened levels of teacher accountability.

This chapter revealed that the participants had clearly articulated beliefs and used a metalanguage to discuss assessment. Examples were given of the Phase 2 schools using the devolution to innovate on their assessment practices and make more localised literacy assessment decisions. Singh (2002) posited that the process of recontextualisation creates a space for a change in power and control. The devolution by the Catholic system had provided a potential opportunity for teachers to have greater assessment autonomy, but it was evident in nearly all schools that the literacy leaders and leadership teams held the power and control over the literacy assessment choices at the local school level. It was apparent that the devolution of responsibility may have offered schools autonomy, but it did not appear to result in teachers having agency.

Chapter 6 explores the topic of sociocultural politics, highlighting the early years educators' responses to the system's devolution of assessment responsibility to schools. The influence of those outside education, including parents and the media, is addressed in relation to literacy assessment in the early years.

Chapter 6. Phase 2 Interviews: Results, Analysis, and Discussion of the Sociocultural Landscape

> As soon as people start mentioning numbers, their ears prick up and they try and make some sort of sense of what they hear and try and judge based on some numbers and I think that's where we're at the moment, community-wise, is that people are hung up on data, numbers. (Nick, Year 2, School 7)

Chapter 5 looked closely at the data relating to literacy assessment at the local school level, explored how early years teachers engaged with assessment, discussed their assessment expertise, and investigated their assessment conceptions. I examined the decisions schools made at the local level to differentiate their literacy assessment practices based on the school context. In this chapter, I explore data related to factors outside the school that impacted the early years teachers' literacy assessment practices. These factors are described as sociocultural political factors and are discussed in the following section.

6.1 Sociocultural Politics

> Everyone is an expert and has an opinion about how reading and writing should be taught, as everyone has been to school. These reasons help explain why the literacy debates command so much attention in the media. (Snyder, 2008, p. 6)

A key finding in this research is that the schools, while embracing the autonomy afforded them by the 2012 policy change, were grappling with a range of sociocultural and political factors that constrained their professional autonomy and impacted their literacy teaching and assessment. In this study, sociocultural politics refers to current issues, debates, and practices that potentially influenced the participants' literacy assessment practices.

Currently, literacy education is in the spotlight due to discourses around a perceived decline in literacy standards, national standardised testing, and accountability measures such as teaching standards. Snyder (2008) noted that there are broader cultural, social, and economic factors impacting literacy teaching and assessment. These issues are highlighted in the fourth theme of "Sociocultural Politics". Adoniou (2015) stated that literacy teaching is "always politically fraught" where "the sociopolitics around literacy . . . is the producer and the director of how literacy is delivered" (p. 112), and this, too, extends to how literacy is assessed. Reporting of literacy standards is often negative and paints teachers as being ill equipped to do their job, a point highlighted by Snyder (2008), Adoniou (2015), and Reid (2019) and reflected in participants' responses in this study. Chen and Derewianka (2009) highlighted the media's role and stated that the reporting and commentary by both the media and government are responsible for creating a discourse around "school failure" or "literacy crisis", resulting in a loss of confidence in schools, teachers, and teaching methods. Further, Spina (2017), citing the work of Klein (2008), stated that neoliberal ideologies from the Chicago School of Economics are underpinned by the premise that crises are necessary to create change, and it does not matter if these crises are real or perceived.

The teachers in this study clearly articulated feeling the impact of these perceptions of a literacy crisis, which had resulted in a greater focus on using literacy assessments to provide quantifiable data as proof of literacy learning. This theme highlights these sociocultural, ideological battles in terms of the current focus on literacy assessment by the government, media, and the wider community and the tension this causes for early years teachers. What follows is an analysis and discussion of the data related to the theme of "Sociocultural Politics".

6.1.1 Autonomy Within the System

Central to the discussion of sociocultural politics in the context of literacy assessment is an understanding of the system the participants were working within. In this study, this system was Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM), which was responsible for both official policy mandates and operational guidelines related to literacy assessment in Catholic schools. As such, CEM could be viewed as constituting

Bernstein's official recontextualising field (ORF) within which schools and teachers operated.

The overwhelming consensus from the 30 Phase 2 participants was that they welcomed the devolved approach to assessment with a belief that schools were best placed to make decisions about assessment. Annie's comment is indicative of how the participants felt about the devolution of responsibility for literacy assessment in the early years to the schools. She stated,

> So, I would agree that the best person to make that decision would be the schools and it's not to say that CEM is scrapping the assessments, just letting the school decide how and when and how far. I think it's terrific. (Annie, Foundation, School 4)

There was a general consensus from the Phase 2 participants that the previous assessments mandated by CEM had caused a great deal of stress due to the amount and timing of testing required. This is an interesting finding as analysis of the Phase 1 data revealed that many schools had engaged in increased data collection than was required during the mandated and prescriptive assessment period (1998–2012). However, schools appeared to be spreading out the formal assessments across the year rather than confining them to the beginning and end of the year. The Phase 2 participants also noted how the data gathered through the formal CEM mandated and prescriptive assessment period (1998–2012) were not used to inform teaching due predominantly to time constraints. Participants recognised the idea that assessment for learning (AfL) was a key component of effective assessment and that the mandated assessment required by the system had resulted in a more summative approach. This was echoed by several participants and was reflected in comments like this by teacher Emma:

> It does make it a lot less stressful. The ones [assessments] that we were doing, they might've given us information, but we weren't necessarily using it; you were just testing, testing, testing, and then the data was old anyway. (Emma, Years 1/2, School 5)

The teachers saw a disconnect between the mandated assessment and their teaching and embraced the opportunity for greater autonomy afforded by the devolution.

Many of the teachers and literacy leaders saw the one-size-fits-all approach, exemplified by the approach to literacy assessment during the mandated and prescriptive assessment period (1998–2012), as problematic. They recognised that schools were different and therefore needed to consider different tools and approaches to assessment, as noted by a Foundation teacher: "Every school is different. The socioeconomic has a massive impact, so I don't think that it would make sense that everyone do the same thing all the time" (Belinda, Foundation, School 7).

All teachers identified autonomy as being important, aligning with the research literature that states autonomy is a key desire of teachers as professionals, but researchers also recognise it as an area of tension in the current climate. Parker (2015) described teacher autonomy as being on a spectrum and described a type of autonomy that exists "within a vacuum of limited scope" (p. 22). She discussed that teachers have responsibility for the journey but "the destination is set in stone" (p. 22). Participants' views echoed this in terms of having some choice around literacy assessment tools used in the early years—that is, having control over the journey but the destination being the same. The destination in this research appeared to be the Year 3 NAPLAN (National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy) assessment, which is discussed further in Section 6.1.2. While the respondents were concerned about other mandates, such as the national testing and test preparation, by and large, they spoke positively about the change in CEM's assessment requirements. This is evident in the following comment where the respondent describes the greater autonomy as opening her eyes to new assessment possibilities and ways of working:

> When we were mandated to do the assessments, we were just doing what our system asked us to do. The definition of insanity, doing the same thing over and over again with like a different result, we had to go, "This is not working. It's not working. What's missing?" And then when you ask the question, somehow your eyes are open and your ears are open to other things. (Mercy, Literacy Leader, School 8)

Literacy leaders and early years teachers spoke positively about schools having not only greater autonomy in making decisions around literacy assessment tools and practices but also the provision of opportunities to be innovative in terms of these assessment tools and practices. One literacy leader stated, "It gives schools autonomy to do any assessment that will suit the needs of their school community and their students. I don't think it's a bad thing because teachers can be creative" (Desi, Literacy Leader, School 1).

Along with an appreciation of the greater autonomy afforded by the 2012 devolution, participants engaged in a critique of CEM policy, questioning why they were still mandated to administer two specific literacy assessment tools (the mandated record of oral language and running records using Alpha Assess), with teacher Kelly asking, "So, while I'm glad it's only two that we have to get done for CEM, I wonder why it's just those two things?" (Kelly, Years 1/2, School 8).

They also questioned the use of the data provided to CEM, as illustrated by one literacy leader who stated, "I don't know what the CEM use the data for" (Ellen, Literacy Leader, School 2).

Although most participants responded positively to the CEM policy change in 2012, a few participants expressed a tension; they recognised the importance of autonomy but felt fewer mandated assessments was also a limitation. One teacher discussed having less data to refer to when planning, and two literacy leaders specifically noted that having mandated assessments from an external body, the system, put a "good" pressure on teachers. The following comments from two different schools illustrate these tensions:

> It was a bit of an adjustment for us because we got used to having all this stuff to use and then it got slashed because it didn't have to be done. So, it's good in some respects for timing and workload, but then also sort of takes away some of the data that may have been useful over the course of the year. (Nick, Year 2, School 7)

> I was sorry to see a lot of that go. Maybe that's just as a literacy leader just because I think it got people thinking about a broader range. Sometimes having an outside request puts a bit of pressure on and gets people doing things that they might not otherwise do and then they can be surprised they're going to have findings that they wouldn't otherwise have. (Kay, Literacy Leader, School 3)

Both Nick and Kay, as illustrated in the above excerpts, saw the perceived benefit of the mandated assessment requirements as providing additional and a broader range of literacy assessment data for early years teachers to use; however, more generally, there was an overwhelming sense of relief from participants when discussing the system's devolution. Teachers felt the mandated assessment had caused a lot of stress. The policy change freed them to think differently and do things differently. Although the system had removed the assessment mandates, the early years teachers were cognisant of the literacy assessment they did not have control over: NAPLAN, which is discussed in the following section.

6.1.2 National Testing and Test Preparation

No Australian study of mandated and devolved literacy assessment practices can overlook the significance of the annual, nation-wide testing-NAPLAN, that occurs in May for Years 3, 5, 7, and 9. The NAPLAN assessment has drawn a great deal of criticism, particularly in terms of teachers feeling they have to prepare children for the test, resulting in a narrowing of the curriculum, as Carter (2017) proffered:

> Resources, teacher attention and class time is soaked up with attempts to improve the results of under-performing students. It means that the scope and depth of the curriculum is often ignored in favour of drills and activities aimed at improving student test performance. (para. 4)

The impact is felt across the school sector, and this study revealed early years teachers interviewed in Phase 2 felt pressure to prepare their students for the Year 3 NAPLAN literacy tests. The Year 3 NAPLAN assesses the knowledge and skills gained in students' first 3 years of schooling as it occurs in the first half of the school year when children are in Year 3, their fourth year at school. It therefore assesses what has been learned in the first 3 years of schooling—that is, the early years.

