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# A responsive evaluation of Mt Warrigal Primary School's Reading Action Program

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# **A Responsive Evaluation of Mt Warrigal Primary School's Reading Action Program**

A thesis completed in partial fulfilment for the award of the  
degree  
Bachelor of Education (Honours)

From

University of Wollongong  
Faculty of Education

By

Julieann Trotter

October 2002

## **Certification**

I, Julieann Trotter, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Education (Honours), in the Department of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Julieann Trotter

25 October 2002

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I would like to thank my supervisor, Associate Professor Brian Cambourne for sharing with me his wealth of knowledge regarding research inquiries. He has provided me with motivation and inspiration that has been of a great assistance to this study.

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# Abstract

The present study was to conduct a Responsive Evaluation of Mt Warrigal Primary School's Reading Action Program. The purpose of this study was to focus on the 'merit' and 'worth' of the program as it applied to its major stakeholders.

Through my role as a participant observer and through the audio taped transcripts of the interviews it was revealed that the Reading Action Program was generally considered to be a valuable and successful remedial reading program to the major stakeholders.

The results indicated that while the program was relevant and important to the major stakeholders, it could be improved by implementing suggested recommendations.

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# Abbreviations

MWPS-	Mt Warrigal Primary School
RAP-	Reading Action Program
STLD-	Support Teacher Learning Difficulties
RR-	Reading Recovery
RR1-	Reading Action Program Room One
RR2-	Reading Action Program Room Two

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

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## **Purpose of the Inquiry**

The purpose of this inquiry is to conduct a rigorous, formative evaluation of a particular remedial reading program, which has been specifically adapted and implemented by the staff of Mt Warrigal Primary School (MWPS). The project specifically aims to conduct a 'Responsive Evaluation' (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) of the "Reading Action Program" (RAP); this evaluation will focus on the 'merit' and 'worth' (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) of the program as it applies to MWPS. Mertens describes 'merit' and 'worth' thus:

"Merit refers to the excellence of an object as assessed by its intrinsic qualities or performance; worth refers to the value of an object in relation to a purpose" (Mertens, 1998, p220)

These purposes entail achieving the following broad research aims:

- describing the Reading Action Program;
- identifying the school's reasons for designing and implementing the program;
- observing and describing the participants' involvement in Reading Action Program sessions;
- discovering the participants' opinions of the Reading Action Program; and
- discussing the implications of these opinions for future implementation of the Reading Action Program.

## **What is the Reading Action Program (RAP)?**

### **An Overview**

The following points describing the main features of RAP were synthesised from the Reading Action Program document written by Duncan and Griffith (date unknown).

**RAP** is a remedial reading program designed to cater for children, from years one to six who have been identified by their teachers as possessing specific learning difficulties in English.

**RAP** operates for three days a week for years one to four students, and two days a week for years five to six pupils, with each session one hour in duration.

**RAP** is taught by a qualified Reading Recovery teacher, the STLD teacher, and the Deputy School Principal (who is released for two hours each week to work with the year five students).

**RAP** is needs based. Classroom teachers annually nominate students to be considered for the RAP. These nominations along with the students still participating in the program from the previous year form the basis of a target group.

**RAP's** emphasis is placed mainly on years one and two students. However the program is also designed to include students who are experiencing difficulty at any time during their primary years.

**RAP** allows students to graduate from the program when individual goals have been achieved.



**RAP** daily sessions consist of lessons in encoding, decoding, daily writing, guided reading, sight words, spelling and comprehension.

**RAP** lessons follow a strict routine so as to help the children develop organisational skills, the ability to remain on task, and discipline so as to not disturb the learning process of other students.

**RAP** recognises the vital role of parents in children's literacy development and supports this by using parent and community volunteers who have been trained to act as tutors.

**RAP** is integrated into the school program to support and supplement the class reading activities.

**RAP** is an outcomes based program, which is linked strongly to the English K-6 Syllabus.

**RAP** not only aims to raise literacy standards, but also student self-esteem and motivation.

**RAP** is an individualised program, which provides students with instant feedback and encourages students to be responsible for their own learning.

## **The Development of RAP**

Two teachers at Vincentia Public School, Carolyn Duncan and Cathie Griffith developed the program during the mid 1990's. After observing Intensive Reading Classes at Queanbeyan and analysing the literacy programs developed and used in Queanbeyan schools for children with reading difficulties (in particular those written by Deborah Packer and Mary Dorrian who are teachers in Queanbeyan) the Reading Action Program was developed. The activities were modified to cater for the particular needs of the students at Vincentia Public School. RAP is now in its fifth year of implementation at this school.

The teachers of MWPS have built on and extended the Vincentia program. The result is a remedial reading program called the “Reading Action Program” (RAP). Like the Vincentia Program, MWPS’ program has been loosely designed around Marie Clay’s reading program, ‘Reading Recovery’. Advocates (Lyons, Su Pinnell, & DeFord, 1993) of Reading Recovery, claim that students learn at an accelerated rate while in the program, which eventually enables them to reach a level in which they can cope independently in the ‘regular classroom’. Like Vincentia, MWPS recognised the need for an intervention program similar to Reading Recovery, however neither school had the financial or manpower resources to implement Reading Recovery in its ‘pure form’. Consequently both school staffs attempted to design and implement a remedial reading program, which was less resource, and manpower-intensive, and yet still based on the same teaching-learning strategies as the Reading Recovery program. This program was called the R.A.P. Like Reading Recovery, this program identifies those students who have failed to acquire sufficient levels of reading skill in grades K-2. The program then aims to deliver intensive, regular, focused instruction to these students in groups of 7-12, three times a week during a one-hour session. This program is now entering its second year at MWPS.

## **Presuppositions Guiding The Evaluation of RAP**

Like all inquiries this study was developed on the basis of prior knowledge. Some of this prior knowledge takes the form of presuppositions. As Kaplan states:

“We presuppose, in every inquiry, not only a set of data, but also a set of generalisations, both about our materials and about the instruments by which they are to be transformed into the cognitive enterprise. We draw our presuppositions from earlier inquiries, from other sciences, from everyday knowledge, from the experiences of conflict and frustration which motivated our inquiry, from habit and tradition, from who knows where...when Freud became interested in the interpretation of dreams, he presupposed certain generalisations about the nature of sleep, consciousness, and related phenomena”( Kaplan, 1964, cited in Cambourne, B., Turbill, J., Keeble, P.et al. 1988, p 25).

This inquiry is no different. As the researcher I drew upon an already accessible rich background of literature and knowledge which related to remedial reading programs, reading failure, tutoring programs, responsive evaluation, and diverse other related areas of interest, which are listed in the bibliography. Consequently, it is vital that presuppositions which have a significant influence on the conduct of the inquiry for this project be made explicit. Once made explicit they will serve the purpose of informing the reader of the underlying principles behind many of the decisions which aided in shaping this inquiry. Those presuppositions that are assumed to have a significant influence on the way in which the inquiry was performed are made explicit in what follows:

## **Presuppositions About The Nature of RAP**

1. RAP is a ‘student orientated’ program that intends to bring about changes in the learning of literacy by first providing students with intensive and regular literacy focused lessons.
2. The predominant aim of RAP is to raise the literacy standards of the students, on the assumption that the accomplishment of this aim, in turn will produce higher student self-esteem, confidence, and motivation with respect to improving learning.

## **Presuppositions About The Nature of Responsive Evaluation**

1. The intent of a Responsive Evaluation is to assist those who are implicated, affected or interested in that which is being evaluated, (‘the evaluand’) to understand it and the way in which it was implemented, for the purposes of improving its merit and worth (i.e. ‘being responsive’). As a result, the focus of a Responsive Evaluation must be the experiences, perceptions, and opinions of the participants in the program being evaluated.
2. Because meaning is closely attached to context, a Responsive Evaluation must be a process that attends closely to context in order to encapsulate the full significance of the program being evaluated.
3. A Responsive Evaluation is a collaborative activity. In order to acquire a more complete understanding of the evaluand, the stakeholders in the program need to become ‘co-researchers’.

4. The relationship between the researcher and participants is interactive. It is vital for both the evaluators and stakeholders to be involved in a dynamic situation, with the purpose being to develop a comprehensive account of the participants.

### **Presuppositions About The Nature of the Inquiry**

This project is located within a naturalistic paradigm of inquiry. It can be broadly described as 'qualitative' in orientation. In a Responsive Evaluation the researcher is expected to become involved in the process as a participant observer, gathering information from the major stakeholders, and using three main methods of data generation, namely observation of the evaluand in action, conversations/ interviews with stakeholders, and collection of artefacts/or documents relevant to the evaluand. By using the 'constant comparative' method of naturalistic inquiry developed by Glaser and Strauss, I was able to remain on track when attempting to make sense of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, cited in Short, 2002). Bogdan and Biklen have summarised the constant comparative method as:

1. Begin collecting data.
2. Look for key issues, recurrent events, or activities in the data that become categories for focus.
3. Collect data that provide many incidents of the categories of focus with an eye to seeing the diversity of the dimensions under the categories.

4. Write about the categories you are exploring, attempting to describe and account for all the incidents you have in your data while continually searching for new incidents.
5. Work with the data and emerging model to discover basic social processes and relationships.
6. Engage in sampling, coding, and writing as the analysis focuses on the core categories.

(Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, cited in Short, 2002, p16).

## **Rationale for the Study**

This inquiry can be justified on a number of fronts. Firstly there has been little research completed in the area of site-based development and implementation of remedial reading programs of this nature for primary aged students. Secondly, a Responsive Evaluation of MWPS' Reading Action Program is timely as it is entering it's second year of implementation. While there is anecdotal evidence from teachers, R.A.P. students and parents, as well as test scores that support the perception that reading levels have improved; a formal evaluation of the program has not been performed. Furthermore a formal evaluation of the program's impact on such things as, the reading development of students, the culture of reading in the school and the homes of those who participated, and the culture of teaching reading in the school, was especially requested by the school executive. An evaluation at this stage will enable recommendations to be made which has the potential to

improve the program for the major stakeholders. Thirdly the profession needs to be aware and remain updated about factors that might enable or inhibit the success of site-based curriculum initiatives of this kind. Fourthly, such an evaluation will inform those who wish to do something similar of the pitfalls and problems involved in developing effective remedial reading programs and teaching strategies.

## **Context of the Inquiry**

### **Site**

The research was conducted in two RAP classrooms at a primary school in the Illawarra region of New South Wales. The school is situated in a low socio-economic area, and is surrounded by an established housing estate south of Wollongong. The community in which the school is situated often experiences high unemployment, and thus the school is part of the priority school-funding program. The school has a population of 548 students. There is a large cultural diversity among the students, and there is a Koori population of thirty children attending the school.

There are two early stage one classes, five stage one classes, five stage two classes and five stage three classes within the school. The school also has a pre-school which caters for children between the ages of three and six, an early intervention unit and two I.O. classes. There is one Reading Recovery teacher, one STLD teacher and three RAP teachers.

The research was carried out in the two RAP classrooms, comprising children between the ages of six and twelve.

## **Stake holding Audiences and Clients**

1. The range of stakeholders who will both influence and be influenced by RAP includes:
  - The staff of MWPS
  - The students of MWPS
  - The RAP teachers
  - Students participating in RAP
  - Parent or community volunteer tutors
  - Peer tutors
  - Parents of RAP students
  - Classroom teachers of RAP students
  - The NSW Department of Education
  
2. For the purpose of this evaluation the major stakeholders are considered to be the teachers, students, parents and tutors involved in the RAP at MWPS. A stratified purposive sample of RAP students was also chosen for the study.



## **Conclusion**

The purpose of the inquiry, was to conduct a Responsive Evaluation to discover the ‘merit’ and ‘worth’ of the RAP as it applied to MWPS. Working closely with the stakeholders to understand how they accepted/rejected, and generally perceived the RAP to be ‘working’ , as well as encouraging them to become co-researchers were the main strategies employed to achieve this purpose.

## **Overview of the Project**

Chapter two is a review of the literature that was pertinent to this inquiry. It looks at: site-based curriculum development, the prevalence of reading failure among primary-aged students and the consequences of reading failure, Reading Recovery and other well known remedial reading programs, and finally the guidelines for success for such programs. The inferences drawn from the review suggest that while children benefit from remedial reading and tutor programs, there is little current research that has focused on the qualitative aspects of these programs.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology that this inquiry is based upon. It justifies the use of a Responsive Evaluation within the broader spectrum of the Naturalistic Inquiry Paradigm. The use of participant observations, field notes and interviews are discussed, and their importance to the inquiry is detailed. This chapter provides reasons as to why the selected methodology, and data collection techniques were chosen, and then explains each of these in detail.

Chapter four is divided into three sections. The first section serves to contextualise the descriptive findings by describing the learning environments in which the RAP students learnt and the literacy learning experiences they engaged with during RAP sessions. The second section presents the descriptive analysis of the data, while the third section provides the interpretations of these findings.

In chapter five a set of recommendations of the evaluand are presented to the major stakeholders for the purpose of improving the merit and worth of the program. Theoretically interesting findings that were by-products of the inquiry are also discussed, and finally the conclusion of the evaluation is presented.

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# **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE**

## **REVIEW**

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## **Introduction**

Remedial reading programs appear to be a standard feature of primary schools today. Enter almost any school and you will find an intervention program of one form or another. Despite this, at the time of writing there appeared to be little current evaluative research, which focused on the more qualitative aspects of these programs.

Deciding which ‘pools’ of literature are significant for guiding and shaping a research project is always a difficult process. When the project involves a range of overlapping, complex domains like this one, it becomes even more complex. Furthermore given the constraints of time and resources that are imposed on a project of this academic level, the complexity becomes more obvious. When reviewing the literature that pertained to this study, the following ‘pools’ of research were considered to be the most relevant.

Research pertaining to:

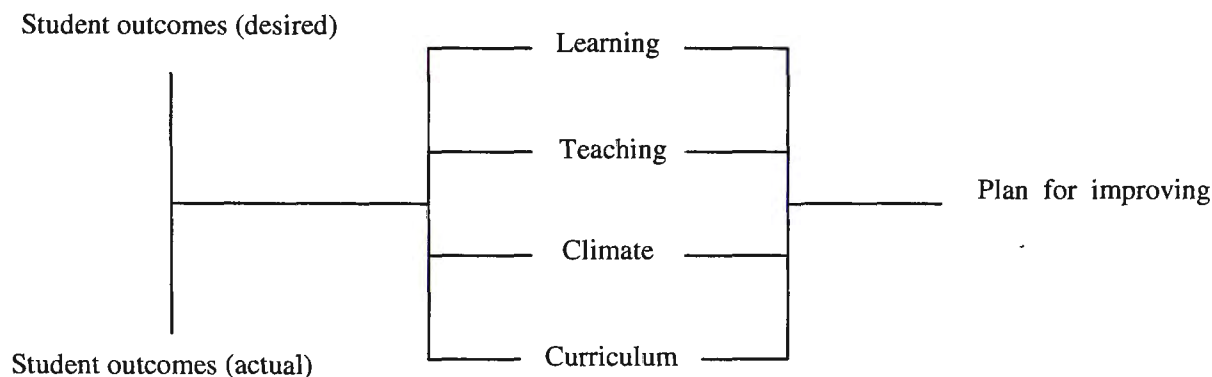
- site-based curriculum,
- the prevalence and consequences of reading failure,
- Reading Recovery, remedial reading programs, and the guidelines for remedial reading success.

## **Site-based Curriculum**

During the past 100 years Australian schools have relied upon school authorities, which were “centralised, rigid and bureaucratic” (Gamage, 1996, p 126) to perform the

curriculum-making process. In recent years however, much of the focus of the curriculum-making process has been given to the schools. Consequently schools are becoming responsible for producing their own curriculums. With this reform comes the opportunity for teachers to “participate individually and collectively in decision-making for the educational context within which they work” (Hansen, 1998, p166). Site-based curriculum policies allow the schools to decide how to best use its resources to meet the needs of their students, and thus to achieve the goals of the school (Crowther, 1998).

According to Dimmock (1993) the starting point of site-based curriculum is to establish the gap between the present and desired levels of students’ achievement. Assessments and standardised tests are most commonly used to achieve this purpose. The staff must then identify the variables that influence student outcomes. Figure 1 identifies four variables that influence student learning outcomes- learning, teaching, climate and curriculum. It is the purpose of those restructuring the curriculum to “improve the quality and performance of those variables in order to achieve the desired improvement in student learning outcomes” (Dimmock, 1993, p16). In light of these variables it is then the responsibility of the staff to discuss the method by which students are expected to learn, the quality of teaching, the learning environment, and the curriculum in order to devise the most likely program of improvement.



**Figure 1: Curriculum management for improving student outcomes (Dimmock, 1993, p15).**

For site-based curriculum to be successful Odden and Wohlstetter suggest the use of three essential strategies:

1. “Provide professional development and training opportunities to strengthen teaching, management, and problem solving skills of teachers and other stakeholders;
2. Provide adequate information to make informed decisions about student performance, parent and community satisfaction, and school resources; and
3. Establish a reward system to recognise improved performance and to acknowledge the increased effort site-based curriculum requires of participants.”

(Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995, p 32)

Site-based Curriculum is a process that empowers teachers to control the curriculum. However, with this control often comes substantial change, which may lead to “a widespread tendency among teachers to negatively perceive [the] project” (Hansen, 1998, p 174). According to Gamage when site-based curriculum was first introduced to

Australian schools it was 'met' with "initial hostility...fears and reservations" (1993, p3). Originally some sections of the society, viewed the reforms as an effort by governmental authorities to shift the burden of education onto the community. It was perceived as a device for moving "unpopular decisions away from the politicians and bureaucrats to the local school community" (Gamage, 1993, p3). Those opposed to site-based curriculum were able to put fear into the minds of others as there was, and still is, a lack of significant research data concerning this issue (Dimmock, 1993). Furthermore many teachers are not prepared adequately to deal with the challenges of implementing a site-based curriculum. At a time of rapid change and new demands being made on education, Hansen (1998) believes more needs to be done to prepare teachers for these remarkable changes in the education system. Hansen's study revealed that beginning and experienced teachers alike criticised their preservice teacher education for being too concerned with individual teacher behaviour, and for not being "open enough to societal changes and the reality in schools" (Hansen, 1998, p172). Consequently Hansen suggests that preservice teachers be trained in verbal interaction as curriculum development is essentially, "a discursive development between...professionals" (1998, p171). Verbal interaction, however, is not the only obstacle teachers will encounter when initiating site-based curriculum. Teachers possess personal barriers, such as a lack of confidence "in ability to adapt to changes and face new challenges" (Gamage, 1996, p3), a perceived deficit of appropriate knowledge, and because teachers work separately from each other they often have not "articulated and formulated a body of shared practical knowledge" (Hansen, 1998, p173). While the attitudes and actions of the

teachers themselves, play a vital role in the outcome of site-based curriculum, the school as a whole also has a part to play.

Simply decentralising the education system and allowing schools autonomy, does not guarantee improvement in student performance. It has been discovered that schools which have difficulty delegating power and decision making opportunities beyond the school principal, and who do not possess the commitment or extra energy required to undertake site-based curriculum will experience little success (Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995). It is also known that schools which do not involve the whole staff in this process - but choose instead to train only a few individuals as opposed to all teachers, and elect to place the responsibility and decision-making powers of site-based curriculum onto this group- develop a school which lacks centrally determined curricular goals, which in turn influences the effectiveness of site-based curriculum (Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995). A final criticism of site-based curriculum concerns the outcome of a decentralised curriculum. Allowing schools greater control over the curriculum may “increase social and local variation among schools” (Hansen, 1998, p167). This raises the issue of equal educational opportunities – will students still experience the same chances no matter what school they attend? To counteract this fear “the process of evaluation has been centralised” (Hansen, 1998, p168). Unfortunately for schools they now have more paperwork to attend to, schools are increasingly made accountable for the outcomes they are expected to produce. Site-based curriculum does require a whole school commitment, and initially can involve a lot of added teacher time, but if implemented effectively it can be rewarding.



As has been the case with site-based curriculum in other Australian schools, when teachers at MWPS wanted to implement RAP, they too had to overcome initial problems of mistrust and adverse attitudes amongst the staff. MWPS decided to undertake a site-based curriculum approach, as the remedial program at the time was not producing evidence that it was effective or successful, this consensus was achieved after the staff as a whole evaluated the program during subsequent staff meetings. The staff then searched for a program that would better meet the needs of the students at MWPS using the resources of the school. When the Reading Action Program was suggested the Principal, and the Deputy Principal supported the program and educated the staff, explaining to them exactly what the program was and what it would involve. It was then up to the staff to modify and adapt the program to meet the teaching styles of the teachers and needs of the MWPS students. MWPS understood it was important to include all staff in the curriculum-making process, and thus tried to inform and include all teachers during the implementing and continued operation of the program.

## **Prevalence of Reading Failure**

Although most students learn to read with almost any instructional approach, other students falter when faced with literacy acquisition. Difficulties learning to read may stem from, inadequate amounts of classroom time dedicated to reading instruction, attention problems, lack of opportunities to acquire pre-reading skills in the home, and biological factors (Hick & Villaume, 2001; Nicolson, Fawcett, Moss, Nicolson and Reason, 1999; Chard & Kameenui, 2000). Professionals and parents alike have grappled

with the riddle of reading failure in Australia for many decades, especially in the last few years in which debates regarding ‘falling literacy standards’ have been quite prominent in this country.

Unfortunately in Australia 10-20% of primary school children do not possess the basic literacy standards (Jones, 1996, cited in Comber, Green, Lingard & Luke, 1998, p18). Statistics like the one just mentioned have been used by the Australian media during the past decade to ‘paint a picture’ of a country experiencing a literacy crisis. Consequently, literacy has become “a sustainable goal of political rhetoric” (Comber, et al, 1998, p18). In 1997 the results from a National English Literacy Survey were publicly revealed. 27% of year three and 29% of year five students did not satisfy the year level outcomes for reading, and 28% of year 3 and 33% of year five did not achieve the grade-appropriate level for writing, when the results were released they were described as “a national disgrace” (Comber, et al, 1998, p19). Consequently the public release of the survey results led to public criticism of teachers, public schooling, and literacy outcomes. The media focused heavily on this issue using the terms “decline, problems, struggle, poverty, shame, blame and deception” (Comber, et al, 1998, p19) when referring to literacy standards. However, according to Comber et al (1998) Australia’s literacy situation may not be as bleak as it appears, the current argument over literacy standards may serve as a decoy for governmental authorities to shift away from economic problems to the social arena. Whether or not Australia is experiencing a ‘literacy crisis’, the fact remains that some Australian school children are continuing to experience reading failure, and it is almost impossible to determine why children have

difficulties in learning to read, despite this, various theories have been developed to explain the cause of reading failure, some of which are listed below:

- **Inappropriate Strategies-** Walker believes that children, who are constantly situated in circumstances where learning is difficult, develop “inappropriate compensatory strategies” (1992, p14). This means that when a child is faced with a literacy challenge they do not possess a range of effective strategies to use when solving the problem, such as double-checking the text, instead the student will guess wildly at words in the process losing the meaning of the text.
- **Ineffective Practices-** Reading failure develops when children frequently depend on deficit reading strategies, continually read texts that are too difficult and restrict the acquisition of new strategies, read without checking meaning, and expect to experience failure with literacy activities (Walker, 1998).
- **Heredity Factors-** According to Gillet and Bernard (1989) there is evidence to suggest that more boys than girls experience reading difficulties. If the male parent fails to provide a positive model of this activity then young boys may reject reading as a feminine task, therefore supporting the theory of a “sex-linked genetic component to reading difficulties” (Gillet & Bernard, 1989, p4).

Downing, May and Ollila (1983) disagree with this theory. They propose:

“...girl/boy reading achievement that whilst there is a slight trend for girls initially to achieve better than boys in reading, the difference between the sexes is relatively unimportant and decreased after about the age ten...despite this, it is more likely

that boys will be referred to reading clinics as a result of reading problems than will girls...reading referrals may well be the result of factors other than reading disabilities (classroom behaviour, for instance) but the result may be...that girls' reading disabilities are being overlooked or are not being considered as urgent as boys" (Downing, May & Ollila, 1983, cited in Gilbert & Rowe, 1989, p11).

- **Language Background-** If a language other than English is spoken in the home this may be disadvantageous when the child is attempting to decipher the English language when it is presented in the written form (Gillet & Bernard, 1989).
- **Expectations-** the expectations of teachers, parents and peers can be extremely influential for young readers. If a teacher perceives a student to be less capable than their peers, then according to Walker (1998), the teacher may unintentionally reduce the amount and quality of instruction for this student, which in turn increases the likelihood of a child experiencing reading failure. Gilbert and Rowe (1989) agree, and add that if teachers or parents exude an expectation that boys will not read as well as girls, or will not enjoy reading, than this expectation has an influential impact on male readers.
- **Maturational Lag-** Another suggested reason for reading failure concerns the beginning of formal schooling. When children are of an age to attend school, this age is also supposed to coincide with the reading readiness of

the average child (Clay, 1991). Although, according to Gilbert and Rowe (1989) some children are not ready to begin formal reading instruction and thus miss vital, beginning instruction and consequently fall behind their peers.

- **Learning Disabilities-** Some children possess specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia, sight or hearing impairments, which may disrupt their ability to read.
- **Behavioural Problems-** reading failure for some students can be attributed to their behaviour in the classroom. Perhaps their temperament (e.g. hyperactivity, distractibility) has made it difficult for them to be taught to read (Gillet & Bernard, 1989).
- **Inadequate Schooling-** Other research by Gillet and Bernard (1989) recognises the influence of ill health or emotional problems as a causative factor of reading failure.
- **Poor Teaching Styles-** Another reason to account for this large number of children who experience reading difficulties may be the teaching strategies employed in these instructional programs. A study conducted by Chard and Kameenui discovered that the literacy instruction used for struggling readers was not “aligned with recent research on preventing reading difficulties” (2000, p28). Santa and Hoiem (1999) complement this finding. These researchers believed that some instructional programs confused the literacy process for struggling readers, by “offering approaches to reading that [were] philosophically different from those

offered in the classroom” (p54). Leslie and Allen (1999) have suggested that struggling readers are being taught with resources that are too perplexing for them.

In an effort to diminish the problem of reading failure teachers attempt to identify children with learning difficulties at an early age and aim to provide them with appropriate early intervention. The principle benefit of early intervention is prevention. Such programs seek to close the gap between those children who are succeeding with reading, and those who are struggling, before these poor readers acquire a sense of reading failure (Santa & Hoiem, 1999). Another factor that contributes to the appeal of early intervention is the belief that “children who do not learn to read well in early grades usually continue to do poorly in subsequent grades” (Fitzgerald, 2001, p28). It is generally favoured by educators to implement early intervention programs, as it has been discovered that programs targeted towards struggling readers beyond second grade are seldom successful (Pikulski, 1994). Unfortunately, early instruction does not always solve the problem. According to Honig, “growing numbers of children are reaching upper-elementary levels unable to read and understand grade appropriate material” (1997, p15). Consequently, whatever the reason for reading failure, supplying the best literacy instruction for students who are struggling academically, still remains a major responsibility for educators. Until this happens some students will continue to experience a downward spiralling of reading achievement.

MWPS decided to implement a new remedial reading program as it was obvious after receiving the Basic Skills Test results that many students lacked effective literacy strategies, and their reading was below their stage requirements. As a result of these findings MWPS was placed in the Priority Schools Funding Program, and was given \$10, 000 to improve the literacy standards of the school. Like most schools MWPS cannot pinpoint an exact cause for the reading failure experienced by its students, but the following are considered to be causative factors of reading failure at MWPS:

- **Maturation Lag-** Young children who have started school too early.
- **Poor Literacy Skills-** Students who have missed their initial sounds and abilities to decode.
- **Behaviour Problems-** The behaviour of students has made it difficult for them to be taught to read.

## **Consequences of Reading Failure**

The consequences for children at-risk of reading difficulty have been well documented (Chard & Kameenui, 2000; Horowitz, 2000; Pikulski, 1994; Taylor, Hanson, Justice-Swanson & Watts, 1997). Chard and Kameenui (2000) reported that children who exhibited poor reading skills in first grade had a 90% chance of remaining poor readers after three years of schooling. The consequences of reading failure are numerous. The longer a child is left to fail, the harder the problem becomes to rectify (Clay, 1993). The

older the struggling reader the more likely they are to possess low feelings of competence and confidence. By the time a poor reader reaches upper primary school their word recognition is poor, reading rate slow, and reading fluency weak (Labbo & Teale, 1990). Avoidance behaviour and poor motivation can also result from experiencing too much reading failure (Honig, 1997).

In recent years attention in Australian education has concentrated on the literacy standards of high school students, yet it is the beginning years of schooling in which many of the skills required for literacy success are introduced. The consequences of completing primary school with inadequate literacy are far-reaching. Not only does the child with reading difficulties suffer from “low self-esteem, poor motivation and self-discipline, excessive worries, depression and poor discipline” (Gillet & Bernard, 1989,p1), but the country as a whole also suffers. Russell and Hill believe if a child reaches adulthood still experiencing reading failure this will negatively influence Australia’s ability “to establish and maintain the flexible, innovative and internationally competitive workforce that it seeks” (1994, p2). Consequently, the nation would benefit from maximising the literacy standards among Australians, through reduced unemployment costs, crime and health, leaving the country to experience an increased productivity of literate people that would positively influence the competitiveness of the Australian economy (Russell & Hill, 1994). The detrimental effects of reading failure are experienced just as strongly in the educational context. Annually schools spend large amounts of money remediating reading problems. The NSW Department of Education and Training alone has allocated \$52 million to the RR program in NSW ( Van



Kraayenoord, Elkins, Palmer, Rickards & Colbert, 2000). According to Russell and Hill the following is a list of gains and financial savings associated with improving reading standards:

- “Reduced need for ongoing remediation, special support for underachievers and disadvantaged students, and special education programs;
- fewer students repeating year levels;
- reduction in truancy, discipline problems and delinquency;
- increased ease of teaching in later primary and secondary schools due to reduced range of achievement levels in classes and increased engagement of students in learning, with a consequent increase in the efficacy of learning of all students and decreased burn-out and stress of teachers”.

(Russell & Hill, 1994, p3)

Due to the devastating effects of reading failure, Spiegel (1995) suggests such readers will never catch up to their peers, unless they make accelerated progress. Convinced that this is the case, various remedial reading programs specially designed for struggling readers aim to accelerate their literacy progress. The dilemma, which such interventions face, is that an early intervention alone is insufficient. Taylor, Hanson, Justice-Swanson and Watts conclude that, “there are older children in grade 2 and beyond who are in need of extra help in reading” (1997, p197). The struggling reader does not always sustain the progress made in early interventions. The majority of previous studies related to struggling readers have focused on early intervention programs, whereas this study will

add to existing research by evaluating a remedial reading program that targets poor readers in grades 1-6, allowing them as much time as they need, to learn, what they need to learn.

MWPS believed it was vital to develop a remedial reading program that was designed for poor readers in grades 1-6, as it was considered necessary to help rectify the difficulties before students moved to high school. MWPS too considered the consequences of reading failure to be far-reaching. The staff at MWPS believes if a child is to be an independent and active member of society after leaving school, they must be literate, which is why they have implemented RAP and spend sufficient time assisting children with reading problems.

## **Reading Recovery**

Reading Recovery is the most commonly researched remedial reading program currently associated with this topic. This research is relevant to this study as RAP is based on the teaching strategies of Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery (RR) is an early intervention program that has received much attention in recent years. The majority of prior efforts to provide extra literacy support for children in the early years have been through the implementation of the RR program.