The teachers I interviewed related concerns about having to prepare children for the NAPLAN test and expressed concerns over the stress it put on both teachers and students due to the reporting of the data to the public through the My School website. The following comment reiterates these concerns from the teachers in this research:

> I don't believe in NAPLAN; you shouldn't cram for it like an exam for three weeks to teach NAPLAN to get the results up. I find it negative when it's just used for the My School website or to rate schools. (Elly, Years 1/2, School 1)

Janine used sarcasm to highlight the narrow use of data based on one test: "I felt like all we were doing was preparing for NAPLAN . . . I think it's a fantastic reflection of how they did on that test *on that one day*" (Janine, Foundation, School 3, emphasis in original).

It was evident that all the Year 2 teachers interviewed spent some time preparing children for the NAPLAN test that would occur the following year. Most of the Year 2 teachers identified this as an issue and had concerns about the assessment but wanted to ensure the children were prepared. For some, it was about helping the student become familiar with the testing genre. NAPLAN affected them as Year 2 teachers, and the following comment is indicative of the responses from Year 2 teachers:

> I know that I'm going to start getting those grade twos prepared for it when they're getting into Grade 3, so we're looking at the language of answering multiple-choice questions and things like that, so it comes into my planning and into my teaching. And the Grade 2 parents are already worried. So, it is influencing what I do. (Kelly, Years 1/2, School 8)

This comment reflects criticism in relation to NAPLAN and teachers spending time preparing children for the test. Thompson and Harbaugh (2013) reported that teachers voiced concerns about the stress NAPLAN placed on students, teachers, parents, and school administrators. This, too, was reflected in participants' responses in this research, where many participants voiced concerns about the negative impact of NAPLAN on students, noting it caused stress as it was a very foreign approach to literacy assessment for students compared to the classroom-based literacy assessment:

> I can see it [NAPLAN] has its place but I don't think it's the way we teach, and I'm not a big fan because it's so foreign to a kid's way of learning and, especially with some of the children here, the whole language of a NAPLAN test is very confusing for them because they don't have that depth of language, they really don't. NAPLAN is quite overwhelming for them. (Kelly, Years 1/2, School 8)

The Phase 2 data results made it clear that the government's NAPLAN was being reproduced in the early years. The My School website reporting of data was also seen as influencing early years teachers in making choices to prepare students for the national testing. In terms of Bernstein's pedagogic device, the official policy of national testing and reporting of data set by the government was impacting the way literacy teaching and assessment was being reproduced by the early years teachers in this research. Teachers articulated having to prepare the children for the test and were aware of the data being readily available to the public. This is discussed further in Section 6.1.3.

In contrast, although most of the participants in Phase 2 had concerns over NAPLAN, some discussed seeing the need for some sort of national assessment to track how schools were going, but quite often they spoke about a tension between the data generated from NAPLAN testing and the anxiety it potentially caused students, parents, and teachers, as discussed in the following two comments:

> NAPLAN is interesting. I'm not one that's totally for or against. So, I've had my own children go through it; I'm talking as a parent now, I guess—seeing it as an experience because they will have to do these formal testing later on in life and to make sure that you're going off what the teacher's saying about your child and not what that number or what that data gives you at the end because there's so much involved and the anxiety of it all . . . I don't like how schools are portrayed on their NAPLAN results. I don't think that's fair to the school at all, but I guess it's a stigma and it goes with it. (Sue, Year 1, School 3)

> I think schools should always have a choice of what they want, but there's also—have to be something that's comparable throughout the whole state. So, there's—whilst people disagree with NAPLAN, I think it's important just to see where every school and every child is at—it is just a glimpse of one day. And some parents don't agree with it. Some schools don't agree with it. I don't have a problem with it because it's just a snapshot of that one day, what can your kids do. (Lyly, Years 1/2, School 4)

The early years educators in Phase 2 of the research had strong views when it came to discussing NAPLAN. They clearly articulated that it did not align with their classroom-based literacy assessments and distracted them from what they considered more valuable teaching in the classroom. They also acknowledged that the NAPLAN assessment caused undue stress even though it was only a snapshot of a child's literacy learning. Although the system had devolved literacy assessment to schools, the autonomy this afforded appeared compromised by the existence of NAPLAN, with teachers feeling compelled to spend time preparing children for the test. This is illustrative of Iorio and Tanabe's (2015) concepts of the readiness chain, as discussed in Chapter 2. Early years teachers felt they had to prepare children for the standardised tests that would happen further "up the chain" as children moved through school.

A range of additional external factors, outside of school, that influenced the schools' approaches to literacy assessment in the early years are discussed in the following section.

6.1.3 Outside the School Gates: The Wider Community

This section addresses issues around how those not directly involved in teaching viewed literacy assessment in schools and how these views impacted the early years teachers. Participants identified the topic of the "datafication" of the early years as an area of concern. Bradbury and Robert-Holmes (2018) used the term datafication to describe the reductive approach of using numerical data gathered through formal assessments in the early years. The Phase 2 participants were concerned about reporting data to the public and the way this increased interest from the wider community impacted them, as illustrated in the following comment:

> Just like any other data, as soon as people start mentioning numbers, their ears prick up and they try and make some sort of sense of what they hear and try and judge based on some numbers and I think that's where we're at, community-wise, is that people are hung up on data, numbers, and don't sort of get—they—not sort of understanding all the stuff that goes around it. So, the child, the school, the community, even details of what's been collected, how it's used, why it's used. So, I think it's dangerous to just give numbers. (Nick, Year 2, School 7)

Many participants lamented the emphasis on quantitative measures of literacy success, the reporting of these by the media, and community perceptions of the data. Snyder (2008) raised similar concerns and questioned how those not directly involved in education, such as parents, must be alarmed by the media's coverage of issues in relation to literacy education. The following comment is indicative of what many early years teachers stated in terms of the limitations of measuring literacy with numbers—the reporting of data by the media—and highlights the need for data that reflects the whole child:

> I don't think there's a big picture involved there. There's a lot of numbers and data on a page that I assume that they're going off, particularly the media, and I view assessment as so much than a number. I take a lot of notes and looking at the behaviour of the child as well as what they deliver at the end, like with testing, you get a number at the end of it, but it's not showing you how—what their thinking was or what they were doing at the time. Were they distracted? There's got to be more to the picture than looking at the percentages of data in that way. (Sue, Year 1, School 3)

Participants questioned the message parents were receiving through the media about literacy assessment results and the level of competition that existed in and among schools. Participants reported parents were fearful about how their child may be performing due to NAPLAN reporting and wanting to know if it was good enough. Those that had been teaching for a long time noted the impact the datafication of literacy was having on parents. The following comment illustrates an early years teacher's concerns with the parental focus on literacy data in the early years and the importance of educating parents:

> When we were at school, you'd never see a parent whereas here, they're here all the time concerned that their child's—they don't know what the level may look like but why aren't they the same as everybody else. I think it's a different understanding of assessment. I think out in the wider world, it's still, "We're behind. We're not meeting these benchmarks. We're not meeting this country". Parents will bring it up and say, "Well, where does my child sit in a group?" and it's a lot about us providing education for them and saying to them there are other areas of assessment. There are other successes out there. (Mel, Literacy Leader, School 6)

This comment is illustrative of the wider issue of standardised testing impacting society, with teachers feeling the pressure at the local level from mandates put in place far beyond the local school gates, as well as pressure from media scrutiny. Lunneblada and Carlsson (2012) and Hopmann (2008) reiterated this, discussing the far-reaching consequences of standardised testing, with Hopmann proffering that the consequences were making "governments tremble, parliaments discuss, journalists write, parents nervous and teachers angry" (p. 417). The teachers' responses in relation to the national standardised testing reflected this frustration and anger at how these external mandates were impacting them and the school community.

Teachers raised issues around parental and community expectations in relation to NAPLAN, as well as the concern about how the media participated in the conversation about NAPLAN and the pressure this placed on teachers. One participant stated, "But I think maybe the community still needs further education about the fact that one test—a NAPLAN on a day isn't the sum total of a child" (Kay, Literacy Leader, School 3). Mockler (2018) asserted parents need to be informed of the limitations of NAPLAN reporting. Participants also identified a lack of understanding from those outside education about the robust approach to literacy assessment that schools engaged with to gain a more detailed picture of each student outside the NAPLAN assessment, as illustrated in this comment:

> A lot of focus is put on NAPLAN I think and some parents think that's the be all and end all, and they get very upset when that external assessment is probably not what they expect, so—yeah. I think they just need to know that we're doing ongoing assessment and we've probably got a better picture where they are rather than one-off assessments that happen in one day of their life, 2 hours of their life or something, in a—well, in primary school in an environment they're not used to, sitting down, doing a test, sitting in rows, sort of thing like that. Yeah. So, that they need the whole picture rather than just one little aspect of assessment. (Marcia, Years 1/2, School 2)

The Phase 2 participants spoke about the pressure on schools of being judged based on NAPLAN data, and how this one tool was used to compare all students from different settings, which placed a great deal of pressure on schools, resulting in teachers having to teach to the test. Parents accessing the data through the My School website meant data were visible not just to the teachers but also to parents who were using the information to select schools. The use of the My School website, introduced in 2010, has elevated NAPLAN to a high-stakes assessment (Mockler, 2018; Reid, 2010b, 2019). Further, Carter (2017) stated, "We know that the publication of these tests increases their significance so that they become high-stakes tests, where parental choice of schools, the job security of principals and teachers and school funding are affected" (para. 9). Frawley and McLean Davies (2015) asserted that the publication of NAPLAN data on the My School website also directly impacts parents' perceptions of schools and teachers. The Phase 2 participants recognised this as a key area of concern and noted how it caused a tension for schools, as illustrated in the two following comments:

> It just—it scares me that so much of your school's identity gets based on NAPLAN. It's just concerning that a week in May just dictates the school's identity. (Kirsty, Literacy Leader, School 7)

> I think this school would like to think sometimes that we don't teach to the test, but they do. And I don't think they should and I think there's that real pressure on leadership, that fine line between how do we boost our numbers coming into prep if we don't have any kind of visible way of way of saying, "Look how great our school is". But I think the school is much better than anything any tests tell you. So, I understand that dilemma that's being had. (Simone, Years 1/2, School 1)

The tension for teachers is illustrated in Simone's comment above; she acknowledged a teaching to the test mentality had pervaded the school even though the staff did not want to teach that way, but they needed to have the "good" visible numerical data published through the My School website so they could ensure they kept up their enrolments. Many of the teachers and literacy leaders raised this sentiment in Phase 2 of this research across the eight schools.

6.2 Summary

It was evident from the Phase 2 data that the early years educators' literacy teaching and assessment practices were influenced by neoliberal political ideology. The Phase 2 data revealed the early years educators had a clear understanding of the sociocultural political factors impacting their literacy assessment. Although they discussed feeling empowered by the greater autonomy gained from the 2012 CEM devolution of literacy assessment in terms of decisions made about literacy assessment in the early years at the local school level, they also considered a range of other factors outside their control that impacted this sense of professional autonomy. Mockler (2011) reiterated the sentiments from participants in this research in terms of how influential the external political environment is on teacher practice:

> External political environment comprises the discourses, attitudes and understandings surrounding education that exist external to the profession, experienced by teachers largely through the media, but also through the development of government policy which relates to their work and the ways in which political ideology impacts upon their work as a result of government policy. (p. 521)

Teachers had very strong opinions about NAPLAN, the My School website, and the reporting of literacy standards. The participants seemed frustrated yet resigned to many of the sociocultural factors that they discussed as affecting them. These factors were so removed from their locus of control, they just had to do what was required even if it did not align with their beliefs. This aligns with the research from Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus (2003) who noted that high-stakes assessment causes teachers to enact practices that may not align with their beliefs. Although verbally, the participants appeared to question current policy and practices such as NAPLAN and the My School reporting of data, they did not demonstrate any real resistance. Caldwell (2016) raised the issue of accountability measures constraining professional autonomy. The impact of official government assessment policy and system-based policy were evident in teachers' assessment autonomy, as was the influence of the media, reporting of data, and the perceived literacy crisis. The system-based autonomy given to the teachers through the policy change of 2012, although greatly appreciated, appeared insignificant compared to the range of sociocultural politics teachers faced.

This chapter provided analysis and discussion of the Phase 2 interview results relating to sociocultural politics. Issues relating to factors outside the school and outside the teachers' control in terms of literacy assessment were discussed. Chapter 7 is the final chapter of the thesis where key findings from the research are summarised, together with recommendations and conclusion.

Chapter 7 Findings, Recommendations, and Reflections

> The absence of teacher voice and teacher expertise in policy debate and decision making is at the heart of all that is wrong with education in Australia today. (Adoniou, 2018, para. 23)

This research investigated the literacy assessment practices of early years teachers in Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese within a changing policy paradigm, following a devolution of literacy assessment allowing schools much greater autonomy over literacy assessment in the early years (Foundation–Year 2) after a long period of mandated and prescriptive literacy assessment (1998–2012). To understand the impact of this devolution, the following questions were posed and answered through a robust mixed-methods case study.

Given the contemporary high-stakes assessment environment, characterised by heightened levels of teacher accountability and coupled with increased autonomy around literacy assessment decision-making returned to schools, the overarching questions that underpinned the study are reiterated as follows.

Research Question 1

1. What are the current literacy assessment beliefs and practices of teachers in early years classrooms (F–2) in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese?

Research Question 2

2. In what ways do devolved responsibility and increased autonomy for literacy assessment allow early years teachers to interrogate, innovate on, resist, or accept both previously mandated and current literacy assessment priorities and practices?

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 constituted an analysis and discussion of the results of the two phases of the research. Phase 1 consisted of an online questionnaire comprising

both open and closed questions, which was completed by 76 literacy leaders from 76 Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information on schools' literacy assessment practices in the early years and if these had changed since a Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) policy change in 2012 allowing schools greater autonomy over literacy assessment in the early years. Phase 2 involved semistructured interviews with 23 early years teachers and seven literacy leaders from eight diverse schools to investigate their literacy assessment practices and how they responded to the opportunities that came with devolved decision-making.

In this chapter, I summarise and synthesise the key findings from the research, explore recommendations based on these findings, reflect on the contribution of this research noting limitations of the research, and offer final reflections.

7.1 Summary and Synthesis of Key Findings

The research reported a rich and complex narrative in relation to literacy assessment in the early years and how teachers navigate their work in a changing policy paradigm. Issues central to teachers' work today, including professionalism, teacher agency, and empowerment, were identified through the research process. Importantly, the research identified how contemporary early years teachers are grappling with assessing literacy amidst a range of local, system, state, and national policies that appear to constrain teacher agency, and yet these teachers demonstrated a commitment to assessing literacy in authentic and meaningful ways to support students' literacy learning. I have summarised and synthesised the insights from the research into the following four key findings and recommendations, each of which I address in turn.

7.1.1 Importance of Teacher Judgement

Resisting the emphasis on standardised literacy assessment, many contemporary teachers ascribe to assessment practices that make greater use of teacher judgement.

This research demonstrates that teachers in the early years have clearly articulated beliefs in relation to literacy assessment; they value literacy assessment and engage in wide-ranging assessment practices using a range of tools to support children's learning but prefer qualitative assessment based on observation requiring

teacher judgement. Additionally, all teachers in this study discussed their literacy assessment practices confidently. Their ideas around what constitutes good literacy assessment were grounded in current theory, positing that good literacy assessment should impact both learning and teaching, be fair, and reflect contextual factors including cultural and linguistic diversity. However, discussion of these assessment values did not stop them from engaging in practices that were contrary to their articulated beliefs. Teachers, although not always agreeing with measuring and reporting literacy numerically or with engaging young children in "test-like" assessments, felt compelled by their school leadership to do so.

Connolly et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of teachers having a repertoire of strategies for assessment and that there should be "recognition that quality education for all students requires teachers to have a repertoire of assessment practices that are valid and reliable and that take seriously the challenge of pedagogic-assessment fit'" (p. 613). The research clearly illustrates that the early years teachers employ a repertoire of literacy assessment processes and practices. Early years teachers' literacy assessment practices could be classified as formal, such as standardised quantitative assessments, or less formal, such as qualitative assessments that require teacher judgement. Allal (2013) noted a new way of conceptualising assessment and, drawing on the work of J. K. Smith (2003), discussed the notion of "sufficiency of information" (p. 31), meaning teachers have enough information to determine a child's progress and achievement. The data from this research clearly indicated teachers met the sufficiency of information criterion with myriad assessments being administered. However, the teachers acknowledged they did not always feel confident with knowing what to do next with the data, particularly data gathered from commercially produced assessments.

All teachers in this study identified gathering qualitative data based on observations as key to assessing children in the early years. Many described this as the best way of assessing literacy. They discussed the importance of linking assessment with teaching and capturing anecdotally what was happening in those teaching moments. They discussed sound assessment gathered during teaching interactions allowed them to respond to students at their point of need or to plan for future teaching opportunities using their teacher judgement.

7.1.2 Privileging Commercially Produced Literacy Assessment Tools

Despite opportunities afforded by the devolution, early years teachers are using more formal literacy assessment tools than during the mandated period. They strongly privilege commercially produced literacy assessment tools, which reflects a deprofessionalisation of teachers and the undermining of teacher judgement.

While this finding may appear initially to contradict the previous finding, it clearly demonstrates the assessment tensions experienced by early years teachers. While they clearly articulated the belief in the importance of teacher judgement, they were compelled to use commercially produced literacy assessment tools. All schools in Phases 1 and 2 had purchased standardised literacy assessment resources aimed at measuring children's literacy skills numerically. Many schools used a range of these tools to report the school's literacy data to the community. Although, again, most classroom teachers articulated reservations about the use of these tools, they were mandated to use them by schools' leadership teams.

The influence of policy and publishers was evident in how teachers reproduced literacy assessment in the early years. Many teachers lamented having to use many of the school-mandated commercially produced literacy assessment tools, but in practice, teachers complied with their use and did not take an active role in resisting the use of these tools. The overt influence of edu-business on schools' assessment practices was apparent across all schools involved in the research, and teachers' ability to resist the use of these tools appeared limited.

7.1.3 Limited Teacher Autonomy

While literacy assessment decision-making has nominally been devolved to the school level, little real authority or responsibility rests with classroom teachers.

Discharging literacy assessment responsibility to schools has opened up options for principals and teachers in Catholic schools, ranging from continuing the status quo to a complete revision of literacy assessment practices in early years classrooms. However, the autonomy afforded teachers is not necessarily automatic or available; any resultant autonomy is school dependent, with literacy leaders in schools playing a critical role. How teachers and their literacy leaders have managed and characterised

this shift in assessment policy provides important insights into not only the impact of the system change, but also the ways early years teachers navigate the assessment autonomy afforded to them, or not, while enduring a climate of high-stakes testing and performativity measures.

Participants in this study overwhelmingly saw the opportunity for greater autonomy over literacy assessment practices in the early years as positive. They clearly articulated the belief that teachers in schools were best placed to make decisions about literacy assessment based on the school's contextual needs. Although they expressed an appreciation of autonomy, in practice, the innovation of literacy assessment in the early years seemed limited.

The role of leadership in determining the approach to literacy assessment at the school level was clear. Each school's literacy leader heavily influenced the literacy assessment practices of that school's early years teachers. The type of leadership exercised by the literacy leader often determined how the teachers felt about their literacy assessment autonomy. Some literacy leaders engaged in a more collaborative approach to literacy leadership and liaised with teachers in the decision-making process in relation to literacy assessment. However, there were clear examples of a more top-down approach to literacy leadership, whereby the teachers felt they had very little agency in terms of literacy assessment as they were told what they were required to do. In the schools with a top-down approach to leadership, some teachers expressed that they just did what they were told to do, while some teachers were clearly frustrated by being told what to do and resented not having greater autonomy. It was evident that the school leadership influenced teachers' literacy assessment practices.

It was also clear from Phase 2 of the research that the school leaders were focused on accountability, standards, and having quantifiable data as evidence. This was often juxtaposed with what the teachers valued in terms of literacy assessment but echoed current neoliberal assessment policies, priorities, and mandates. Although there was push back from most teachers in relation to, for example, quantifying students' literacy learning in the early years and feeling a pressure to prepare children for the national standardised Year 3 assessment NAPLAN, there was a general sense of helplessness from the teachers who resigned themselves to the fact that it was out of

their hands and that they had to comply and accept school, system, state, and national policy expectations. Teachers did not feel they had a voice to reject policy mandates. Dinham (2015) proffered that teachers' voices are no longer heard in education: "Educators have been silent or silenced in discourses about education" (p. 3). In this research, teachers held clearly articulated beliefs but in practice complied with expectations imposed upon them.