RR is an intensive early intervention program designed to accelerate the progress of struggling readers, who have failed to acquire sufficient levels of reading skill after their

first 12 months of formal instruction (Clay, 1993). Marie Clay originated the program after completing her studies of young children's reading and writing behaviour. First grade students are selected for the program after the whole class has completed a range of initial assessments. These assessments are analysed by the specially trained RR teacher. Students who score in the bottom 20% of these assessments are entered into the one-to-one tutoring program (Nicolson, Fawcett, Moss, Nicolson & Reason, 1999). Children receive a daily 30-minute lesson for 12-20 weeks. The lessons are designed to help children expand their reading expertise each time they interact with text. Although teachers incorporate teaching points and choose books based on individual needs, all RR lessons include seven activities, usually presented in the following order:

1. **Rereading two or more familiar books:** the child rereads an entire book. The teacher comments on strategies used well, or the story's meaning (Lyons, Pinnell, & DeFord, 1993).
2. **Rereading yesterday's new book and taking a running record:** the child reads independently while the teacher "monitors and records which 'clues' the pupil uses in identifying unfamiliar words" (Colvin, 1997, p26).
3. **Letter identification (plastic letters on a magnetic board) and/or word making and breaking:** the teacher spends one to two minutes helping the child to form words using magnetic letters (Colvin, 1997).
4. **Writing a story (recording hearing and recording sounds in words):** The child generates a story, usually one sentence in length. The child and the teacher

work in a “highly scaffolded manner to represent the message” (Lyons, et al, 1993, p6).

5. **Cut-up story to be rearranged:** the teacher rewrites the story onto a sentence strip; the child must then arrange their pieces back into the correct order (Colvin, 1997).
6. **New book introduced:** the teacher introduces the book by drawing the child’s attention to the important ideas, reading specific words to allow the child to hear the language of the book, and by discussing the pictures in the text (Clay, 1993).
7. **New book attempted:** the student attempts to read a new book and the teacher guides the child if necessary.

Students exit the program after consideration has been given to the following: achievement of reading level suitable to the class they are returned, achievement of a reasonable ability to read independently, and the number of weeks spent on the program (the maximum is usually 20 weeks) (Centre, Wheldall, Freeman, Outhred & McNaught, 1995). Those students who successfully satisfy the above criteria are referred to as ‘discontinued’. Students who do not satisfy the above criteria are recommended for different educational assistance and are referred to as ‘not discontinued’ (MacKenzie, 2001). Researchers (Shanahan & Barr, 1995) have found that between 10% and 30% of RR students do not reach average reading levels and thus do not experience acceleration.

Just like RR, RAP is an intensive remedial reading program using tutors. RAP lessons are designed to encourage students to read new and challenging books regularly, engage

in daily writing tasks, and participate in an active dialogue with their tutor by asking questions, and receiving feedback regarding their literacy progress, all of which, are strategies used in RR. Perhaps the strongest link between RR and RAP, are the reading strategies employed by both programs. RAP constantly reminds children of what proficient readers and writers do, and promotes the strategies used for reading unknown words employed by RR. These principles of RR have been implemented into the RAP, with the anticipation that they will help make the program a success.

## **Is Reading Recovery a Good Model for RAP? Some Research Findings on Reading Recovery.**

Independent evaluations have confirmed that those participating in RR programs experience significant gains. Center et al (1995) reported that 65% of RR students in their sample reached average reading levels. Pinnell, Lyons, DeFord, Bryk and Sheltzer's (1994, cited in Leslie & Allen, 1999) large-scale study of RR, discovered that children who received one-to-one tuition from trained RR teachers, displayed a statistically significant growth on text reading level, when compared to students receiving tuition from teachers who had not completed a full RR course. Spiegel (1995) agrees that RR possesses exemplary teaching principles, and suggests that traditional remedial reading programs would experience greater success if they adopted the instructional principles from RR.

RR was introduced to Australia in the mid 1980's. Geekie completed the first evaluation of RR in Australia for the Victorian Department of Education and Training in 1988. Like most new remedial programs, RR was 'met' with initial anxiety by the Victorian teachers. Once the initial problems were overcome, such as the need to re-allocate resources, purchase new books, find a suitable teaching space and teacher, Victorian schools quickly came to realise the benefits of RR (Geekie, 1988). After the RR field trial in Central Victoria all teachers were able to identify, "significant numbers of children whose literacy skills had been minimal but were now functioning effectively in their classrooms" (Geekie, 1988, p79). It was discovered that the benefits of RR were two-fold, not only was the development of the children's reading skills accelerated, but the program also brought about teacher change. Teachers were shown how to use running records for the first time, and many considered that their personal competence and knowledge had grown as a result of their involvement with RR (Geekie, 1988).

In 1998 Moore and Wade conducted a longitudinal study to determine whether the impressive results achieved by RR students were in fact sustained for the duration of their schooling. The reading and comprehension ages of 121 Australian and New Zealand children who had RR intervention at age 6 were compared with those of a comparison group of 121, drawn from the same class who, at age 6, had been better performers in literacy. Moore and Wade's results showed that "the weakest group had overtaken initially more able readers and performed better in both reading accuracy and comprehension" (1998, p201), thus proving the gains made in RR had lasting effects.

While RR has demonstrated positive effects with first grade reading development the program has run into some practical as well as methodological criticisms. Clay's research has been criticised for excluding children who were not successfully discontinued from the RR program. Such an omission may have inflated the reported effectiveness of the program. Clay has also been criticised for not randomly assigning children to experimental and control groups (Center, et al, 1999). Other criticisms of the program concern the discontinuing of students and need for further literacy support. Although students discontinue from the program at the average level of their class, some teachers overtime has seen a need for follow up work (MacKenzie, 2001; Taylor, Hanson, Justice-Swanson & Watts, 1997). It is apparent that despite the impressive learning levels achieved whilst in the program, some students require regular maintenance and support in order to continue performing in subsequent grades to the level one would hope. Yet despite these criticisms RR continues to receive popularity and success, with more and more reading programs implementing the RR teaching principles. Given these data, it could be argued that RR is an effective model on which to base RAP.

## **Other Remedial Reading Programs**

RR is not the only model available for schools interested in developing site based remedial reading initiatives. During the past decade there has been a growing interest in and development of effective reading intervention programs. There are some studies, which have moved away from the traditional one-to-one tuition in an effort to develop

successful pullout programs (Hedrick & Pearish, 1999; MacKenzie, 2001). However, according to Spiegel (1995) traditional pullout programs have been criticised in the past for lacking connection with the regular classroom instruction, and for at times competing with it. Nevertheless in recent years some programs have shown promise.

Hedrick & Pearish (1999) developed a pullout program in which kindergarten and year one students met with a literacy teacher for thirty minutes each week with seven other students. This program provided opportunities for phonemic practice, shared and guided reading, shared and guided writing, and letter recognition. Their research found that teachers could improve the reading of young students by providing fast paced small group reading lessons. The program was found to have positively influenced all readers, both low-achievers and high-achievers. While the low-achieving readers were pulled-out of class, the program permitted class teachers to work intensively with the high reading achievers in order to challenge and extend their literacy acquisition. The program was also praised for its strong link to classroom instruction. Class teachers encouraged the children to continually practice the strategies they had been taught in their literacy group sessions and to use them when completing class activities. One criticism of the program concerns the selection process for students participating in the literacy groups. Hedrick and Pearish (1999) themselves confess that the program was set up to succeed, by only choosing those students who were believed to most likely benefit from the group instruction.



Another promising pullout program has been described by Hiebert (1994). This small-group design involved Title I teachers and their assistants, working with groups of three year one students, during thirty minute sessions, for the first half of year one, they then changed groups for the remainder of the year. Teachers documented that at the end of first grade more than 50% of the children involved in the program could read at the average first grade level, while a further 25% could read at the primer level.

Similarly Nicolson, Fawcett, Moss, Nicolson and Reason (1999) developed a literacy program for kindergarten students. These researchers evaluated the use of a computer-assisted reading support program, which teachers could use with small groups of children to provide individualised assistance when necessary. The program was administered to children in groups of four for two thirty-minute sessions a week for a period of ten weeks. The emphasis of the program was on word building and phonics skills. When compared against the control group at the conclusion of the study it was determined that the intervention group had made vast improvements (the mean reading standard score had improved from 89.0 to 92.8), whereas the control group had made no overall improvement. Although, despite the vast improvements experienced by the intervention group, 25% were still considered to be 'problem readers'.

MacKenzie (2001) describes a literacy program for year one and year two students. The program was initiated after teachers saw a need for an "instructional boost" (MacKenzie, 2001, p226) for ex Reading Recovery students to sustain the goals they had achieved whilst in the program. The literacy support this program offered was designed to

encourage strategy use in new literacy activities and student independence. MacKenzie (2001) found that after working with groups of eight students for thirty minutes a week the students improved in all assessment areas. Teachers believed children “showed significant growth and an accelerated rate of improvement” (MacKenzie, 2001, p231) after the program. There was also a noticed “increase in student confidence, motivation, and performance in the classroom” (MacKenzie, 2001, p233). The program was believed to be successful as “help was there immediately before the child lost confidence or interest” (MacKenzie, 2001, p232).

An extension of the small-group program has been studied by Taylor, Hanson, Justice-Swanson and Watts (1997). Struggling readers in year two were chosen to participate in an intervention program offered as enrichment classes. Students participated in the pullout program daily for 45 minutes for seven weeks. The emphasis of the program was repeated reading, decoding, self-monitoring strategies and writing. In addition to the small-group pullout portion of the intervention, students were supplemented with a cross-age tutoring program for 25 minutes, twice a week, for 21 weeks once the seven-week reading intervention classes were finished. The tutors were nine to ten year olds who were considered to benefit from the literacy coaching. The tutors were responsible for choosing the books, which were read with the year two students, and engaged regularly in oral debriefing sessions with the literacy co-ordinator. From their results, Taylor et al (2001) demonstrated that the oral reading and standardised test results improved for both the younger and older students throughout the school year. Compared with a control group who received no enrichment it was discovered that the combination

of small-group pullout, and cross-age tutoring programs produced significant gains in reading ability for low-achieving readers.

Other researchers are starting to move away from traditional pullout programs and are instead evaluating programs, which incorporate volunteer tutors (Juel, 1997; Santa & Hoen, 1999; Wasik, 1998). One-to-one instruction when provided as an addition to classroom instruction is “generally considered to be the most effective way of increasing students’ achievement” (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes & Watson Moody, 2000, p 605). Wasik and Slavin agree with this statement, they believe that “one-to-one tutoring is the most powerful form of instruction” (1993, cited in Pikulski, 1994, p34).

Another variation on the RR program is the Early Steps program originally developed by Darrell Morris (Santa & Hoen, 1999). The aim of this program is to rectify the learning inadequacies of year one students before they reach the upper grades. A qualified class teacher tutors children in this program for 30 minutes a day. During the time the student is removed from the class, a teacher’s assistant or volunteer parent remains to read aloud to the other students (Santa & Hoen, 1999). The tutors in the program strongly enforce reading strategies and encourage students to discover words for themselves. Repeated reading, letter recognition, vowels, and word sorting are components of each 30-minute lesson. After Santa & Hoen’s (1999) evaluation of the Early Steps program, they revealed that the experimental group “statistically significantly outperformed the control group on all post-intervention tests” (Santa & Hoen, 1999, p67). The success of this program was largely due to the repeated reading

component of the lessons. It was suggested that this repetition increased the speed and accuracy of the students' oral reading.

Leslie and Allen (1999) evaluated a tutorial program with a difference. This program was designed for students between grades one to four, who came from low socio-economic backgrounds, and who possessed minimal early reading skills. Tutors who were enrolled in a college teacher education program tutored the students in the areas of reading, writing, comprehension strategies, word identification, and rhyme. The program was unique as it also possessed parental support through attendance at literacy meetings, and listening to their children read at home. The program proved successful and beneficial on a number of fronts. Firstly, 70% of the children who began with reading levels far below their grade level reached an average grade level by the end of one semester, or twelve months of tutoring. Secondly, the program taught parents about "their role in supporting their child's literacy development" (Leslie & Allen, 1999, p409). Finally, the program provided the training teachers (i.e. the tutors) with knowledge that they may one day implement into their own classrooms.

A similar one-to-one tutorial that relies on volunteer tutors was studied by Invernizzi, Juel and Rosemary (1997). This program strongly relied on the recruitment of community volunteers for its success. Like the majority of remedial reading programs, this program too was designed for predominantly year one students who were at risk of reading failure. Unlike the previous tutor interventions this program possessed a reading co-ordinator. It was the role of this co-ordinator to provide ongoing training and support

for the tutors, and to assess the students twice annually. The tutors taught students the core activities planned by the reading co-ordinator. These activities consisted of reading familiar storybooks, word studies, writing, and reading new books. The standardised test results from the program evaluation “show statistically significant increases on measures of alphabet, phonemic awareness, and word recognition” (Invernizzi et al, 1997, p308). Heins and Perry’s (1999) study was similar and discovered comparable results. They found that 81% of students who participated in an after school tutorial program made significant reading progress.

The teaching strategies employed by the RAP and the content taught during daily sessions is a mixture of all these remedial reading programs. RAP is a pull-out program, which possesses tutors consisting of community volunteers and peer tutors. The content taught, ranges from teaching decoding skills to comprehension strategies, and the students in the program consist of students, who for whatever reason, have not yet caught onto the reading process, or, who are ex-reading recovery students in need of further literacy support.

## **What Principles Underpin an Effective Site-Based Remedial Reading Program?**

According to Horowitz (2000) certain principles are almost universal in organising a remedial reading program. The challenge for educators is to choose programs that will work best, and to modify or adapt them as required. Spiegel (1995) proposed 15

guidelines based upon the Reading Recovery model that, if followed, was likely to make remedial reading programs more successful. The following guidelines may also be used as the basis for evaluating and improving any remedial program:

1. **The intervention should take place early:** Pikulski agrees stating that such programs “play a critical role in efforts to eradicate reading and school failure” (1994, p32).
2. **Reading instruction should focus on comprehension of connected text, not the fragmented study of isolated skills.**
3. **Children should spend time reading:** Wasik (1998) suggests remedial reading programs should engage children in the rereading of familiar texts, and to encourage children to attempt reading new and more challenging texts.
4. **Both the child and the teacher should be aware of the goals of the instruction.**
5. **Children must have the opportunity to learn:** This means that children need to be given appropriate time on task.
6. **Children should be given materials to read at their instructional level.**
7. **Children should be taught strategies and how to transfer those strategies to new situations:** Wasik (1998) believes considerable time needs to be spent modelling appropriate techniques and strategies so the child is able to use them effectively.
8. **Writing should be an integral part of a beginning reading program.**

- 9. A beginning reading program should have phonemic awareness as part of the curriculum.**
- 10. The intervention should be congruent with the classroom reading program.**
- 11. Direct instruction should be part of the program.**
- 12. Instruction in special programs should be individualised.**
- 13. Children's attempts to make meaning of text should be monitored and reinforced.**
- 14. Children most at risk should be taught by the best teachers.**
- 15. Children who have fallen behind need a program that helps them make accelerated progress.**

(Spiegel, 1995, p89-94)

Furthermore, Wasik (1998) has produced a similar set of guidelines specifically for tutoring remedial programs. Wasik believes if the following components are put in place, it should ensure an efficient and valuable approach to developing volunteer tutoring programs:

- 1. A certified reading specialist needs to supervise tutors:** The role of this specialist is similar to the role of the reading co-ordinator in the program studied by Invernizzi, et al (1997). This reading specialist is expected to supervise the tutors regularly, assess the children, develop lesson plans for the tutors to implement, and to gather equipment needed for the lessons.