The teachers articulated the limitations of measuring literacy success numerically, with many teachers expressing anger at having to compromise their beliefs in relation to what they perceived as best practice for assessing children's literacy in the early years, and as previously noted, they complied with what was required. Moore and Clarke (2016) noted that teachers have numerous reasons for complying with policy that they do not agree with, but ultimately, "Resistance is seldom a simple or a comfortable business and . . . its pursuit is generally more easily talked about than put into practice" (p. 675).

The literacy leaders were less inclined to be critical of neoliberal policy and practices, with many speaking positively about having numerical data as evidence of literacy learning. As part of their role, they required these data to report to the wider community and enthusiastically took up this responsibility.

Although there was a devolution of responsibility for literacy assessment to the schools from CEM, this did not result in an assessment revolution. It was evident that schools had continued to use many literacy assessment tools that were mandated for early years teachers prior to 2012 but were using them in more flexible ways. Most schools did not make significant changes and in fact appeared to engage in more literacy assessment than during the mandated period. School leadership played a key role in the types of literacy assessment tools and approaches enacted in the schools, thereby limiting teacher agency. This seemed to be influenced by key policy, priorities, and mandates that had emerged after the 2012 devolution, and this is discussed further in the following finding.

7.1.4 Current Policy Initiatives Limiting Literacy Assessment Autonomy

Key policy initiatives (particularly those linked to high-stakes testing and professional standards) influence teachers' assessment practices and limit their literacy assessment autonomy.

It was clear that policy, priorities, and assessment mandates made outside the schools were impacting the early years teachers' assessment practices in all schools. The CEM literacy assessment devolution occurred in 2012, and although some policies and practices were in place prior, it appears that post 2012, an exponential number of other key neoliberal policies and practices at state, national, and international levels had come to the fore. Ball et al. (2012) described this as a "current climate of policy overload and *initiativitis*" (p. 141, emphasis added). This is illustrated in the policy levers diagram (see Figure 7.1), which illustrates myriad neoliberal system, state, and national policies and directives that have come into play since 2012.

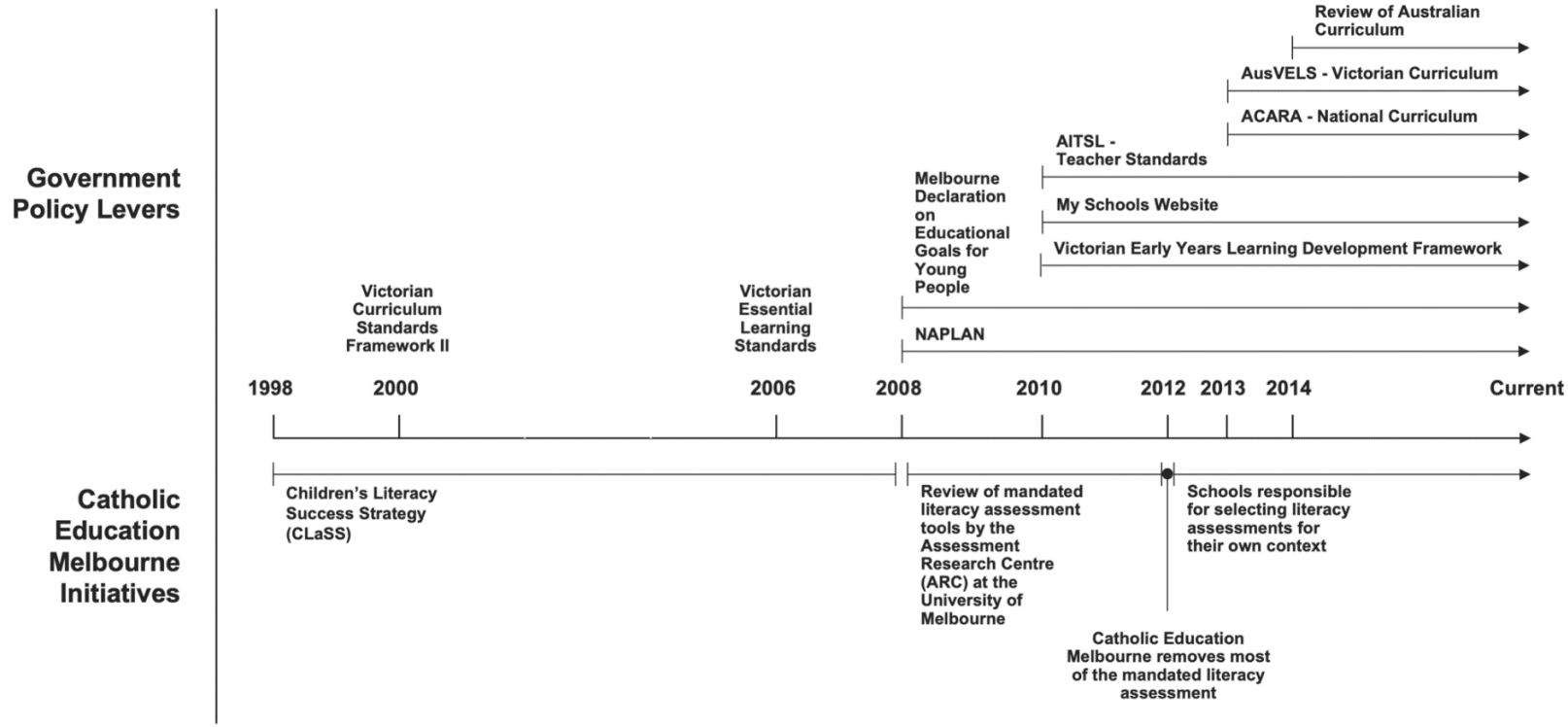


Figure 7.1. Policy levers timeline.

Gerrard and Farrell (2014) posited that these neoliberal policies regulate teachers' work and impact teacher autonomy. Although since 2012 the system has devolved responsibility for literacy assessment in the early years to schools, the many policies after this period were clearly influencing the assessment practices of the early years teachers in this study. Darling-Hammond (1990) asserted, "Policies do not land in a vacuum; they land on top of other policies" (p. 240). This was evident in this research, with autonomy being given by one policy but constrained by a range of other policies that "landed" around the same time. These official policies were being reproduced in the teachers' assessment practices, such as preparing children for NAPLAN testing or moderating work samples to assess students against curriculum standards.

It was also evident that a range of factors influenced teachers' varied responses. The influence of NAPLAN, although not occurring in the early years, was identified as a definite pressure by the early years teachers and clearly affected their approach to literacy assessment. Teachers were also cognisant of mechanisms for reporting NAPLAN data through the My School website and articulated that this also influenced their literacy assessment practices. The way teachers were positioned and how literacy standards were reported, or misreported, by the media also influenced teachers' approaches to literacy assessment.

Teachers were also conscious of national and state teacher standards and the requirements of teachers to engage in assessment to meet the requirements of these standards. There was a perception of what "good" teachers do in terms of literacy assessment, and this echoes the neoliberal concepts of performativity (Ball, 2003) and teacher surveillance (Page, 2017).

7.2 Recommendations

The early years of schooling are an important phase in which learners have specific needs based on their age and development. The importance of early years teachers meeting the needs of learners during this period with developmentally appropriate literacy teaching and assessment is universally recognised. Arising from the four findings outlined in Section 7.1 are four key recommendations, each of which is outlined next.

7.2.1 Assess Less but Analyse More

A strategic and holistic approach to literacy assessment is required, allowing early years teachers in schools to ensure the developmental needs of children in the early years are met.

This research found teachers used a plethora of different literacy assessment tools that provided them with the same information. They spoke about being time poor, and many were frustrated with the number of formal commercial literacy assessments they were compelled to use. Instead of using a range of different tools, teachers could be supported to use tools that assess a range of skills. For example, teachers engaged in moderating writing samples to report against curriculum standards. These writing samples could be used to assess a range of other skills, including knowledge of letters and sounds, spelling, handwriting, genre, and voice. A reading conference could be used to assess both students' decoding and comprehension and engagement. Reid (2019) acknowledged that teachers need to be supported to engage with meaningful assessment, contending teachers' professional judgement should be trusted. Teachers should first think about what it is they need to find out about a student's literacy learning and then think of the most developmentally appropriate and strategic way to assess this, as opposed to reaching for a commercially produced literacy assessment tool.

7.2.2 Earlier Is Not Better

Limit the amount of narrow and formal literacy assessments tools used in the early years, particularly the use of commercially produced literacy assessment tools.

This research revealed that teachers often felt pressure to prepare children in the early years for what was to come next, such as NAPLAN testing. Teachers discussed having to ensure that children meet standards and demonstrate 12 months' growth. Many theorists (see Alliance for High Quality Education [AHQE], 2014; Berliner, as cited in Strauss, 2011; Iorio & Tanabe, 2015) have expressed concern with current practices in early years classrooms, particularly in English-speaking countries, including using narrow and formal assessments that have the potential to identify children as being at risk too early when these students may just need additional time and support. The use of commercially based literacy assessment tools needs to be limited in the early years.

There is a risk that these tools become the curriculum and lead to teachers narrowing their teaching to the skills these tools assess. Instead, it is recommended that a much more robust and developmentally appropriate approach to learning and assessment in the early years is required that inextricably links early years curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. This approach would hopefully alleviate some of the current literacy assessment burdens the early years teachers in this research identified.

7.2.3 Respect Teacher Knowledge

Innovation from the bottom up is required, allowing teachers to have a pivotal role in research and policy debate and formation.

Teachers in this research showed they were knowledgeable individuals whose assessment knowledge and beliefs were based on both experience and theory, but their literacy assessment practices were being constrained by a range of policy factors outside of their control. Theorists such as Comber and Nixon (2009) and Dinham (2015) have argued that teachers today are excluded from policy debate and formation. Further, Ellison et al. (2018) stated, "Practicing teachers may not hold a privileged epistemic position in policy debate, but we believe that their experience, knowledge, and skills have much to contribute to educational change" (p. 168). It is therefore recommended that teachers have their expertise acknowledged and their voices heard in policy debates and formation. Teachers need to have a key role in producing research, recontextualising this research into policy and programs, and then reproducing this in the form of sound literacy teaching and assessment in the early years.

7.2.4 Targeting the Early Years

Literacy teaching and assessment in the first 3 years of schooling should reflect the specific needs of this stage.