2. **Tutors need ongoing training and feedback:** Volunteer tutors should be provided with opportunities to share experiences with their supervisor and other tutors. Tutors should also be trained in order to possess a basic understanding of the reading process.
3. **Tutoring sessions need to be structured and contain basic elements:** Wasik suggests the following activities: Rereading a familiar book, word analysis, writing, and reading new texts.
4. **Tutoring needs to be intensive and consistent:** in order for the child and tutor to build a trusting relationship the same volunteer should tutor the child. Wasik (1998) advises a minimum of 30 minutes to two hours of tutoring should be provided weekly. Whereas Horowitz (2000) suggests the best results are achieved from a little instruction each day, 20 minutes being the optimum time.
5. **Quality materials are needed to facilitate the tutoring model.**
6. **Assessment of students needs to be ongoing:** such continuous assessment informs the tutors of their student's changing needs.
7. **Schools need to find ways to ensure that tutors will attend regularly.**
8. **Tutoring needs to be coordinated with the classroom instruction.**

(Wasik, 1998, p565-569)

There are many aspects to consider when designing a remedial reading intervention program. Wasik (1998) believes the most important component is the need to provide quality training and supervision for tutors. To date there are a great many remedial programs available, some of which have been implemented with greater success than



others. Those, which have experienced greater success, have incorporated the RR teaching strategies.

The aspect, which was most important when implementing the RAP at MWPS, was the need to meet the literacy needs of the struggling readers in the school. This may account for why MWPS deliberately implemented a program, that while possessing some of the RR principles also possessed many of the successful strategies and techniques found in other programs.

## **Summary**

The literature reviewed in this chapter has covered the six broad areas that relate to remedial reading. This includes an explanation of site-based curriculum, and an identification of the prevalence and consequences of reading failure. A description of Marie Clay's RR program was then given, which outlined the structure of an RR lesson. Next pullout and tutorial remedial reading programs were investigated. Finally the proposed guidelines with which programs may be evaluated were outlined.

Although the review is a comprehensive exploration of this area of literature, it highlights the sparsity of research that has been conducted that discusses remedial reading programs for older students. This substantiates the view that there is a definite need for more research into remedial reading practices for all primary-aged students using a naturalistic approach.

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# **CHAPTER THREE:**

## **METHODOLOGY**

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of my inquiry was to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the merit and worth (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) of a remedial reading program (known as the RAP) that was specifically adapted and implemented by the staff of Mt Warrigal Primary School (MWPS). Because the clients of this evaluation (the staff of MWPS) specifically requested an evaluation that would focus on possible pervasive, but less tangible, perceptions, opinions, experiences, and other socio-contextual effects of the program, a model of evaluation pioneered by Stake (1975), and later refined by Guba and Lincoln (1981) known as 'Responsive Evaluation' was chosen to guide and frame the inquiry.

As Responsive Evaluation falls within the broader spectrum of the naturalistic inquiry paradigm, the research decisions that relate to the specific methods of, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and the potential threats to the credibility and trustworthiness were guided by, and based on the canons which underpin this paradigm.

Almost all schools provide remedial reading programs for struggling readers, however, at the time of writing there appeared to be little current evaluative research, which focused on the more qualitative aspects of the program. This is why in this study 'participant observation' which relies on, semi-structured interviews, descriptive field notes and 'artefact' collection are prominent. However the major reason for choosing these particular methods was that they were most appropriate for the kind of evaluation, which the staff of MWPS (the clients of the evaluation) requested.

## **Inquiry Design**

### **The Nature of this Evaluation Project**

The approach taken in the evaluation of RAP was based on Stake's (1975) model, known as 'Responsive Evaluation'. This model has since been expanded and improved upon by Guba and Lincoln (1981). At the heart of Responsive Evaluation are the "issues that are perceived to be important by [the] stakeholders" (Popham, 1993, p42). Given that:

1. The clients had already gathered quantitative data which indicated that there was a positive (correlational) relationship between the RAP program and standardised tests of reading;
2. The clients were now interested in the 'how' and 'why' the program seemed to be associated with an increase in measured reading scores;

This was considered to be the most appropriate form of evaluation for the following reason: rather than placing the emphasis on the accomplishment of predetermined goals, it allowed participants "at all levels and all positions in the program [to] provide data concerning what the program meant to them" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p196). In other words the aim of a Responsive Evaluation is to "study situations from the participants' points of view" (Burgess, 1985, p3). The data collected from these experiences establishes the value of the program's worth to the participants, which in turn is an indication of the program's success or failure. The overall intent of Responsive Evaluation is to assist those who are implicated,

affected or interested in the evaluated program, to understand it and the ways it was implemented.

In order to achieve this purpose, the evaluator must seek to understand how the evaluand (RAP) is understood, accepted/rejected, modified and generally perceived to be 'working' by the stake holding groups. This means that the evaluator must collect data that allows her to see the program through the eyes of the participants. Due to the different backgrounds of those involved in the inquiry, different meanings and realities will be discovered. According to Guba and Lincoln,

“If multiple realities are assumed, and they are dependent on the time and context of the constructors who hold them, it is essential that the study be carried out in the same time/context frame that the inquirer seeks to understand.”(Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p175).

Consequently it is vital for Responsive Evaluations to be conducted in the place where the program is actually implemented. In doing so the researcher spends time evaluating the participants on their own territory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

The word 'responsive'-generally means to 'answer', or to 'reciprocate'. In the context of this kind of research, “responsiveness suggests an interactive process-an ongoing dialogue with the environment” (Pulley, 1994, p23). So, responsive evaluators are expected to become involved with the participants, in their natural setting and to gather information by

interacting with them. Although the responsive evaluator has a range of data-gathering schemes to employ, “most frequently those data-gathering schemes will be human instruments” (Popham, 1993, p43). Information is collected by conversing with the participants, observing them in action, and by collecting ‘artefacts’. These rich and complex “data” generated can be turned into “information” using methodological procedures found within the qualitative paradigm.

As indicated above, Responsive Evaluation is based upon the principles, which underpin Naturalistic Inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Naturalistic Inquiry can be broadly described as ‘qualitative’ in orientation. It is unlike traditional (or “rationalistic”) paradigms as it acknowledges that, “it is impossible to believe that investigations that involve people can occur without some kind of interaction taking place” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p60). Responsive Evaluation is no different. A Responsive Evaluation is a collaborative activity. In order to acquire a more complete understanding of the evaluated program, the stakeholders in the program need to become co-researchers. As a result of becoming co-researchers they are permitted to take an active role in data collection and analysis, thus positively influencing the credibility and trustworthiness of the data.

Responsive Evaluation emphasises the importance of getting close to people and situations being studied (Patton, 1987). This being the case, Responsive Evaluation is an approach that draws more on the disciplines such as ethnography and sociology rather than quantitative methods. Consequently, it is necessary to explore the nature of naturalistic inquiry more closely.

## **The Nature of Naturalistic Inquiry**

This research paradigm was considered to be the most appropriate for this evaluation for two main reasons. Firstly the purpose was to observe the program ‘through the eyes’ of the participants. The use of naturalistic inquiry data collection and analysis techniques was essential in achieving this outcome. Secondly it was important not to manipulate the program during the inquiry for the purposes of the evaluation. Thus it was vital to view the program in operation in its natural setting, which the naturalistic inquiry paradigm allows.

Naturalistic inquiry is a rigorous process, involving everyday interactions between people in a natural setting. Lincoln and Guba summarise the complex nature of this inquiry approach in the following statement:

“...naturalistic studies are virtually impossible to design in any definitive way before the study is actually undertaken. But naturalistic studies do have a characteristic pattern of flow or development...Naturalistic inquiry is always carried out, logically enough in a natural setting, since context is so heavily implicated in meaning. Such a contextual inquiry demands a human instrument, one fully adaptive to the indeterminate situation that will be encountered. The human instrument builds upon his or her tacit knowledge, and uses methods that are appropriate to humanly implemented inquiry: interviews, observations, document analysis, unobtrusive clues, and the like. Once in the field the inquiry takes the form of successive iterations of four elements: purposive sampling, inductive analysis of the data obtained from the sample, development of grounded theory based on the inductive analysis, and the projection of next steps in a

constantly emergent design. The iterations are repeated as often as necessary until redundancy is achieved, the theory is stabilised, and the emergent design fulfilled to the extent possible in view of time and resource constraints. Throughout the inquiry, but especially near the end, the data and interpretations are continually checked with the respondents who have acted as sources, as well as counterpart individuals; differences in opinion are negotiated until the outcomes are agreed upon or minority opinions are well understood and reflected. The information is then used to develop a case report- a case study. The case study is primarily an interpretative instrument for idiographic construal of what was found there. It may however, be tentatively applied to other, similar contexts, if empirical comparison of the sites seems to warrant such an extension. The entire study is bounded by the nature of the research problem, the evaluand, or the policy option being investigated, (which are, however, themselves subject to revision and extension as the study proceeds). Finally, its trustworthiness is tested by four naturalistic analogues to the conventional criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity, which are termed 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability', and 'confirmability', respectively. This testing begins early in the study and continues throughout, culminating in a final critical review by a panel of local respondents.", (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Cambourne, B., Turbill, J., Keeble, P. et al. 1988, p33-34).

A more detailed analysis of naturalistic inquiry is presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p188) in Figure 2.



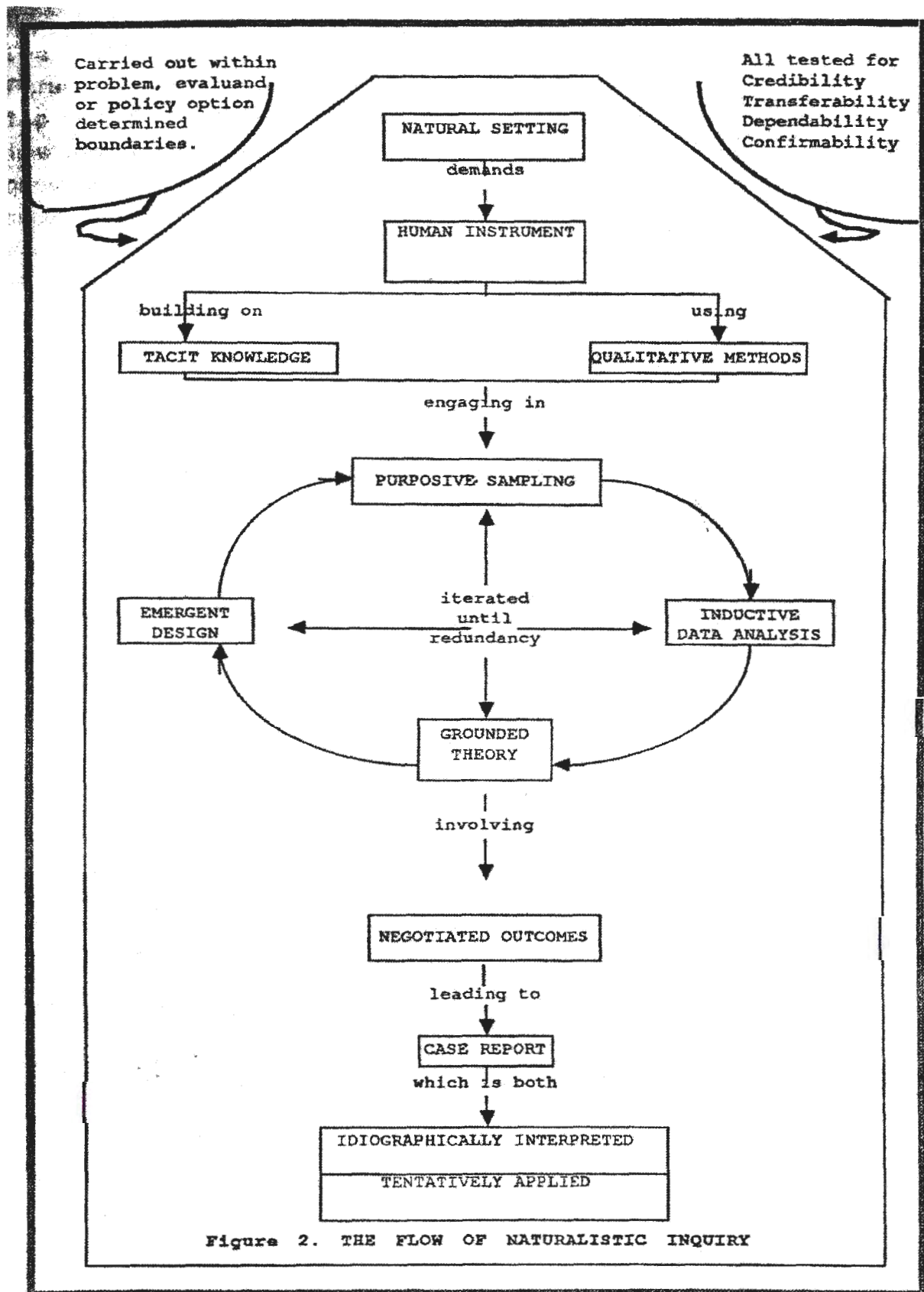


Figure 2: The Flow of Naturalistic Inquiry

## **The RAP Evaluation and the Naturalistic Inquiry**

The methodology used for this study followed the general pattern of ‘flow’ described on the previous pages. Guba and Lincoln (1985) identify naturalistic inquiry as possessing common elements:

**Natural Setting:** The research was conducted in the two RAP classrooms, and the school staffroom.

**Human-as-instrument:** The human mind was used as the instrument for data collection for this inquiry.

**Using qualitative methods:** The data collection methods used were those that came “most readily to hand for a human” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p175). These included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, descriptive field notes and collection of relevant students’ work samples and program documents.

**Purposive Sampling:** Sampling was purposive at a number of levels. A sample of students, teachers and parents were selected to represent a range of ages, year levels and gender.

**Inductive data analysis:** The process of analysis began with a broad spectrum of data that was then categorised into themes and codes. During this process data or evidence was not sought to prove or disprove hypotheses developed before entering the inquiry, rather the initial set of inquiry questions guided and helped locate significant aspects provided by the data.

**Case Study Report:** This method of reporting was chosen as it provides the structure to give an in-depth view of the RAP classrooms. A case study report “observes the characteristics of an individual unit [with an aim] to probe deeply and analyse intensively

the multifarious phenomena that constitute the daily life of the unit with a view to establishing generalisations about the wider population to which the unit belongs” (Cohen & Manion, 1980, p124).

**Trustworthiness:** The trustworthiness and credibility of the data and its analysis were ensured by the rigorous application of the research criteria for naturalistic inquiry namely: prolonged engagement on the site, persistent observation, triangulation, negative case analysis, peer debriefing and member checking ( Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Therefore the naturalistic inquiry methodology was the most appropriate choice for this study, as it served the purpose and was compatible with the environment within which the research took place.

## **Methodological Details**

### **Methods of Data Collection**

The following methods for data collection were employed:

**Participant Observations:** As a result of being a participant observer I was able to “share as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the people in the program” (Patton, 1987, p75). As a participant observer my role was to become a community tutor in the RAP program. During each session I would sit with two students and assist them with their literacy acquisition. During such sessions I would observe the students while they were

working, ask them questions to clarify what they were doing, and write descriptive field notes. Some examples of my field notes are displayed below.

Participant Observations, 28.2.02, Year 5

*...Quickly the boys started providing Jennifer with 'w' words. The first suggestion was 'wheel'. She asked the boy who provided the response to spell the word, which he did correctly. She then asked those who thought the word was spelt right to raise their hand, all but one boy, Peter, raised their hand. Jennifer asked Peter, "How do you think you spell 'wheel'?" Peter sat there staring at the board. Jennifer suggested, "Do you think there is only one 'e'?" Peter looked at the word for a while and then decided that the original word was in fact correct.*

Participant Observations, 6.3.02, Year 4

*...One girl was reading and read the word 'grab' for 'grasp'. I said to her when she had read the sentence, "You said that word was grab, if it was grab which letter would you expect to find on the end?" She replied, "A 'b' and no 's'". I said "That's right, now this word does mean grab, but it's a little different, do you think you know what the word is?" She then read the word correctly. When I praised her, she had a smile on her face. "How did you know the word was grasp?" "I knew grasp was another word for grab".*

Such observations provided me with an insider's view of what was happening. The aim of my participant observations was to capture, in descriptive language, the situations ordinarily meet by the participants in the RAP, and how they behaved in them (Burgess,

1984). The role of participant observer also allowed me to converse with some, or all of the participants in these situations to discover their interpretations of the incidents observed. These observations were recorded in the form of field notes. The field notes were written so as to contain my “reactions to the experiences, and reflections about the meaning and significance of what occurred” (Patton, 1987, p95). The field notes were descriptive accounts of what I heard, saw, experienced, and thought during the course of collecting and reflecting on the data. Due to the fact that it is almost impossible for the observer to notice and record everything happening during an observation session (Burgess, 1984), I chose instead to narrow the focus of my observations to the daily routines of the RAP and how the participants behaved or reacted towards these situations. Representative samples of my field notes are shown in Appendix 1.