As reported in the literature review in Chapter 2, the early years from birth to 8 years is a key period in childhood development, and as such, the literacy teaching and assessment in the first 3 years of schooling should reflect the specific needs of this stage. Currently, "early years" straddles two policy spaces: a "boundary zone", whereby early years teachers are encouraged to follow the Victorian Early Years Learning

Development Education Framework (VEYLDEF) that sets out teaching guidelines from birth to 8 years, and the Victorian Curriculum, which they are required to follow and mandated to report against. The early years teachers in this research articulated feeling pressure to prepare children for what was coming next and as a result adjusted their teaching and assessment. It is recommended that teachers in the early years be supported with navigating this "boundary zone" of teaching and assessing children between 5 and 8 years through understanding the developmental needs of children in this stage and the most appropriate approaches to literacy teaching and assessment. Rather than having two policy and curriculum documents applied to the early years, it would be better for the early years to only refer to one. This may entail a review of the early years and more specific professional learning targeted at teachers in the early years of schooling to support them with meeting the needs of children in the early years.

7.3 Contribution of This Research

This predominantly qualitative mixed-methods two-phase study focused on a specific case of early years teachers' literacy assessment practices in Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese. The study provides important findings into what happens when a system devolves assessment responsibility back to schools. Importantly, it problematises concepts like devolution, drawing attention to the systemic constraints that remain even when decision-making responsibility is ostensibly entrusted to schools. The study reports on the practices of the schools of 76 literacy leaders who completed the Phase 1 questionnaire, and the beliefs and practices of 23 early years teachers and seven literacy leaders interviewed in the eight schools that were part of Phase 2. While the sampling of schools in both phases of the research reflects the range of school populations and community demography in the Melbourne archdiocese, I acknowledge that this sample cannot purport to represent the views or practices of all early years teachers from the Catholic system or early years teachers in other systems. Despite this, there were consistent messages from the literacy leaders and early years teachers involved in the research about literacy assessment in the early years. The purpose of my research was not to provide generalisability; rather, in line with Stake (2010), this research provides important "situational examples" (p. 24).

It is important to highlight that the robust approach to the research, through the two-phased approach to data collection and analysis, provides important insights into issues related to literacy assessment in the early years. The significant data gathered in Phase 1 through the high response rate to the questionnaire from 76 schools across the Melbourne archdiocese, and then the more fine-grained data collected from the 30 semistructured interviews conducted in the eight demographically different schools in Phase 2, ensures that a comprehensive picture of early years teachers' literacy assessment beliefs and practices has been achieved.

Further research into the literacy pedagogical practices of early years teachers is recommended, and research into the interconnectedness of pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment in the early years could lead to further recommendations on best practice for literacy teaching and assessment in the early years. Ideally, early years teachers should be actively involved in this research to ensure their voices are heard and to inform any future policy directives.

Additionally, the study reports on participants' interrogation of, innovation on, resistance to, or acceptance of both previously mandated and current options around literacy assessment priorities and practices. Bernstein's (1990, 1996, 2000) pedagogic device as a theoretical framework provided an important conceptual tool for exploring the complexities and tensions of policy enactments at the school and classroom level. It is also recommended that any future research into the interconnectedness of pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment in the early years makes use of Bernstein's pedagogic device as a lens through which to explore the relay of policy to the school and classroom level and further investigate who has autonomy over pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment in the early years.

Findings from this study illustrate that early years teachers' literacy assessment work is complex due to working in a "boundary zone" of tension and compromise where, on one hand, teachers are encouraged to engage in age-appropriate, child-centred early years pedagogies, yet on the other, they are mandated to assess and report against system-wide primary curriculum standards.

Importantly, my research investigated early years teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to literacy assessment within a changing policy paradigm. While previous

studies have illuminated issues around the importance of education in the early years (DeLuca & Hughes, 2014; Ewing et al., 2016; Tayler & Page, 2016), issues in relation to standardised assessment (Polesel et al., 2012) and matters in relation to assessment in the early years (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018; DeLuca & Hughes, 2014; Jay et al., 2016; Hesterman, 2018; Laevers, 2007), my research, while focused on literacy, assessment, and the early years, specifically explored the process of devolution and schools being offered more literacy assessment decision-making power in an era characterised by high levels of accountability. This study yields new insights into early years teachers' literacy assessment autonomy and agency and the importance of developmentally appropriate literacy teaching and assessment in the first 3 years of schooling. The findings of this research are important for early years teachers, school leaders, and education systems.

In this chapter, I emphasised the four key findings that emerged from the research and discussed four recommendations based on these findings. The two-phase predominantly qualitative mixed-methods case study, although limited to early years teachers in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne archdiocese, provides insight into how schools responded to the change from a mandated and prescriptive approach to literacy assessment (1998–2012) to schools having much greater autonomy. This autonomy exists in a period characterised by high levels of accountability, and the findings illustrate the challenges early years teachers face in terms of literacy assessment in the current educational climate with a focus on measuring literacy numerically.

7.4 Final Thoughts: Reclaiming Literacy Assessment in the Early Years

This research reveals a complex narrative in relation to literacy assessment in the early years as teachers attempt to navigate "contested assessment policies" (Cumming et al., 2019, p. 836). It is evident that teachers hold firm beliefs when it comes to assessment and try to enact these beliefs while sometimes being mandated to engage in practices that do not always align with their beliefs. Some participants articulated this as a challenge. Gowlett (2013) and Cody (2019) noted that teachers are often required to manage competing and conflicting educational priorities. Cody (2019) called upon educators to embrace binary positions and views. She asserted that it does not have to

be an “either/or” approach and that differing philosophical approaches to teaching and assessment should be embraced. Cody cited a native Scottish proverb: “If you can’t ride two wild horses at once you shouldn’t be in the circus” (p. 198). She argued that teachers need to embrace the measurement and accountability agenda while focusing on a holistic approach to education (p. 202). However, Cumming and colleagues (2019) cautioned that “accountability agendas are serving to erode community trust in teachers, and teachers’ trust in their own professional judgement” (p. 849). It is evident that teachers in my research were trying to navigate the often conflicting and contested literacy assessment agendas; they showed an acceptance of school, system, state, and national government official mandated assessment requirements, such as moderating and reporting against standards, while engaging in assessment requiring teacher judgement. However, I argue that it is time for early years teachers to reclaim their professional autonomy and engage in an interrogation and resistance of literacy assessment practices that they believe do not support student learning in the early years. Teachers should be encouraged to use their professional judgement to engage in literacy assessment practices that they know best suit the needs of early years students within their given school context.

> It is time that we looked seriously at the demoralisation of teachers in Australia and restore their professionalism. (Appel, 2003, p. 3)

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Appendices

Appendix A. Plain Language Statement: Literacy Leader and Early Years Teachers

Martina Tassone
Doctor of Education
Ethics no. 1545063.1

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

"Literacy assessment in the early years"

Dear

You are invited to participate in the research project, "Literacy assessment in the early years". It is part of my study for a Doctor of Education at the University of Melbourne. My supervisors for the project are Dr. Paul Molyneux and Dr. Carmel Sandiford. The project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Melbourne. Permission to conduct the research has also been obtained from Catholic Education Melbourne.

Aim of Research

The aim of the study is to investigate the current principles, priorities and practices that underpin assessment in the early years of schooling (that is; Foundation to Year Two classrooms) in the Melbourne Archdiocese. By doing this research, I hope to document how early years educators' assessment practices have been impacted upon by the 2012 Catholic Education Policy change providing schools much greater autonomy in terms of assessment tools and processes used at the beginning and end of the school year. Should you agree to participate you will be invited to contribute to this research by:

- participating in an interview that will take up to 45 minutes. You will have the opportunity to discuss your assessment practices and how The Catholic Education Office's policy change to assessment requirements for pre and post testing periods, has impacted upon your assessment practices. The interview will be audio-taped to ensure that I can make an accurate record of what you say.

How privacy and confidentiality will be protected

I intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. Your name and contact details will be kept in a separate, password-protected computer file from the data concerning you. In the final report, you and your school will be referred to by a pseudonym. I will remove any references to personal information that might allow someone to guess your identity. However, you should note, that as the number of people involved in the project is small, it is possible that someone may still be able to identify you. I hope that in spite of this possibility, your participation in such a project will help to address issues relating to assessment practices in the early years and provide important information to inform Catholic Education as well as the wider education community.

Once the research-report arising from this research has been completed, a brief summary of the findings will be available if you wish to see it. It is also possible that the results will be presented at

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academic conferences and in research publications. Any data collected for the project will be kept securely in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education for five years from the completion of the research report, before being destroyed.

Participation is Voluntary

Please be advised that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw at any stage, or to withdraw any unprocessed data you have supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice.

If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and returning it to me via email. I will then contact you and send you the link to the on-line survey and arrange a mutually convenient time to complete the interview.

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the researchers:

Dr. Paul Molyneux
University of Melbourne Project Supervisor
Ph: (03) 8344 8202
pdmoly@unimelb.edu.au

Dr. Carmel Sandiford
University of Melbourne Project Supervisor
Ph: (03) 8344 2582
carmel.sandiford@unimelb.edu.au

Mrs Martina Tassone
University of Melbourne DEd candidate
Ph: 0414 664 066
tassonem@unimelb.edu.au

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

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Appendix B. Online Questionnaire

Appendix 4

Literacy Assessment in the Early Years

Doctor of Education Research- Martina Tassone

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. This questionnaire forms part of the research for my Doctor of Education at the University of Melbourne. The research is being supervised by Doctor Paul Molyneux and Doctor Carmel Sandiford. The purpose of this survey is to ascertain how a change in assessment policy has impacted upon your school's assessment practices.

From 1998 until 2011 Catholic Primary schools were required by the Catholic Education Office Melbourne to collect and submit literacy assessment data on children from Prep to Year 2. This included administering *The Observation Survey* for children in Prep and Year 1, completing *running records* using a benchmark text to determine an instructional reading level, administering *The Record of Oral Language* and completing *Peter's Dictation* for students in Year 2. In 2012, the Catholic Education Office changed these requirements and schools are now only required to collect and submit two forms of data to CEM (formally the Catholic Education Office). Schools are now required to administer *The Record of Oral language* at the beginning of the year and collect text level information using *Alpha Assess* at the end of the year.

1. Name of School

2. School's Suburb

3. Your Name

4. Time fraction for Literacy Leader Role

- ◯ Full Time
- ◯ .5 to .8
- ◯ .2 to .4
- ◯ Less than .2

5. Number of Years in the Literacy Leader role

1

6. Other roles currently held

7. To what extent would you say your school's assessment practices in the early years have changed since 2012?

- ◯ The changes to our assessment practices in the early years have been **significant**
- ◯ There have been **minor** changes made to our assessment practices in the early years
- ◯ The assessment practices **remain the same** in the early years

8. Which of the following assessment tools do you use at the beginning of the school year to assess students in the early years (tick as many as applicable)?