**The Semi-Structured Interview:** This type of interview provided a framework within which the participants could express their own understandings in their own terms about the RAP. A number of broad areas were chosen before the interview occurred; the participants were then free to talk about these predetermined areas during the interview, these broad areas were as follows:

- A definition of RAP
- The day to day functioning of RAP and how it worked
- How RAP was implemented at MWPS
- Student motivation and RAP
- The difference between RAP and normal classroom instruction

- Strengths of RAP
- Weaknesses of RAP

My role during these interviews was to probe for clarification, seek expansion, comment, and direct the conversation. These interviews were also given to groups of participants. The purpose of these interviews was to allow myself to enter the participants' perspectives, and also to gather rich data that would depict the focus of the inquiry when analysed. While I carried out a range of interviews with various participants, I predominantly interviewed the RAP teachers, and the following is a sample of one such interview:

#### Semi-Structured Interview with Melanie, 8.5.02

*Researcher: The first thing I wanted to know is, what is RAP?*

*Melanie: Well it's called the Reading Action Program, and from my point of view I think it looks at filling in gaps for the kids to learn systematically. I think there's a lot of whole language going on in the classroom, and the kids who pick that up, that's great they get up and run, but there's a lot of kids who miss the basics, the initial sounds and the blends and I think that just carries right through. So for me Rap is grabbing those kids and looking at the gaps, trying to fill the gaps in that they've missed out on, somewhere between K-5.*

*Researcher: I've noticed after watching some of Jennifer's lessons that she emphasises the vowel sounds, I've also noticed you do this. Why do you place an important emphasis on the vowel sounds?*

*Melanie: I think that when you work with kids that have difficulty in reading, it doesn't come out when you're working with kids who aren't having difficulties, but when you get the kids who can't, don't know their vowel sounds, also the kids who can't decode, and they can't spell, even phonetically, like even if children can do invented spelling, these kids can't even do that because they can't do their vowel sounds, and if anyone's got a fantastic you beaut program that teaches vowel sounds because it's my bug bear at the moment with year three I'd love to see it. It just doesn't work, like, and they get 'e' and 'i' mixed up, and 'u' and 'a' mixed up (Melanie says the sounds of the letters 'u' and 'a') all the time, and it's just so frustrating, and there's no way I can think of doing it, unless just going over, over and over again. 'A' is really weird as you say to children 'Go and get a pencil' and they know it's 'a pencil' but we're saying 'a' (says the sound), I can understand how that confuses them and then...what were we working on today? We had a group of children working on something today, they kept putting 'e' for 'a'. They get the 'e' mixed up with the 'a' as well. 'O' they don't get mixed up (laughs), until you do the long vowel sounds.*

A representative sample of this type of interview is shown in Appendix 2.

**The Focused Interview:** This type of interview consisted of a set of questions, which were designed to encourage and invite the range of RAP participants to report on their experiences in, and perceptions of the RAP. These questions are listed below:

1. RAP teachers

- How does the RAP work?
- In your opinion has RAP been successful? Why?

- Could it be more successful? How?
- Has RAP changed the way you think about teaching reading? How?
- Has RAP changed the way reading and literacy is taught in the school as a whole? How do you know (what are the indicators that changes have occurred)?
- If a colleague from another school asked you how to get a RAP started in his/her school, what advice would you give him/her? (Pitfalls to avoid, things to do differently).

## 2. Tutors

- Does RAP work? How do you know?
- In your opinion has RAP been successful? Why?
- Could it be more successful? How?
- Has RAP changed the way you think about teaching reading? How?
- If another parent asked you about becoming a tutor in the program what advice would you give him/her?
- Tell me about one of the success stories you have witnessed since being a tutor?
- Are you aware of any students who have not benefited from RAP? Why do you think it didn't work for this child?

## 3. Parents of RAP students

- Before your child began RAP were you aware that he/she was having problems with reading? (What signs, indicators etc).



- How do you feel about your child participating in RAP? How long has your child participated in the RAP?
- Have you noticed any marked differences in your child's learning/attitudes to learning since participating in the program? Tell me about them.
- Would you recommend this program to other parents? Why/ why not?
- Has RAP changed the way you think about your child as a reader? As a learner? The school? The teachers in the school? How?
- What advice if any would you like to pass on to the school executive about RAP?

4. RAP students

- What activities do you do during a RAP session?
- Do you enjoy RAP sessions? Why?
- If you could change one or two things about RAP what would they be?
- Has RAP helped you become a better reader/writer/speller? How do you know?
- Tell me three things that you've learned about reading, writing, spelling, that you learned from RAP?

5. Class Teachers of RAP students

- Have you noticed improvements in the learning of these students since participating in the program?
- How do you support the principles of the RAP in the mainstream classroom?

- How do you decide which students should participate in the program?
- In your opinion has RAP been successful? Why?
- Could it be more successful? How?
- Has RAP changed the way you think about teaching reading? How?
- Has RAP changed the way reading and literacy is taught in the school as a whole? How do you know (what are the indicators that changes have occurred)?
- If a colleague from another school asked you how to get a RAP started in his/her school, what advice would you give him/her? (Pitfalls to avoid, things to do differently).

Most often these questions emerged from interpretations that I had developed from situations observed or information provided in the semi-structured interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to acquire specific information. Flexibility to probe over a range of topics was limited for both the informants and myself during these interviews. All interviews were audio taped to ensure a complete record of the discussion was completed. Below is a sample interview with responses. Other representative samples of these interviews are shown in Appendix 3.

Parent Tutor, 8.3.02

*Researcher: Before Matt was chosen for the program were you aware Matt was having reading difficulties?*

*Maree: I realised he had reading difficulties from Kindergarten. It was no shock. We had him hearing tested, his eyesight tested his speech tested and they could not find nothing*

wrong. He had been to the paediatrician and he told me I was being a neurotic mother, and then we let it go and every time there was a program I asked if Matt could go in on it. A Paediatrician told me that he (Matt) was not interested, and until he is interested he will not learn.

*Researcher:* What have you noticed in Matt, how has he changed from the start of the program to the end?

*Maree:* One thing that really helped him was we actually found out he had a sight problem. We thought, his teacher last year said, we still think Matt has a sight problem. I said fine, they introduced me to an optometrist in Albion Park who specialises in children's learning disabilities as well, he goes a little bit deeper, and he reckons his eye muscles were very, very weak and he said that he probably couldn't even concentrate for more than five minutes and then he'd have trouble. That has helped him with RAP. So it all coincided, that he needed glasses, Jennifer made it very interesting last year, so he was very happy, it was a much smaller group, and he's picked up really well.

*Researcher:* So what do you like about the program?

*Maree:* I think it's...English is a really hard language to learn and they don't get taught a lot in their class, all the key notes, they might go over it but it's not explained to them enough when they're little, plus their little not to understand and if they lose that well they've lost it.

*Researcher:* Has there ever been a child whom you've worked with who felt didn't succeed with the program?

*Maree:* I know some children are picking it up faster. Well there's one little boy who's got a very, very poor reading skill, learning concentration skill, he can't concentrate. But he

*has picked up slowly, but the problem is because it's such a late time at sixth class, he's still going to have trouble.*

*Researcher: What advice would you give future tutors?*

*Maree: Oh if they were interested, just to come up and listen to the day they have the information day and come and learn. Yeah it's interesting. A problem is a parent who's interested in their children will come, they'll already be here. I don't know of anyone who's really shy and would want to do it. You find when the school calls for help, the helpers come and that's as far as it will go, I don't know how to explain it.*

*Researcher: After being involved in the program has it changed your view of how reading it taught? Would you do anything different now with Matt?*

*Maree: I wouldn't do anything different, I'd just keep going over what's he's learning. Because I know I was a bad reader at school, I lost all this key learning period as well, and I only picked up when I got to high school, which I didn't want him to do. Because my daughter is also helping children in high school with reading problems and she keeps saying to him don't do it in high school learn now.*

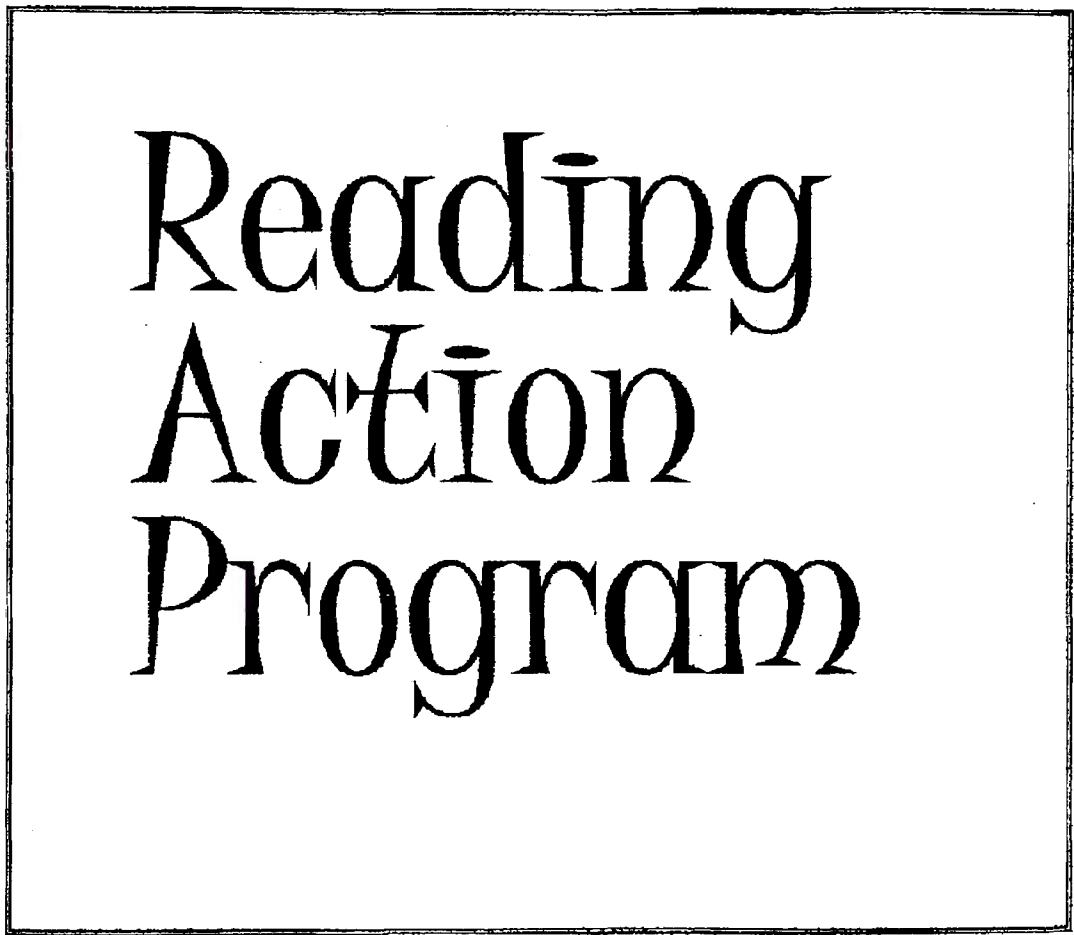
*Researcher: Is there anything you think needs to be modified in the program?*

*Maree: No not at this stage, as I think what's it's covering is what child lose, what they've lost in infants. No I wouldn't change it, no it's fine.*

*Researcher: So you're happy with the way it going?*

*Maree: Yeah it great, it's fine. The kids have improved heaps, and Matt is even when he does assignments on the computer, I can see he is actually doing, thinking of sounding out the words to get the words, which he never done before, he had no idea in the world. So it's working.*

**Document Examination and Analysis:** Documents related to the RAP were collected and examined. These included the RAP teaching manual, student worksheet material, and RAP correspondence forms. It was vital to collect these documents as they provided information about many things that could not be observed as they occurred before the evaluation began. Below is a sample of some of these artefacts.



Carolyn Duncan and  
Cathie Griffith

Figure 3: The cover of the RAP teaching manual.



# R.A.P. Evaluation Sheet

Name:		Class:		Date:	
The Reading Action Program is outcomes based and supports English across the school. The program not only raises literacy standards but also student self esteem and motivation. The program provides instant feedback to students and is totally individualised. Students are encouraged to be self-monitoring and responsible for their own learning.					
♦ Encoding. (The ability to hear the sounds in words and write them down).		Encoding words are always directly related to the weekly sound focus.			
♦ Decoding. (To develop speed and fluency in reading).		Encoding words are always directly related to the weekly sound focus.			
♦ Daily Writing.					
♦ Guided Reading.		Commenced on level		Is now reading level	
♦ Sight Word Development	♦ First Sight Words				
	♦ Key Words				
	♦ Useful Words				
	♦ Useful Extension Words				
	♦ Johnson's Sight Words				
♦ Spelling	♦ First Sight Words				
	♦ Key Words				
	♦ Useful Words				
	♦ Useful Extension Words				
	♦ Johnson's Sight Words				
I have reached Step <input type="text"/> in Stage <input type="text"/> this year.					
		Absent from R.A.P.: /			
Teacher Comments:					
Parent Comments:				Date:	

Figure 4: A RAP student evaluation sheet

## **The Participants**

The anonymity of the participants was guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms. The following categories of participants were involved:

**RAP Teachers:** A purposive sample of three RAP teachers was selected. These three teachers were responsible for teaching and implementing the RAP. One teacher was the school's Reading Recovery teacher, one was the school's STLD teacher and the third RAP teacher was the school's Deputy Principal. They were visited on many occasions over the course of the evaluation, with a wide range of data being collected from them (refer to Table 2). These teachers were both informants and collaborative respondents in regard to the interpretations that appeared from various data collected.

**RAP Students:** Due to the number of children in the program (roughly 80-90) there was not sufficient time to include all the RAP students in the inquiry. Thus a stratified, purposive sampling of 19 students was chosen to represent the range of ages, year levels (refer to Table 1), abilities and gender of those involved in the program. These students were selected with the help of the executive staff member in charge of the RAP program. These 19 students were observed during RAP sessions, and descriptive field notes were taken. These students also participated in semi-structured and focused interviews.



**Table 1: Distribution of RAP Students**

Year Level	Male	Female
1	1	2
2	3	0
3	1	2
4	1	2
5	4	0
6	2	1

**Classroom Teachers:** A purposive sample of three “Non-RAP” classroom teachers who taught RAP students in their class in the previous year were invited to participate in the inquiry. It was necessary to interview teachers who taught RAP students in the previous year, as they had the benefit of witnessing the literacy development of their RAP students over the course of a whole school year.<sup>1</sup>

**Tutors:** Two adult tutors were chosen to contribute information to the evaluation. Adult tutors were community volunteers who did not have children, grandchildren, or other relatives currently in the program.

**Parent Tutors:** Two parent tutors of RAP students were asked to discuss the impact (if any) the RAP had, had on their children. They were also asked to contribute information to the evaluation. Parent tutors were volunteer tutors who did have a child in the program, they did not however work with their own child.

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<sup>1</sup> If current class teachers of RAP students had been interviewed it may have been too soon to comment on the influence, if any, RAP was having on their students.

**Data Collection, Timeframe and Outcomes**

The following table is a schedule of how the data was collected throughout the research phase:

Table 2: Data collection, timeframe and outcomes

Date	Subject	Methods	Outcomes	Phase
13.2.02	RAP teachers and tutors	Participant Observation	To meet the facilitators and tutors of the program. To gain an understanding of the planning involved in the everyday implementation of the RAP.	Organisation
14.2.02	RAP teachers	Participant Observations and Document Collection		
18.2.02	Jennifer's Year 5 Rap class	Participant Observation		
21.2.02	Jennifer's Year 5 Rap class	Participant Observation	To establish a researcher-participant relationship. To begin understanding the daily routines of RAP. To establish questions and areas needing clarification for interviews.	Relationship building and familiarisation with the program.
	Jennifer	Interview		
26.2.02	Linda's Year 2 Rap class	Participant Observation		
	Linda's Year 1 RAP class	Participant Observation		
28.2.02	Jennifer's Year 5 Rap class	Participant Observation		
	Linda's Year 3 Rap class	Participant Observation		
6.3.02	Melanie's Year 4 RAP class	Participant Observation		
	Melanie's Year 3 RAP class	Participant Observation		
7.3.02	Linda's Year 6 Rap class	Participant Observation	To understand how the RAP is understood, accepted/rejected, modified and generally perceived to be working by the stake holding groups.	Interviews Conducted
	2 x Year 6 Students	Interviews		
	Linda's Year 3 Rap class	Participant Observation		
	1 x Year 3 Student	Interview		
	1 x Parent Tutor	Interview		
8.3.02	Linda's Year 3 Rap class	Participant Observation		
	1 x Year 3 Student	Interview		
	1 x Year 4 Student	Interview		
14.3.02	Linda's Year 6 Rap class	Participant Observation		
	Linda's Year 3 Rap class	Participant Observation		
	1 x Year 3 Student	Interview		
	1 x Parent Tutor	Interview		
	Linda	Interview		

Date	Subject	Methods	Outcomes	Phase
15.3.02	Jennifer's Year 5 Rap class	Participant Observation		
	2 x Year 5 Students	Interviews		
20.3.02	Melanie's Year 2 RAP class	Participant Observation		
	Linda's Year 1 RAP class	Participant Observation		
22.3.02	Jennifer's Year 5 RAP class	Participant Observation		
26.3.02	Linda's Year 2 Rap class	Participant Observation		
	1 x Year1 Student	Interview		
	1 x Year 2 Student	Interview		
	1 x Tutor	Interview		
27.3.02	Jennifer	Interview		
28.3.02	Jennifer's Year 5 Rap class	Linda's Year 2 Rap class		
	2 x Class Teachers	Interviews		
2.4.02	Linda's Year 2 Rap class	Participant Observer		
	2 x Year 2 Students	Interviews		
	1 x Class Teacher	Interview		
3.4.02	Linda's Year 2 Rap class	Participant Observer		
4.4.02	Linda's Year 6 Rap class	Participant Observer		
	2 x Year 6 Students	Interviews		
			To find emerging themes or categories from the data. To locate areas which still need further clarification.	Initial Data Analysis
8.5.02	Melanie	Interview	To fill in the gaps and to seek further clarification.	Further Data Collection
22.5.02	Linda's Year 1 RAP class	Participant Observer		
	2 x Year 1 Students	Interview		
	Melanie's Year 4 RAP class	Participant Observer		
	2 x Year 4 Students	Interview		
29.5.02	Jennifer	Interview		
	Melanie	Interview		

## **The Stages in Data Collection**

The following phases were used during data collection:

- **Phase One:** Organisation
- **Phase Two:** Researcher-participant relationship developed, and familiarisation with the program obtained
- **Phase Three:** Conducting interviews
- **Phase Four:** Initial data analysis
- **Phase Five:** Further data collection
- **Phase Six:** Further analysis and coding of data
- **Phase Seven:** Writing case-study report

## **Data Analysis**

Naturalistic program evaluation generates a voluminous amount of data. In the course of data gathering the evaluator generates ideas about analysis and interpretation. Such a degree of data analysis was conducted during the collection stages for this study to ensure that the data being collected was both relevant and rich.

### **‘Core’ data and ‘Supportive’ data**

The many layers of data collected each contributed differently to the focus question of the study. The data thought to contribute the most to the inquiry was called the ‘core’ data, while the other data was referred to as ‘supportive’ data. ‘Supportive’ data was used to strengthen, support and/or adjust analysis made of the core data.

For this evaluation there were three layers of 'core' data. The data collected from the semi-structured and focused interviews was at the heart of these layers. The middle layer consisted of the participant observations and descriptive field notes. The outer layer comprised of RAP 'artefacts' such as documents and work samples. Figure 5 captures the essence of this relationship.

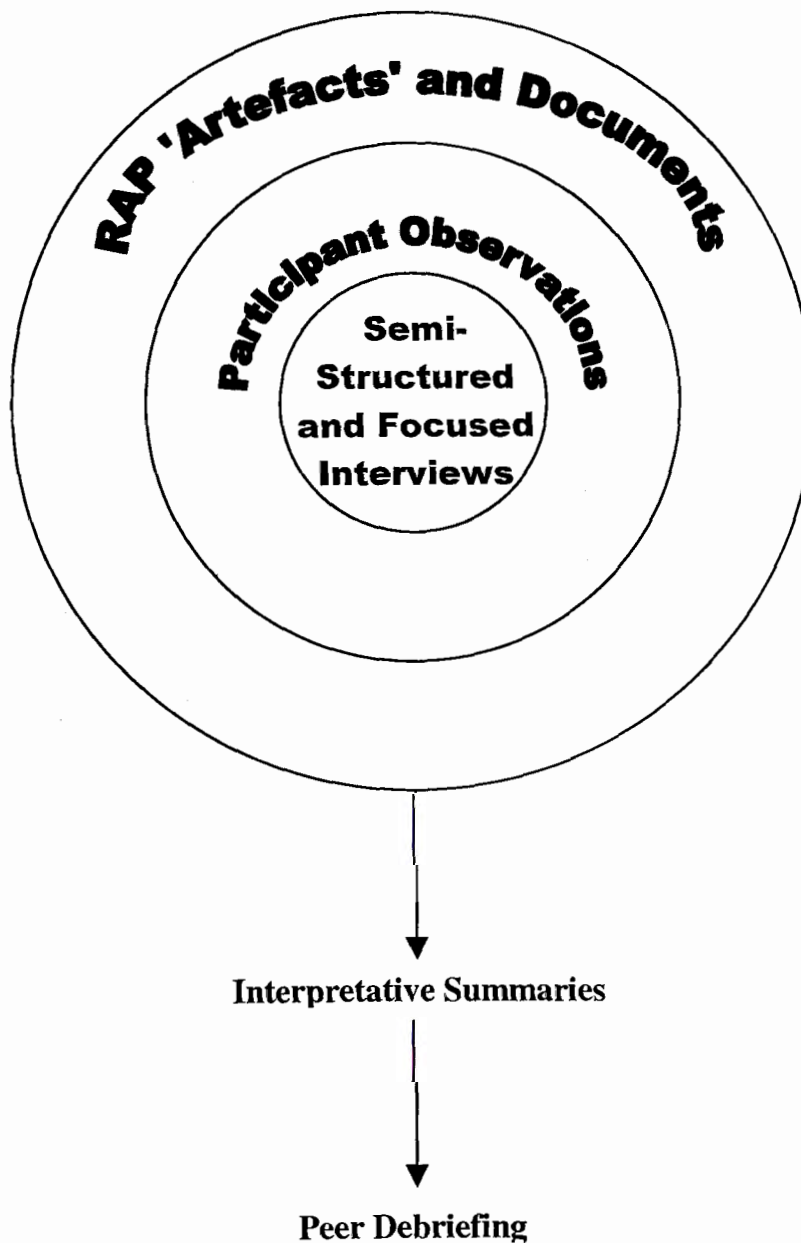


Figure 5: Relationship between the Core and Supportive data

## The Coding of the 'Core' Data

The audiotapes of the focused and semi-structured interviews were transcribed for reading and coding. This data was read and then divided into smaller, more meaningful units. As a sentence is a piece of information that can comprehensively stand alone it was selected as the basic unit of data.

Emerging themes were discovered after numerous readings of each interview. My background knowledge and the recorded information allowed me to recognise and subsequently verify themes. Below is a section from an interview with a classroom teacher conducted on the 28.3.02:

*Bonita: I think it (RAP) just covers so much of the basics that the kids miss out on and in a general classroom situation you don't get that time to spend individual time with the children. So it definitely raises their levels, plus as I said the confidence is there, and their self-esteem goes through the roof because they're able to do things.*

The sentences with the underlined sections in the data above were sentences that I placed into a category called strengths. Sentences were sorted into this category if they described the positive outcomes of the RAP for the participants.

During the analysis process the themes and their explanations (that is rules for assigning data to a particular theme) remained provisional. The categories were flexible and were modified as further data analysis occurred. Once coding was achieved the explanations

could be accepted. Below is a section of an interview conducted with a RAP teacher on the 14.3.02:

*Linda:...they're (the children) working at their levels. They're quite; well they seem to be quite happy because they're working at their level. They'll answer questions that they won't do in the classroom.*

While analysing the data it became apparent that the category called “strengths”, was in fact quite broad. The sentence ideas underlined in the data above were initially placed into the strengths category, but as I began to realise the broadness of this category I began to modify it further, one of the new categories to develop from this larger category was children working at their own level, therefore the information underlined above was thus moved to this new category.

Details of the coding rules are set out in Appendix 4.

Participant observations were coded using a similar process to identify emerging themes and to provide supportive data in accordance to the focused and semi-structured interview data. Below is a section of a participant observation recorded on the 28.2.02:

*The children were asked to list 'ch' words. They listed the following: chair, chick, church, China, chip, beach, chicken, catch, cheese, chain, shave, cat and clown. Children were madly looking around the room during this activity trying to locate new 'ch' words. Zoe*



*put her hand up, and then put it down and said to me, “Oh duck isn’t one is it?” Linda then brought the cards around and the children started making words: chin, child and cheese.*

The underlined sentences above are examples of what happens during the encoding section of a RAP session. Information from participant observations that discussed the day to day functioning of RAP that encouraged student learning was placed into a category called student learning.

It was during this process in which, it was vital to remain focused on the original research questions. Consequently I felt it necessary to display copies of the research questions around the room near where I analysed the data so that I always remained on track. The research literature also acted as an ‘anchoring’ point when making meaning from the data. The review of literature assisted in the making meaning process by stimulating questions and providing direction. The following diagram shows how the review of the literature is intertwined with the inquiry, and thus portrays how the inquiry and literature direct and affect each other.

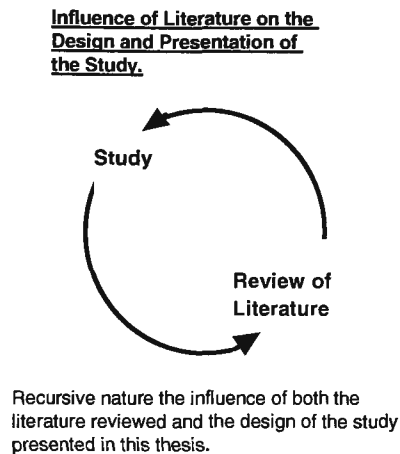


Figure 6: The influence of the literature on the inquiry. (Short, 2002).

## Credibility Issues

Throughout the data collection several techniques and procedures were employed to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings and interpretations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advise evaluators to implement a variety of measures to ensure trustworthiness of the data gathering and analysis phases during a naturalistic inquiry. This study included the following credibility measures:

**Prolonged and Substantial Engagement:** I visited the site extensively over a four-month period. During this time I was able to build up a relationship with the participants and become an accepted member of their environment. Only when I had confidence that themes were repeating instead of expanding did I feel as though it was time to leave the field.

**Persistent Observations:** Through persistent observations I was able to identify important issues concerning the merit and worth of the program as it applied to the stakeholders.

**Thick Description:** The use of descriptive field notes allowed me to thoroughly describe the RAP and its environment in which it operates. Such description also allowed me to describe meaningful human interactions and processes, which aided in identifying the merit and worth of the program.

**Peer Debriefing:** Peer debriefing is a process where the researcher engages “in an extended discussion with a disinterested peer, of findings, conclusions, analysis, and hypotheses” (Mertens, 1998, 182). This process occurred on a weekly basis with peers who were going through a similar process, but who had no vested interest in the outcome of the inquiry. It was during peer debriefing sessions in which peers posed searching questions, which encouraged me to check or clarify misinterpretations, these peers also aided in guiding the subsequent steps of the study.

**Member Checking:** This process took place through the interviews and involved the constructions that had been developed as a result of data collections and analysis to be checked with the participants in order to represent their perspectives correctly.

**Source Triangulation:** Triangulation “involves checking information that has been collected from different sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data” (Mertens, 1998, p183). This was achieved by implementing multiple data collection techniques such as interviews, observations and data analysis from a range of participants.

## **Conclusion**

The research paradigm and evaluation procedure used in this inquiry into the merit and worth of the RAP as it applied to MWPS were selected as they were the best options for achieving the needs of the study. This inquiry used a Responsive Evaluation, which included qualitative data collection and analysis methods within the Naturalistic research paradigm. This provided a rich supply of data and thick description of the RAP and the participants' understandings, interpretations and attitudes towards the program.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

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## **Introduction**

This chapter sets out to describe and interpret the results of the inquiry. It will be recalled that the aim of the inquiry was to conduct a Responsive Evaluation of MWPS' RAP, in order to judge its merit and worth. This in turn necessitated data being analysed from two broad perspectives. Perspective one is descriptive and non-interpretative. In perspective one I address the question, "What factual information do the data reveal about the events, stakeholder perceptions, and other phenomena associated with RAP at MWPS?" Perspective two is interpretative. In perspective two I address the question "What do these descriptive results mean in terms of the aims and purposes which originally motivated the inquiry?"

As data were reduced and reorganised using the analytic procedures described in the previous chapters, a number of themes emerged which have been used as organisers for describing and interpreting the results. These themes were:

- The implementation of RAP at MWPS
- Student learning
- Support needed for teachers
- Student work level
- Scaffolding
- High points of RAP
- Low points of RAP

- Strengths of RAP
- Weaknesses of RAP
- Suggested changes to RAP
- RAP and its perceived success

Although the chapter is predominantly about *describing* and *interpreting* the data, I decided that, for purposes of clarity, these two perspectives should be optimally contextualised. Accordingly the chapter has been organised into three major sections. The first section serves to contextualise the latter two by describing the learning environments in which the RAP students learnt, and the literacy learning experiences they engaged with during RAP sessions. The second section presents the descriptive analysis of the data, while the third section provides the interpretations of these findings.

## The Learning Environment

The research was conducted in two average sized classrooms. I will refer to the two classrooms as RAP Room 1 (RR1) and RAP Room 2 (RR2).

**RR1-** *The room has a teacher storeroom and is joined to RR2 by a large bag room. The children's desks are arranged in three rows facing the blackboard, each accommodating four students and two tutors. Each desk contains a pencil tin, tutor box, a letter and blends chart and a dictionary. The teacher's desk is placed at the back of the students' tables facing the blackboard. The positioning of this desk, while creating more space along the sides of the classroom, is out of the way of the students, as it is never actually used during*

RAP sessions anyway. On the sides of the blackboard are magnetic alphabet cards that the teacher uses for word formation activities.

As you enter the class, on the right hand side are the students' RAP folders stored in two boxes and filed according to class group. In between the two boxes is a large poster with the heading, 'When I don't know a word I...' a range of reading strategies are then written on the poster. On the same wall is the student library. Books from the school library are displayed on book holders above a small set of shelves. On the shelves are unused RAP certificates that the teachers give to students on completion of a new spelling list or reading level.

Along the back wall is the tutor resource shelf. Here tutors are able to collect stamps, pens, highlighters, erasers and letter cards needed for RAP sessions. Next to the shelf are the students' books for guided reading. The books are levelled from 1–20 and are stored in 20 boxes that sit on the floor. The class computer (an Apple Macintosh) is set up behind the teacher's desk.