	Foundation	Year 1	Year 2
Observation Survey Letter ID	◯	◯	◯
Observation Survey Hearing and Recording Sound in words	◯	◯	◯
Observation Survey Writing Vocabulary	◯	◯	◯
Observation Survey Concepts About Print	◯	◯	◯
Observation Survey Word Test	◯	◯	◯
Record of Oral Language	◯	◯	◯
BURT word Test	◯	◯	◯
Peter's Dictation	◯	◯	◯
Running Records using Alpha Assess	◯	◯	◯
Running Records using PM Benchmark kit	◯	◯	◯
Running Records using Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark kit	◯	◯	◯

Other Tools Used (please specify)

2

9. Which of the following assessment tools do you use at the end of the school year to assess students in the early years (tick as many as applicable)?

	Foundation	Year 1	Year 2
Observation Survey Letter ID	○	○	○
Observation Survey Hearing and Recording Sound in words	○	○	○
Observation Survey Writing Vocabulary	○	○	○
Observation Survey Concepts About Print	○	○	○
Observation Survey Word Test	○	○	○
Record of Oral Language	○	○	○
BURT word Test	○	○	○
Peter's Dictation	○	○	○
Running Records using Alpha Assess	○	○	○
Running Records using PM Benchmark kit	○	○	○
Running Records using Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark kit	○	○	○

Other Tools Used (please specify)

10. Since 2012, as Literacy Leader, which of the following Catholic Education Office *Whole School Improvement* Professional Learning Projects have you participated in?

- ○ School Improvement Literacy(SIL)
- ○ Literacy Coaching (SILC)
- ○ Mentoring
- ○ Literacy Clusters

3

11. Since 2012, as Literacy Leader, which of the following Catholic Education Office*Supporting Pedagogical Practice* Professional Learning Projects have you participated in

- ◯ F-8 Learning Literacies (Writing)
- ◯ Collaborative Literacy Learning Communities (CLLC)
- ◯ Reading to Learn
- ◯ Reading Recovery Training
- ◯ Reading Recovery Continuing Contact
- ◯ Literacy Assessment Project (LAP)
- ◯ P-2 Literacy Assessment Progression of Reading Development (2013)
- ◯ P-2 Literacy Assessment for Literacy Learning and Teaching (2013)
- ◯ F-2 Assessment (2014)
- ◯ F-2 Building Literacy Assessment Capacity-BLAC (2015)

12. Prior to completing this survey has your school used the online Literacy Assessment Resource available on Catholic Education Victorian Network (CEVN)? If 'Yes' proceed to question 13 if 'No' proceed to question 14.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

13. Did the resource help you in making decisions around assessment tools and practices in the Early Years (Foundation to Year 2)?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

14. Which statement best reflects your reason for not accessing the online resource?

- ◯ We did not know it existed
- ◯ We did not feel the school needed any support around assessment in the early years
- ◯ Other (please specify)

4

15. How often, at your school, do you dedicate time to discuss literacy assessment in the early years?

- Once a week
- Once a fortnight
- Once every three weeks
- Once a month
- Once a term
- Rarely
- Not at all
- Other (please specify)

16. Where do these discussions about literacy assessment take place (you can tick more than one box)?

- In professional learning team meetings
- In whole staff meetings
- At school curriculum days
- Other (please specify)

17. Do you have any additional comments to make in relation to assessment in the early years at your school?

18. Would you be interested in participating in a face-to-face interview to discuss your school's literacy assessment practices in more detail?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

19. If you answered 'Yes' to question 18, please provide name and contact details (phone and email address)

Name

Email Address

Phone Number

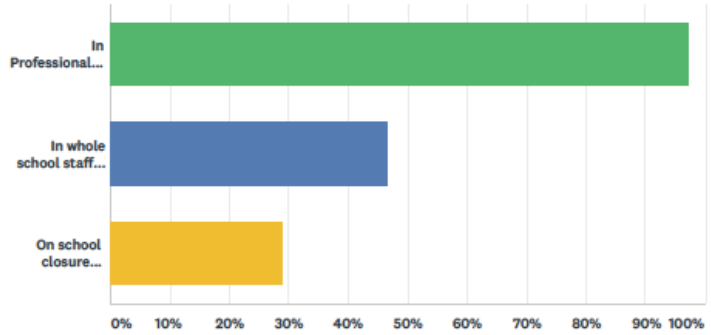
5

Appendix C. Survey Monkey Charts

Literacy Assessment in the Early Years

Q16 Where do these discussions about literacy assessment occur? (you can tick more than one box)

Answered: 73 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
In Professional Learning Team meetings	97.26%	71
In whole school staff meetings	46.58%	34
On school closure curriculum days	28.77%	21
Total Respondents: 73		

Response Date	er (please spec	Categories
1 Jul 14 2016 01:45	At our literacy PLTs we discuss our ongoing assessment of our students. What evidence are we collecting? what can the student do? What is their next step? etc	
2 Jul 13 2016 11:55	It's difficult to put a time frame around it. The conversation about children's date and achievements is ongoing. This occurs in planning, in PLT's and incidentally. PLT's is where though the discussion around changes take place.	
3 Jul 11 2016 05:40	In previous years it has been discussed more regularly but the meeting structure has changed this year, leading to me having less direct involvement in P-2 planning	
4 Jun 06 2016 11:09	As needed informally with P-2 teachersFormally once a term.	
5 Jun 04 2016 08:49	P-2 Assessment not as such but we have weekly PLTs and I completed the Early Literacy intervention Certificate with Brenda Delheim last year so assessment procedures and intervention are an ongoing discussion in Prep and Year 1 particularly.	
6 Jun 03 2016 05:49	We are constantly talking about where the students are and where they need to go next in our planning.	
7 Jun 03 2016 11:5	Discussed incident all at most fortnightly planning sessions but explicitly focused on at PLTs or whole school meetings at least monthly	
8 Jun 02 2016 11:0	Teachers are reflecting at their planning where children are at with their literacy to inform and drive the planning for the coming fortnight and manipulation of reading groups.	
9 Jun 01 2016 01:2	This is approximate ... we have weekly PLT's and it depends on our focus, so sometimes it is more often. After the initial assessments their are regular times dedicated to analysing Peter's or running records etc based on teacher and student needs.	
10 May 30 2016 01:4	We are continuously talking about our assessment practices and data at bi weekly PLT's and at Literacy intervention meetings. Discussions are not always with key stakeholders but as a staff we are constantly trying to refine and improve our practices to ensure that assessments are ongoing and used to inform our learning and teaching of literacy.	
11 May 30 2016 01:1	We discuss data and what it demonstrates. The online writing assessment tool presented at the Reading Recovery Conference has been used to analyse writing samples from f-2. Data from ongoing running records is another way assessment tools are ongoing.	
12 May 27 2016 09:1	Takes place in planning sessionsExpectation that assessment is ongoing and provides the basis for teaching decisions	
13 May 25 2016 03:1	The PLT is fortnightly and we try to focus on using data at each one. We do have some where this has not happened. We have one extra session in term one to focus on data.	
14 May 25 2016 10:2	Writing and spelling are probably the most regularly discussed in relation to assessment. Reading (accuracy) assessment receives more discussion around reporting time each semester. This year there has been a focus on developing reading comprehension so assessment of this is discussed approximately monthly.	
15 May 25 2016 09:2	And as the need arises.	
16 May 24 2016 02:0	During planning each week, (in addition to allocated PLTS), most teams are lead (by myself) through analysing and using data to forward plan (although 1 team works on a fortnightly planning basis).	
17 May 22 2016 09:1	Discussion about Literacy assessment occurs as : an on-going discussion with and between teachers & the Literacy Leader in level planning sessions and fortnightly PLTs	
18 May 22 2016 06:1	We spend some time during weekly planning sessions across the school to discuss assessments, data and analysing data to best direct our teaching and support our students.	
19 May 19 2016 12:4	discussed in planning time and PIt's with the P-2 teachers but as a whole school never (or very rarely)	
20 May 18 2016 11:1	Assessments are discussed in terms of identifying specific areas of strength or challenge, usually around individuals. The leadership team plans the whole school assessment schedule annually. In addition, teachers in the P-2 area select further assessment tools independently throughout the year for their own students, sharing these with colleagues.	
21 May 12 2016 02:1	I am present at team planning on a fortnightly basis as well as facilitated regular PLTs.	
22 May 12 2016 01:1	Literacy Assessment as per our assessment schedule is discussed at the beginning and end of the year.At the moment the F - 2 PLTs are focused on the Benchmark Assessment testing. PLTs occur fortnightly	
23 May 10 2016 04:0	USUALLY AT LEVEL PLANNING SESSIONS AS PART OF EVIDENCE CYCLE	
24 May 06 2016 01:4	Every week with Preps and then we have two literacy PLTs a term, and literacy has been a focus at school closure days over the past 18 months. There are also informal catch ups with other levels.	
25 May 06 2016 01:3	It is difficult to select one response as it is ongoing and can look different from week to week. This is on a needs basis. Prior to collecting data discussions occur which involve how assessments are administered. When ever data is collected it is analysed, discussed and goals are set. Weekly PLTs focus on data which is brought to the table by the teacher- depending on the focus this may include Early	
26 May 06 2016 11:0	It can also occur in ongoing ways with teachers as they assess using focus sheets, running records etc	
27 May 05 2016 04:4	Not necessarily formal discussions but with 2 Literacy Leaders and the Reading Recovery teacher sharing the same office, we are constantly discussing assessment and reporting.	

Appendix D. Semistructured Early Years Teacher Interview Questions

Semi-structured Early Years Teacher Interview Questions:
1 x 45min interview

Participant background

How long have you been teaching?

What current year level are you teaching and how long have you taught in this year level?

Please tell me a little about yourself and your role as an early years teacher?

Knowledge about Content

What aspects of literacy do you think are important to assess at the beginning of the year? What about at the end of the year?

Tell me a little bit about your assessment practices throughout the year?

Knowledge about Theory

What informs your assessment practices?

Do you draw upon the work of anyone in particular to guided your assessment? (tools/processes)

Knowledge of Teaching

How do you plan for assessment in your classroom? What documentation do you have to assist this process?

Are there any specific literacy assessment tools you use?

What do you think are some of the most useful way to assess literacy in the early years and why?

Are there any assessments you don't find useful?

How is the assessment gathered used?

Do you feel you need further support with assessment in the early years?

If so, what sort of support do you think you may need?

Knowledge of Learners

How do your assessment practices help you find out about the learners in your classroom?

Are there any assessments that you use for specific children in your class?

How do your assessment practices reflect the needs of your students?

Knowledge of School Context

Tell me about the school's expectations in relation to assessment?

How do the expectations of parents impact upon assessment practices at the school?

Does the school have an assessment schedule?

Are there specific assessments that you think are relevant for your school setting?

Knowledge of Sociocultural Politics

What do you know about Catholic Education Melbourne's change in 2012 to assessment policy?

What are your thoughts about the change?

How do you feel about current approaches to assessment in general within the school context and beyond?

How do you feel about NAPLAN as an early years teacher?

Anything you would like to add?

Appendix E. Transcript Extract

105 **Interviewer: Oral language – is oral language monitored in any –?**

106 Interviewee: No. No.

107 **Interviewer: So, record of oral language is done –**

108 Interviewee: That's it.

109 **Interviewer: Do you spend time with the teachers when you do the pre-assessment**
110 **analysing the data?**

111 Interviewee: Yes. Yes. The first term is all about analysing the data. So, with Burt –
112 analysing Burt, what is it telling us? It's talking about decoding and then the record of oral
113 language, what is it telling us? So, there's a lot – that whole term, because we commit two
114 days at beginning of the year assessment, that term is pretty much about data and what
115 we've collected.

116 **Interviewer: So, the two days – there's two days at the beginning of the year?**

117 Interviewee: Yeah.

118 **Interviewer: And children are assessed one-on-one with –?**

119 Interviewee: Yes.

120 **Interviewer: And that happens with the foundation children as well or does that**
121 **happen on their Wednesdays?**

122 Interviewee: That happens on their Wednesdays.

123 **Interviewer: Wednesdays, so they'll be given an appointment time?**

124 Interviewee: Yes.

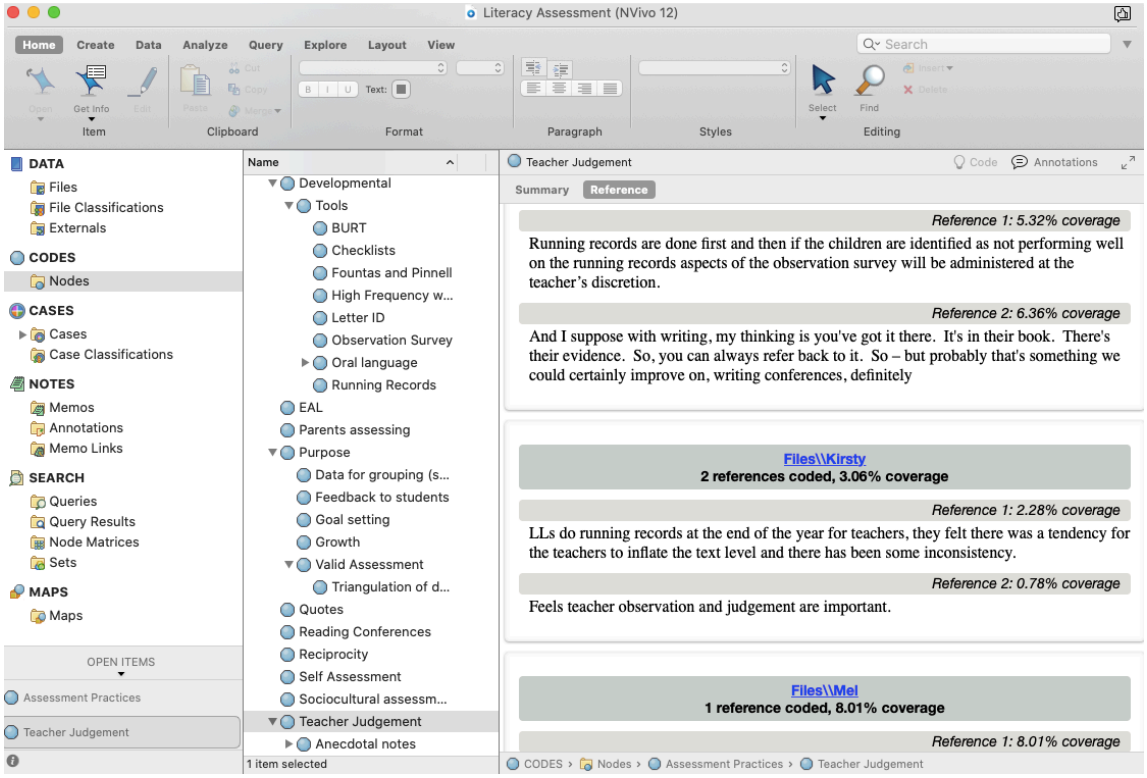
125 **Interviewer: And they come in that appointment time.**

126 Interviewee: Yes. Yeah.

127 **Interviewer: In terms of any theory or any beliefs, what do you think underpins the**
128 **assessment practices in the early years? What sort of knowledge do you draw upon**
129 **or the teachers draw upon that informs that practice?**

130 Interviewee: So, then it depends on – it depends on the actual text. So, the knowledge
131 around initial sounds and final sounds, the knowledge around record of oral language – is it
132 the pronunciation of words or is it being able to follow simple complex sentences? What
133 else does the record of oral language tell you? I couldn't tell you. It gives us a score. If
134 they're low, we say their record of oral language is low, but I'm not too sure what record of
135 oral language really tells us. Burt is all about decoding and then their running record and
136 concepts about print, whether they do know the features of a book, and reading, and
137 directionality. So that gives us a lot of information too. What else do we have? Hearing and

Appendix F. NVivo Screenshot



Appendix G. Five Main Tools Used to Assess Reading Comprehension

The Five Main Tools Used to Assess Reading Comprehension

Name of Tool	Administration	Standardized	Scoring & Data Analysis	Source of Information
Progress Achievement Test (PAT R) published by Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)	The Foundation (prep/first year of school) assessment is delivered using a hard copy. Subsequent years can be administered either via hard copy or electronically. All schools using the PAT R assessment were using the electronic version.	Yes. Percentile ranks and stanines provide a picture of how students' results compare with results of students in the norm reference sample in the same year level across Australia	Individual and group reports have automatically calculated scores and sorting functions that allow comparison of scores across students.	ACER website https://www.acer.org/pat/tests
Prose Reading Observation, Behaviour and Evaluation - PROBE (Published by ACER)	Individually through a 'reading interview' The student reads passages and answers questions based on six comprehension areas	No, although texts have been levelled through trialling	Questions are multiple choice and the teacher scores using the manual	ACER website https://shop.acer.edu.au/probe-2
Assessment Research Centre Online Testing System (ARCOTS published by The Assessment Research	Students complete the assessment electronically. The assessment consists of reading comprehension questions.	Yes	The Assessment Research Centre has developed the Assessment Research Centre Online Testing System (ARCOTS). It combines the output of an item bank with targeted assessment. It also encompasses the ARC Learning	ARCOTS website https://education.unimelb.edu.au/arc/arcots

Centre at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education)			Profiles (ALPS) reporting package which provides real time reports to students and teachers. This tool can only be used by school who have participated in the joint Melbourne Graduate School of Education and Catholic Education Melbourne Assessment Project	
Benchmark Assessment System (BAS- Fountas & Pinnell,2010)	Comprehension is assessed by the teacher through children reading levelled texts and engaging in a comprehension conversation with the teacher	Yes	Based on the guidelines the teacher scores the student's comprehension thereby assigning them a level to assist with guided reading and text selection	Fountas and Pinnell website http://www.fountasandpinnell.com/faqs/assessment
PM Benchmark (Nelson, CENAGE, 2010)	The PM Benchmark Reading Assessment Resources has been specifically designed to explicitly assess students' instructional and independent reading levels using unseen, meaningful texts. By providing accurately levelled fiction and non-fiction	No. But texts have been levelled through extensive trialling	The teacher score the student based on the PM Guidelines and uses this information to make instructional decisions	CENAGE website https://cengage.com.au/primary/browse-series/pm/pm-benchmark and New Zealand TKI website http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessme

	texts ranging progressively from emergent levels to reading age 12, teachers can rigorously access students' fluency and retelling strategies while determining their comprehension within and beyond the text.		nt-tools-resources/Assessment-tool-selector/Browse-assessment-tools/English/Reading/PM-Benchmarks/(back_to_results)/Assessment-tools-resources/Assessment-tool-selector/Select-an-Assessment-Tool/Results/(area)/3749/(sub_area)/All/(year_level)/All/(nz_origin)/-1/(standardised)/-1/(administration_to_individual_or_group)/-1

Appendix H. School Information/Demographics

School Information/Demographics

The Schools

An overview of the eight schools is provided below. To describe the socio-economic status of each school the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) is used. ACARA was established under section 5 of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority and its responsible for the development of the Australian Curriculum, the administration of national assessments (NAPLAN) and the reporting of this data though the My School website. ACARA describes The My School website as allowing a fair comparison of data between schools. To enable this fair comparison ACARA has assigned each school an ICSEA value. An ICSEA is set at an average of 1000, the lower the ICSEA value, the lower the level of educational advantage of students who attend the school. ICSEA is determined by a range of different factors including parents' occupation, parents' education, the geographical location of the school and the proportion of indigenous students (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2016).

THE SCHOOLS

SCHOOL 1	
Number of Students	135
% of students from a language background other than English	68
ICSEA	1101
Other roles of the literacy leader	Deputy Principal
Number of Catholic Education Melbourne Professional Learning Programs attended with a focus on early years literacy assessment	3
Changes to early years literacy assessment since 2012	Minor
Did the school use the Catholic Education Melbourne online tool to assist with making decisions about literacy assessment in the early years?	No. They did not feel they needed to use the tool

SCHOOL 2	
Number of Students	375
% of students from a language background other than English	6
ICSEA	1100
Other roles of the literacy leader	learning and teaching leader
Number of Catholic Education Melbourne Professional Learning Programs attended with a focus on early years literacy assessment	4
Changes to early years literacy assessment since 2012	Significant
Did the school use the Catholic Education Melbourne online tool to assist with making	Yes. They found the tool useful in assisting with making decisions around assessment.

decisions about literacy assessment in the early years?	