Towards the front of the room opposite the RAP folders is another set of shelves, which store the student RAP worksheets. Students are able to collect new sheets when required. Above the blackboard are lists of encoding words recorded on coloured paper from previous RAP sessions. Finally, the door display is an acrostic poem using the word RAPPERS, which reads, Ready, Active, Positive, Participant and Enthusiastic Readers. (Field Notes, 22/5/02). Figure 7 shows the classroom layout of RR1.



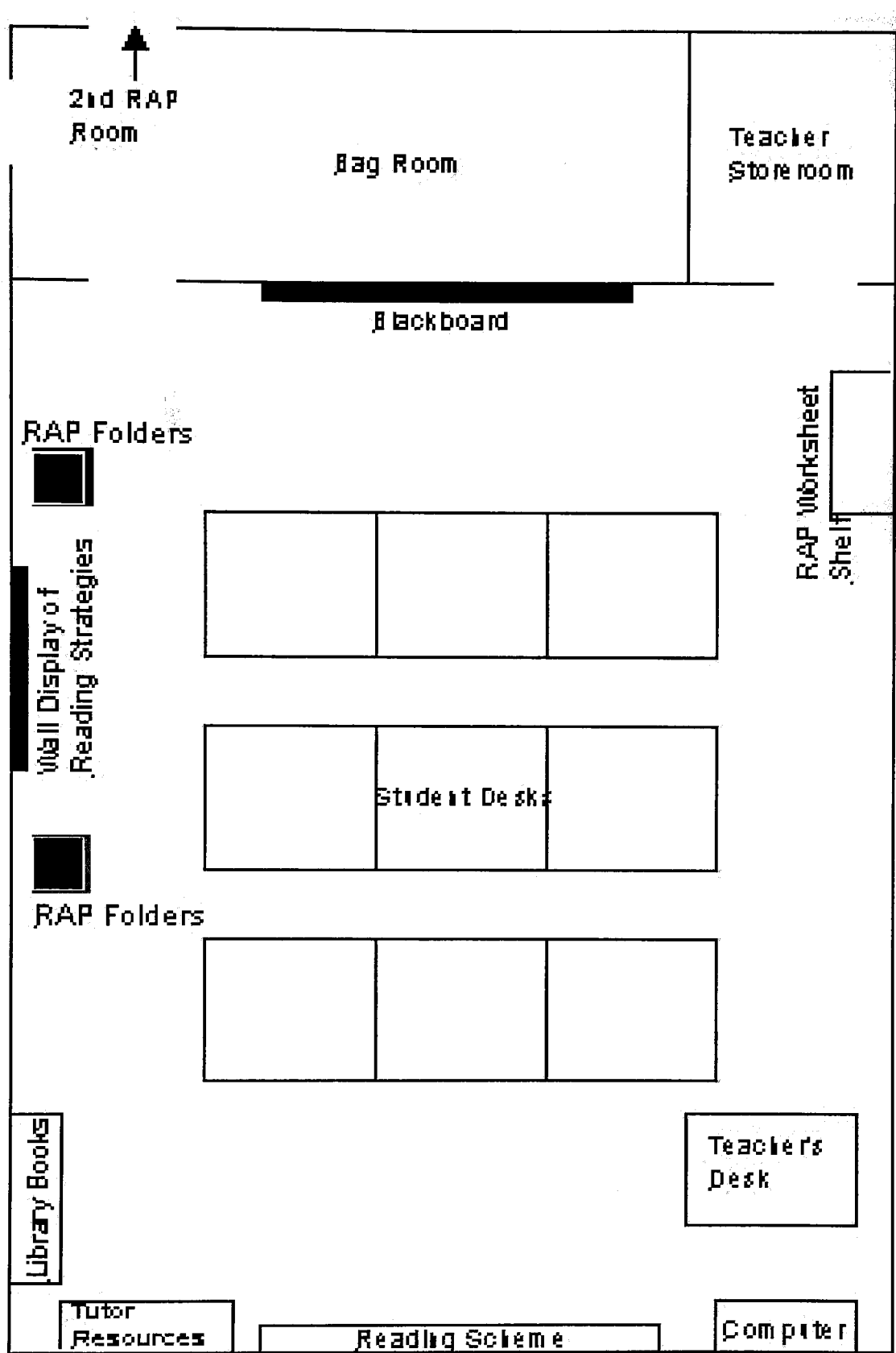


Figure 7: A Plan of RR1

**RR2-** *In comparison to RR1 this room is cluttered and compact. The room has a teacher storeroom, is also used as the Reading Recovery Centre, and is the mathematics and music storeroom. The students' desks are organised into three rows facing the blackboard accommodating two students and 1 tutor, 1 row facing the teacher's desk accommodating four students and two tutors, and a stand-a-lone desk placed on an angle accommodating one student and one tutor. Each desk contains a pencil tin, tutor box, a letter and blends chart and dictionary. The names of the RAP students are contacted onto the tables. The teacher's desk is at the front of the room facing the students' desks.*

*At the sides of the blackboard are colourful word lists designed for Reading Recovery students. Above the students' desk is wire running across the roof at various angles. The wire also runs across the walls above the level of the windows. On this wire hangs colourful encoding word lists from previous RAP sessions.*

*At the back of the classroom are two cupboards the width of the class full of mathematics equipment and musical instruments. In front of the cupboard directly behind the students' desks is the class library; here books from the school library are displayed. On the wall opposite the class library are the guided reading books. These books are also the Reading Recovery books and are organised into levels between 1-20.*

*In an effort to block out the many distractions in this room, large display boards have been positioned around the students' desks, with alphabet charts and book posters pinned onto them. (Field Notes, 22/5/02). Figure 8 shows the classroom layout of RR2.*

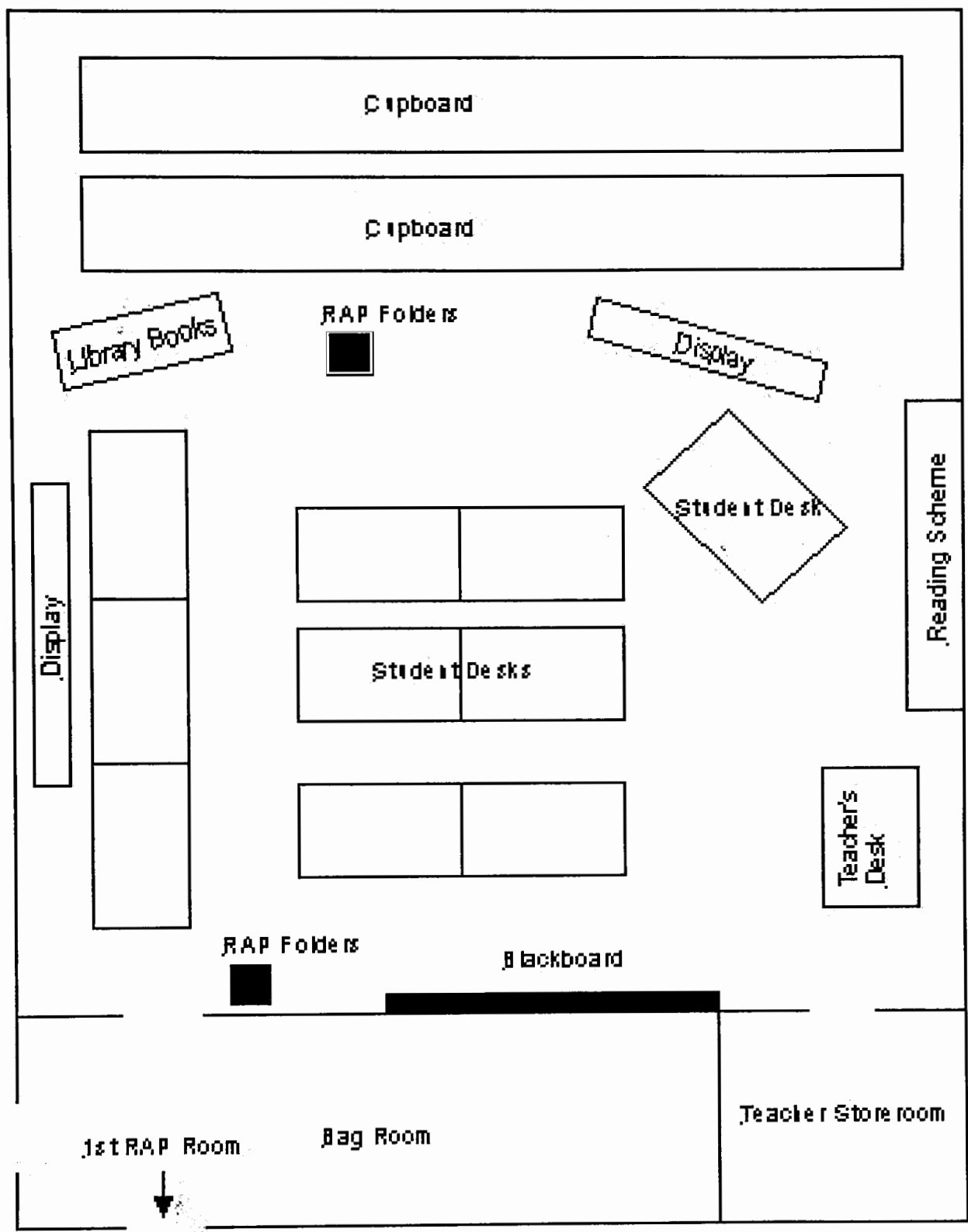


Figure 8: A Plan of RR2

## **RAP Sessions**

As most of the data was collected during the RAP sessions, it is helpful to further contextualise these sessions by describing how they were structured. The following is a plan of the literacy learning experiences planned for daily RAP sessions:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Suggested Time</b>
1. Encoding	10 minutes
2. Decoding	5 minutes
3. Daily Writing	5 minutes
4. Guided Reading	10 minutes
5. Sight Words	5 minutes
6. Spelling	10 minutes
7. Comprehension/Activity/Game	10 minutes

1. **Encoding-** this task is designed to help students “aurally break up words into their component sounds and to correctly record on paper the sounds” they hear (Duncan & Griffith, p12). It involves the teacher choosing a sound focus for the week (e.g. fr). The students are then asked to brainstorm words starting with ‘fr’. The teacher breaks down the hearing of the word, e.g. frog  $\Rightarrow$  ‘ffff-rrrr-ooo-ggg’ and writes the word on the board (depending upon the literacy ability of the students they may be asked to spell the word as the teacher writes it). Four words are then chosen from the class brainstorm as the encoding words. The students then write these words down on their encoding sheets and the tutor marks them.

2. **Decoding-** This task is designed to “develop speed and fluency when reading words” (Duncan & Griffith, p15). This task is taught using two different strategies. The first strategy requires the teacher to rub the encoding words off the board. The teacher then tests the students by repeating the words, and asking the students to write the words onto their decoding sheets, the tutor then marks their work. The second strategy used is to provide the students with a list of words linked to the weekly sound focus. Students must then practice reading this list to themselves first, and then aloud to their tutor.

3. **Daily Writing-** This activity is designed to “allow the students to use words from encoding and decoding in a written format” (Duncan & Griffith, p17). Students try to use one or more words from their encoding sheet to include in a sentence. Depending upon the RAP teacher this sentence may be dictated by the teacher or student constructed. The tutor corrects and discusses the sentence with the child upon completion.

4. **Guided Reading-** This task is designed to provide “structured support for students developing and mastering all the strategies involved in the reading process” (Duncan & Griffith, p19). The students are responsible for selecting a book at their guided reading level allocated to them by their teacher. The students fill out their guided reading log with the date, title of the book and the level, and then colour the appropriate square of their reading graph. The student reads silently to himself or herself until a tutor or the teacher is ready to listen to them read. The tutor assists the child to use a range of reading strategies when reading unknown words, and writes a comment about the students’ reading on their reading log. If the student reads the book competently and confidently, the tutor will ask them to change their book, so they will have a new book ready for the next day.

**5. Sight Words-** The purpose of “sight word development is for students to recognise words quickly and confidently” (Duncan & Griffith, p22). Students are assessed at the start of the year and given an appropriate sight word list. It is during this task in which students spend five minutes reading some of the words to their tutor. If the child reads a word correctly upon their first attempt the word is highlighted blue and referred to as a known word. For words that are not blue they become the focus of subsequent lessons. When the child recognises the word the tutor dates it. When the word has been dated three times it is highlighted yellow and referred to as a learnt word. When the child has mastered all the words on their list they progress to the next list.

**6. Spelling-** This activity is designed to “assist pupils to learn common usage words by rote” (Duncan & Griffith, p30). Students are assessed at the start of the year and given an appropriate spelling list. Students are encouraged to review their spelling list and use the look, say, cover, write and check method. The tutor then tests the students on six words, one at a time. The students record their answers on their spelling sheet. Just as with the sight words, known spelling words are highlighted blue, and learnt spelling words are highlighted yellow.

**7. Comprehension/ Activity/ Game-** At the completion of spelling students may be involved in one of three activities until the completion of the RAP session. Comprehension tasks are often given to the older students to encourage the use of higher order thinking skills, while the younger students are given activity sheets, which enable them to practice their weekly sound focus. Some RAP sessions also finish with an English game such as hangman.

## **Descriptive Results**

Analysis of the data revealed a set of themes that can guide the evaluation of the merit and worth of the RAP as perceived by the participants at MWPS. In what follows, these categories will be identified and described.

### **Implementation of RAP at MWPS**

*This category included any reference that was made to the implementation of the RAP at MWPS. That is, why and how the program was implemented, and how this affected the stakeholders who were involved with the implementation of the RAP.*

The data revealed a few references regarding the implementation of the RAP. Initially before the RAP was available, the school had an STLD teacher, who assisted students with learning difficulties by working through a six-week program with them. When discussed with the staff this program was found to be ineffective, which thus led to the need to find a more appropriate and supportive program.

The new Deputy Principal who had come from a school where the program had been successful introduced RAP to MWPS. After informing the staff about this new program, the STLD teacher, and the RR teacher along with the Deputy Principal, travelled to Vincentia Public School to observe the RAP in action. Resources were then immediately purchased and so the preparation phase began.

The RAP teachers “*met everyday and talked about what to do and how to get the program up and running*” (Interview, 21/2/02, Jennifer). They spent a whole term “*purchasing the resources, getting books covered, training tutors, training each other, talking to staff about it, consulting with them and being collaborative so that they were part of the process*” (Interview, 21/2/02, Jennifer), and then finally screening the children. The planning and implementation of the RAP was a busy time for the RAP teachers, as even “*running through a basic sight word list and sound checking mechanism [with] kindergarten [took] days and days*” (Interview, 29/5/02, Jennifer).

While the preparation phase was occurring, other staff members recall periods of uncertainty regarding the implementation of RAP. “*Through no fault of anybody’s it (RAP) got pushed from one staff meeting to the next, and really it ended up being squashed into this tiny little time frame, while a lot of teachers came out not really knowing what it was, resenting the fact that they were being told that they had to do this, a group of children were being dragged out at certain times, there was a lot of resentment there.*” (Interview, 14/3/02, Linda).

Asking teachers to allow students to attend RAP during class time was not the only pitfall associated with the implementation of RAP, the new roles of the RAP teachers also sparked resentment. It was considered by some staff members that the RAP teachers “*were actually having an easier time because [they were] not marking rolls or writing class programs*” (Interview, 29/5/02, Jennifer). Many changes occurred as a result of the implementation of the RAP. Some of these changes were:



- A new school timetable for teaching children with reading difficulties;
- A new role for the STLD teacher;
- Changes in class routine, due to students leaving at various times to attend RAP;
- Relocation of furniture and resources to ensure the RAP rooms were equipped for teaching; and
- A stronger link with the community (i.e. teachers and students working closely with volunteer tutors).