SCHOOL 3

Number of Students	305
% of students from a language background other than English	8
ICSEA	1055
Other roles of the literacy leader	Learning intervention
Number of Catholic Education Melbourne Professional Learning Programs attended with a focus on early years literacy assessment	0
Changes to early years literacy assessment since 2012	significant
Did the school use the Catholic Education Melbourne online tool to assist with making decisions about literacy assessment in the early years?	No. they were not aware of the tool

SCHOOL 4

Number of Students	109
% of students from a language background other than English	91
ICSEA	897
Other roles of the literacy leader	nil
Number of Catholic Education Melbourne Professional Learning Programs attended with a focus on early years literacy assessment	1
Changes to early years literacy assessment since 2012	minor
Did the school use the Catholic Education Melbourne online tool to assist with making decisions about literacy assessment in the early years?	No. they did not feel they needed to use it

SCHOOL 5

Number of Students	220
% of students from a language background other than English	21
ICSEA	1084
Other roles of the literacy leader	Learning and teaching leader, deputy principal
Number of Catholic Education Melbourne Professional Learning Programs attended with a focus on early years literacy assessment	nil
Changes to early years literacy assessment since 2012	minor
Did the school use the Catholic Education Melbourne online tool to assist with making decisions about literacy assessment in the early years?	No. They were unaware of the tool

SCHOOL 6

Number of Students	320
% of students from a language background other than English	11
ICSEA	1125
Other roles of the literacy leader	Learning and teaching leader, deputy principal
Number of Catholic Education Melbourne Professional Learning Programs attended with a focus on early years literacy assessment	nil
Changes to early years literacy assessment since 2012	minor
Did the school use the Catholic Education Melbourne online tool to assist with making decisions about literacy assessment in the early years?	Yes, but did not use any of the information as they felt happy with their approach to assessment in the early years

SCHOOL 7

Number of Students	540
% of students from a language background other than English	55
ICSEA	1013
Other roles of the literacy leader	Reading recovery
Number of Catholic Education Melbourne Professional Learning Programs attended with a focus on early years literacy assessment	1
Changes to early years literacy assessment since 2012	none
Did the school use the Catholic Education Melbourne online tool to assist with making decisions about literacy assessment in the early years?	No. They did not know it existed.

SCHOOL 8

Number of Students	170
% of students from a language background other than English	54
ICSEA	1025
Other roles of the literacy leader	Deputy principal, special needs coordinator
Number of Catholic Education Melbourne Professional Learning Programs attended with a focus on early years literacy assessment	nil
Changes to early years literacy assessment since 2012	significant
Did the school use the Catholic Education Melbourne online tool to assist with making decisions about literacy assessment in the early years?	No. They were not aware of the tool

2017 Assessment Schedule

	Term One	Term Two - DRAFT	Term Three - DRAFT	Term Four - DRAFT
Prep	**LITERACY** Record of Oral Language Concepts About Print✓ Letter ID✓ BURT Word Test ???? Oxford Word Test ✓(when/who?) Hearing & Recording Sounds ✓ Level of Text ✓ Writing Sample ✓ **MATHS** ENRP Prep Detour & Interview	**LITERACY** Letter ID✓ Oxford Word Test ✓ Level of Text ✓ Writing Sample ✓ **MATHS**	**LITERACY** Letter ID✓ Oxford Word Test✓ Early Years PAT R✓ Level of Text✓ Writing Sample ✓ **MATHS** Early Years PAT M	**LITERACY** Record of Oral Language ? Concepts About Print- Teacher's Discretion- Levels 0-2 ? Letter ID✓ BURT Word Test- ??? Oxford Word Test✓ Hearing & Recording Sounds (when?) Level of Text✓ Writing Sample✓ **MATHS**
One	**LITERACY** Record of Oral Language Concepts About Print????? Letter ID (??? or use previous years data) BURT Word Test???? Hearing & Recording Sounds ✓ Level of Text ✓ Oxford Word Test (??? or use previous years data) ✓ Writing Sample ✓ PAT R ✓ **MATHS** SINE 1/2 A Westwood Addition PAT-M	**LITERACY** Oxford Word Test ✓ Level of Text ✓ Letter Identification-If child's EOP score was below 40 ✓ Writing Sample✓ **MATHS** Westwood Addition	**LITERACY** Oxford Word Test✓ Level of Text✓ Letter Identification-If child's previous score was below 45 ✓ Writing Sample✓ PAT-R✓ **Ex-RR: Seen Text LOT (1/mnth) ?? (is it needed if English Leaders are monitoring) **MATHS** PAT - M Westwood Addition	**LITERACY** Concepts About Print- Teacher's Discretion- Levels 0-3 ?????? Letter Identification-If child's previous score was below 50 ✓ BURT Word Test ??????? Hearing & Recording Sounds (when?) Level of Text Oxford Word Test ✓ Writing Sample **Ex-RR: Seen Text LOT (1/mnth) ???? **MATHS** SINE 1/2 A Westwood Addition

Two	**LITERACY** Peter's Dictation* (Lv 16 and over) ???? (deeper analysis of writing sample) Burt Word Test???? Level of Text ✓ Oxford Word Test (??? or use previous years data) (Below Level 16) * *Concepts About Print* * *Letter Identification* * *Hearing & Recording Sounds* *Record of Oral Language Writing Sample PAT R **Ex-RR: Seen Text LOT (1/mnth) ???? **MATHS** SINE 1/2 B Westwood Addition Westwood Subtraction *Westwood Multiplication* PAT-M	**LITERACY** Level of Text ✓ Oxford Words Test ✓ **Ex-RR: Seen Text LOT (1/mnth) ????? Writing Sample ✓ **MATHS** Westwood Addition Westwood Subtraction *Westwood Multiplication*	**LITERACY** Level of Text ✓ Oxford Words Test ✓ **Ex-RR: Seen Text LOT (1/mnth) ????? Writing Sample ✓ PAT - R ✓ **MATHS** Westwood Addition Westwood Subtraction *Westwood Multiplication* PAT - M	**LITERACY** Level of Text ✓ Peter's Dictation* (Lv 16 and over) Oxford Words Test ✓ >Level 16- 1-200 words <Level 16- 200-400 words (Below Level 16) * *Concepts About Print* * *Letter Identification- Teacher Discretion* * BURT * *Hearing & Recording Sounds* *Record of Oral Language* Writing Sample **Ex-RR: Seen Text LOT (1/mnth) ????? **MATHS** SINE 1/2 B Westwood Addition Westwood Subtraction *Westwood Multiplication*
Three	**LITERACY** Level of Text any child who was 28 and below at the beginning of the year. ✓ Torch for all other students ✓ SA Spelling Form A ✓ Burt Word Test ???? Oxford Word List * if not achieved 500 ✓ Soundwaves Diagnostic ✓ **Ex-RR: Seen Text LOT (1/mnth) Writing Sample ✓ PAT R ✓ **MATHS** SINE 3/4A Whole Number Westwood Addition Westwood Subtraction Westwood Multiplication *Westwood Division* PAT-M	**LITERACY** NAPLAN ✓ Oxford Word List * if not achieved 500 ✓ Soundwave Diagnostic ✓ **Ex-RR: Seen Text LOT (1/mnth) Writing Sample ✓ **MATHS** NAPLAN Westwood Addition Westwood Subtraction Westwood Multiplication *Westwood Division* *On Demand*	**LITERACY** Soundwaves Diagnostic ✓ Oxford Word List * if not achieved 500 ✓ **Ex-RR: Seen Text LOT (1/mnth) Writing Sample ✓ PAT-R ✓ **MATHS** PAT-M Westwood Addition Westwood Subtraction Westwood Multiplication *Westwood Division*	**LITERACY** Level of Text- any child who was 28 and below at the beginning of the year. ✓ Torch for all other students✓ SA Spelling Form A✓ Burt Word Test???? Soundwave Diagnostic✓ Oxford Word List * if not achieved 500✓ **Ex-RR: Seen Text LOT (1/mnth) Writing Sample✓ **MATHS** SINE 3/4A Whole Number Westwood Addition Westwood Subtraction Westwood Multiplication *Westwood Division* *On Demand*

Assessment Schedule

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
Prep	1. Ob Survey (Feb) (some items not relevant for some students) 2. Text level (Feb) 3. letter formation from vocab or hearing and recording sounds 4. ROL (CEO) • Something re speaking and listening, e.g SLAT for some students, analyse ROL	1. Writing analysis 2. Alpha Assess A- phonological awareness		1. Text Level (CEO) 2. ROL 3. Ob Survey 4. Alpha Assess A - phonological awareness
	Ongoing Reading: Focus sheets, running records (seen, based on guided reading text), PLP Ongoing Writing: Letter formation checklist, writing analysis, focus sheets, HFW, spelling (personalised), PLP Ongoing Speaking and Listening: focus sheets/checklists, PLP EAL Continuum			
Year 1	1. ROL (CEO) 2. Ob Survey (Reading Recovery students) 3. Fountas and Pinnell	1. Ob Survey (all)		1. Text Level (CEO) 2. Ob Survey (all)
	Ongoing Reading: Focus sheets, running records (seen based on guided reading text), text responses, PLP Ongoing Writing: Letter formation checklist, writing analysis, focus sheets, spelling (personalised), HFW, PLP Ongoing Speaking and Listening: focus sheets/checklists, PLP EAL Continuum			
Year 2	1. ROL (CEO) (all students) 2. Fountas and Pinnell 3. ARCOTS	1. Ob Survey (some students may not require all items)	1. ARCOTS – end of term	1. Text Level (CEO) 2. Ob Survey (some students may not require all items) 3. Peters (Level 16 +)
	Ongoing Reading: Focus sheets, running records (seen based on guided reading text), text responses, PLP Ongoing Writing: Letter formation checklist, writing analysis, focus sheets, spelling (personalised), HFW, PLP Ongoing Speaking and Listening: focus sheets/checklists, PLP EAL Continuum			
Years 3-6	1. Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark – all students 2. ARCOTS	1. BURT (those who need it) 2. NAPLAN 3. Peters Spelling NAPLAN - Writing analysis	1. ARCOTS – end of term	1. BURT (every student) 2. Peters Spelling (All)
	Ongoing Reading: Focus sheets, running records (seen, based on guided reading text), Scheduled Conference notes, reading journals, PLP Ongoing Writing: checklist, writing analysis, focus sheets, Scheduled Conference notes, rubrics, spelling (personalised), HFW, PLP Ongoing Speaking and Listening: focus sheets/checklists, PLP EAL Continuum			

New students to be tested as appropriate