## Student Learning

*This category included data that made reference to student learning in RAP, student improvements, and knowledge students have learnt.*

The success of student learning while participating in RAP was a recurring theme through the interview and field note data. The RAP students were often more than willing to share their literacy accomplishments with me. When I asked one student whether her reading had improved, she replied, “*Yep, because when I was in year two I couldn’t read at all, and I’m in year six now and I’m up to level 15*” (Interview, 4/4/02, Anita). Another student replied to the same question by saying, “[*I’ve*] *learned how to sound out words if they’re really long, or find the little words in [big words]* ” (Interview, 15/3/02, Adam). These sorts of responses tended to dominate more than responses, which suggested they didn’t believe they’d made any or little progress in reading.

It seems, not only have students perceived their improvement in their literacy performance, but they have also acquired strategies to make their literacy learning easier. One boy told me he remembered how to spell the word, 'when', "*as he thinks of the word 'hen', and then adds a 'w' to the front to create 'when'*" (Field Notes, 22/5/02, Melanie's Year 4 RAP class). A different student explained how his reading fluency of the book *Seagull is Clever* improved, due to his ability to learn from past mistakes, as he said, "*[Yesterday] I made a couple of mistakes. When I read it today I didn't make any mistakes, since I made my mistakes yesterday*" (Interview, 3/4/02, Trent).

Literacy is not the only area in which students are learning. Targeting correct work habits and behaviour modification is an important aspect of the RAP. Student learning in relation to work habits has been noticed by the RAP teachers, as Jennifer responded, "*...you see children stop swinging on chairs...they don't have to be reminded as they're doing it themselves*" (Interview, 29/5/02, Jennifer).

The class teachers of the RAP students also acknowledged the student learning which takes place in the RAP. One teacher noticed the RAP students in her class were "*calling on their RAP skills so to speak to read, and...had virtually leapt ahead and [were] doing automatic reading*" (Interview, 2/4/02, Catherine). An additional teacher noticed her RAP students were "*more willing to take on challenges and have a go rather than giving up to start with...[and] in particular their class work improved, and their oral reading*" (Interview, 28/3/02, Bonita). It must be said that all teachers did not notice such extreme improvements, one teacher "*only noticed slight improvements*" (Interview, 28/3/02, Janet) in her RAP students' literacy performance.

Student learning was also recognised by the parents and tutors of the RAP students. One parent recalls when her son completed assignments on the computer she observed him *“thinking of sounding out the words to get the words, which he [had] never done before”* (Interview, 14/3/02, Maree). Not only did the parents of RAP students inform me of the student learning they witnessed, but they also reminded their own children of their accomplishments, as Chris answered, *“My mum says I’m a better reader now then last year and she says I’m improved...and I think too, and I like reading now, last year I didn’t like reading”* (Interview, 8/3/02, Chris).

### **Support needed for the RAP teachers**

*This category included data relating to extra support identified by the RAP teachers as necessary for the success of the program, and the teaching of literacy in the classroom and the school as a whole at MWPS.*

Because the RAP has only been implemented at MWPS for less than two years, the data suggests that the teaching of literacy throughout the school as a whole has not been affected, as one teacher commented *“On a whole school basis I don’t think it’s changed”* (Interview, 2/4/02, Catherine). The Deputy Principal agreed with this assumption as she said, *“It hasn’t changed the programs that they’re delivering in literacy”* and adds, *“I think that will come as we start to see the results through basic skills tests, that I’m sure will come later”* (Interview, 27/3/02, Jennifer).

It seems that the class teachers are attempting to support some of the principles of RAP in their classrooms but on a very small scale. Linda became aware of a few “*teachers using the sight word lists as their spelling lists*” (Interview, 14/3/02, Linda). While Melanie noticed sound work being incorporated in lessons, where “*the teacher might pick a sound for the week and discuss that with the class*” (Interview, 8/5/02, Melanie). One teacher said she supported the principles of the RAP in her class by “*following letter patterns...[reinforcing] the concepts, and [going] over the decoding strategies...with the whole class*” (Interview, 28/3/02, Bonita). Whereas a different teacher, when asked if she supported the principles of RAP in her classroom replied, “*not really*” (Interview, 2/4/02, Catherine).

It might be argued that the RAP teachers require further support from the classroom teachers. Jennifer comments on the need for consistency, particularly when discussing assessments, she says, “*when we’re actually talking about common assessment tasks, such as, stage one children can spell most frequent words correctly, well what does frequent mean? What’s that list? Is it the same list we use in RAP?*” (Interview, 27/3/02, Jennifer).

Whole school support is not all that is required for the RAP teachers; support in terms of new resources was also identified. Linda recalled being told that she was “*going to get all the stencils [and] all the lesson plans*” (Interview, 14/3/02, Linda) in which to teach RAP. When they never arrived she had to adapt the program to suit her teaching style. When the resources are available there appears to be a need to constantly update. Melanie informed me that she bought a series of phonics books and when she used those “*after a while the kids [got] a bit bored*” (Interview, 8/5/02, Melanie). It seems not only has it been difficult

to continually find new and interesting resources, but locating resources that match the needs of the learners has also proved difficult. Melanie explains *“I think there is a missing link between too easy and too hard”* (Interview, 8/5/02, Melanie).

### **Student work level**

*This category included information that discussed the ability of RAP students to work at their own level, and how this strategy affects the students.*

The data suggests that RAP students enjoy coming to RAP sessions as the literacy learning episodes are easier, than the English activities they complete in their classroom. Jennifer described RAP as *“one hour during the day in which they (the RAP students) can succeed, and work constantly at their own level”* (Field Notes, 14/2/02, Teacher Training RAP Session). Many students referred to RAP as being easier than their class work- *“I don’t have to do hard work, it’s really easy”* (Interview, 14/3/02, Mark), *“I like it because we don’t have to do work in the classroom like maths and that, and like it’s easier to do this”* (Interview, 22/5/02, Emily), *“Because it’s hard work back there (in the class) and it’s easy here (in RAP)”* (Interview, 8/3/02, Paul).

Some students appeared to enjoy the work in RAP so much, that they forgot they were actually completing schoolwork. The following excerpt from an interview conducted with Chris on the 8/3/02 shows evidence of this occurring.

*Researcher: Did you like it when you were picked for RAP?*

*Chris: Yeah because you get out of class and you don't have to do school work.*

*Researcher: Isn't what you're doing in here (the RAP room) school work?*

*Chris: Yes but this is better than the work in class.*

*Researcher: Why do you think this is better than the work in class?*

*Chris: Because some of the work in class is hard and in here it's easy.*

There appear to be benefits from allowing the RAP students an hour in the school day in which they can work at their own individual levels. To start with students are able to experience success instead of confusion. Evidence of these benefits can be found in a comment from Linda, *"well they seem to be quite happy because they're working at their level, and they'll answer questions that they won't do in the classroom"* (Interview, 14/3/02, Linda).

## **Scaffolding**

*Bruner (1984) describes scaffolding as "a matter of somebody with knowledge and awareness scaffolding a task for somebody without knowledge and awareness until the latter becomes capable of 'reaching higher ground'" (Bruner, 1984, cited in Henderson, Many, Wellborn & Ward, 2002, p311). Thus, this category included information related to teacher/tutor modelling or repeating of literacy strategies, and how this affected the students.*

Due to the fact RAP is a remedial program many examples of scaffolding were evident when analysing the data. The data suggests that the RAP teachers constantly reinforced the basic functions of literacy. Melanie would regularly support students' understandings of the

letter sounds and names, by providing students with letter cards and asking them to find particular letters or sounds which were on the cards (Field Notes, 20/3/02, Melanie's Year 2 RAP class). Not only were students supported with the use of visual stimulus, but with teacher pronunciation also, as can be seen in this next excerpt:

*I watch as one child writes 'cest' for chest. Melanie stands out the front of the room and sounds out the word chest. The student then looks at her word and attempts to change it. She then changes the word to 'cheest'.* (Field Notes, 6/3/02, Melanie's Year 4 RAP class).

Scaffolding seems to be quite evident within the questions the RAP teachers asked. These questions were at times used to clarify a teaching point, or to remind the students of their literacy strategies. Melanie was recorded as supporting her students by asking, "*What's the first sound you hear? What vowel sound can you hear? What ending comes next?*" (Field Notes, 6/3/02, Melanie's Year 4 RAP class). Linda constantly reminded her students of the purpose of decoding, which was to "*say the word in your head, sound it out, then stretch the word and write it down*" (Field Notes, 2/4/02, Linda's Year 2 RAP class). Possibly the students began to remember these strategies- *Peter was worried about writing the word, 'blinked' on his sheet. He practiced saying the word numerous times.* (Field Notes, 22/3/02, Jennifer's Year 5 RAP class).

It appears that scaffolding was also evident when students provided answers to their teacher's questions. All student answers were accepted. If they were incorrect, instead of the teacher dismissing the wrong answer and proceeding with the lesson, the field notes strongly suggest that the RAP teachers attempt to provide the students with strategies, that

they can use to test the correctness of their answers. The following excerpt from the field notes written in Jennifer's Year 5 RAP class on the 28/2/02 is an example.

*Quickly the boys started providing Jennifer with 'w' words. The first suggestion was 'wheel'. She asked the boy who provided the response to spell the word, which he did correctly. She then asked those who thought the word was spelt right to raise their hand, all but one boy, Peter, raised their hand. Jennifer asked Peter, "How do you think you spell wheel?" Peter sat there staring at the board. He appeared to be unsure so Jennifer suggested, "Do you think there is only one 'e'?" With this Jennifer wrote, 'whel' on the board and said, "Do you think this is right?" Peter looked at the word for a while and then decided that the original word was in fact correct.*

Teacher support like this seemed to be beneficial for students like Peter. The next time he provided a misspelt answer he was able to discover his mistake quickly without the assistance of his teacher's probing questions- *Peter suggested, 'swimed' and then said, "No that looks funny"* (Field Notes, 22/3/02, Jennifer's Year 5 RAP class).

During the reading component of the RAP sessions, tutors and teachers alike often provided students with literacy support. Melanie attempted to encourage student independence by reminding students to use the reading strategies they had been shown- *When the girl she is listening to approaches a word she doesn't know, she stops and looks to Melanie for help. Melanie says... "Use our strategies", "Sound it out", "I don't want you to guess work it out", "See you can work it out"*. (Field Notes, 20/3/02, Melanie's Year 2 RAP class). The



RAP tutors were also heard saying similar supportive remarks- *“What does that say?”* *“Sound it out”* *“Here’s a clue...”* (Field Notes, 26/3/02, Linda’s Year 2 RAP class).

## High points of RAP

*This category included data that referred to participants’ favourite aspects of RAP.*

The RAP students themselves had many high points of RAP to report. Perhaps the aspect that most students agreed upon was the opportunity to receive awards for their successes in RAP. When one student was asked what his favourite part of RAP was he commented, *“My reading, because I like to get up higher levels, and work my hardest to get more of these (points to a certificate)”* (Interview, 2/4/02, Andrew). Students were given certificates when they completed a new reading level or spelling list. Not only were students awarded with certificates but also small prizes. The RAP teachers each had a ‘ballot box’, *-children who provided excellent answers or were well behaved were allowed to write their name on a raffle ticket. After a fortnight, one name was chosen out of the box to receive a prize,* (Field Notes, 14/3/02, Linda’s Year 6 RAP class). These prizes encouraged students to continue trying, and for some students were the highlight of RAP- *“If you win the ballot box you get cool stuff and that, like lunch orders and prizes”* (Interview, 15/3/02, Luke). Melanie explains that it is important to provide plenty of rewards for the RAP students *“as they’re often the kids that don’t get a lot of that in the classroom, because they’re not achieving in the classroom”* (Interview, 29/5/02, Melanie).

For other students the high points of RAP was the work they were able to complete and their achievements they thought they had accomplished. When Trent was asked to describe his favourite part of RAP he replied, *"We do worksheets, and we like learning new words, I like doing that because at guided reading we have to read out books to the tutors and it's really fun, because we can write down what the name of the book is and what level it is and what the date is, and the tutor writes a comment about how we read and what we do and how good we read"* (Interview, 2/4/02, Trent). It became obvious that while students enjoyed moving up reading levels, some students possessed clear goals in regard to these levels. The following excerpt from an interview with Adam conducted on the 15/3/02 is an example:

*Researcher: What 's the best thing about RAP for you Adam?*

*Adam: ...I like going up levels a lot, because then I've nearly finished RAP. I didn't have to come this year, but I wanted to come.*

*Researcher: So it was up to you was it?*

*Adam: Yeah, they said I didn't have to come because I was a good enough reader, but I wanted to come and finish the levels and all that.*

A goal of RAP is for students to be ultimately satisfied with intrinsic rewards. Jennifer explains, *"kids need to remember to self pat inside and say yes I did it aren't I terrific"* (Interview, 29/5/02, Jennifer).

The RAP teachers identified witnessing student improvements as a high point. Jennifer says the RAP students, *"become more and more familiar with the strategies that they have*

*lacked that they need to use in their reading and writing process...they end up gaining confidence"* ((Interview, 21/2/02, Jennifer). Linda acknowledged the attitude of the RAP students themselves as a high point, *"they don't laugh at [each other] unless they make an absolutely stupid mistake. They'll just sort of go, 'oh no that's wrong' and correct them. There's sort of no put down"* (Interview, 14/3/02, Linda). Linda also recognised the knowledge she has acquired as a result of teaching the RAP to be a high point, *"I've taught for 23 years in upper years and I never knew how to teach children to read, because I'm primary trained, and when you've got them in third class they can [already] read something"* (Interview, 14/3/02, Linda). Linda now feels she has learnt valuable knowledge concerning the reading process and working with students with reading difficulties.

The classroom teachers of the RAP students believe the program allows the high reading achievers (who remain in their normal class) to be challenged, which is a high point of the program. One teacher explained that she did, *"extension work with the children [that remained which allowed her to] move much faster, which was better"* (Interview, 2/4/02, Catherine). It seems that while the low achieving readers were out of the class, the class teachers had more time to advance and challenge the high reading achievers.

The most common high point for the tutors was the self-satisfaction they felt as result of working with the RAP students. One tutor replied, *"it's a very rewarding thing to do, especially when you go for a whole year with them, there's big changes"* (Interview, 8/3/02, Michelle). While another tutor added, *"I feel the children are going well, and if I've made a difference to that, terrific"* (Interview, 26/3/02, Liz).

## Low points of RAP

*This category included information that referred to participants' least favoured aspects of RAP.*

There were a few low points identified in the RAP by the participants. The first low point refers to some students' perceived level difficulty of their learning tasks. It appears the RAP students enjoy completing the work in RAP when they consider it to be easy, but when the work becomes challenging they enjoy RAP less. Trent expresses how he feels while completing challenging work, *"we have to try and sound out the words, sometimes I get them wrong and I don't like getting them wrong"* (Interview, 2/4/02, Trent). Similarly, Luke discusses why he dislikes decoding, *"because when they're really long words they're hard"* (Interview, 15/3/02, Luke).

Another aspect the RAP students identified as being a low point was distractions caused by other students. As one girl said, *"I don't like it when people talk"* (Interview, 22/5/02, Emily). Because these students often possess poor work habits they are prone to fidget and distract others. My field notes show numerous examples of student distractions- *The minute Luke was seated he began to talk about the spider he killed last week...Before daily writing...one boy noticed Jennifer's car outside, so they all went to the window to have a look.* (Field Notes, 21/2/02, Jennifer's Year 5 RAP class).

A low point that was acknowledged by the RAP teachers and students concerned the lesson structure of RAP lessons. As one student explained, *"it gets boring because you do the*

*same things over and over again, it gets annoying after you do it over three times"* (Interview, 7/3/02, Matt). Melanie agrees that the program is very structured and adds, *"if the kids aren't motivated...I think they get a bit bored with it and they don't want to keep doing it"* (Interview, 8/5/02, Melanie). For Melanie maintaining the motivation of her older students can be a low point of the program as she explains, *"on Monday I feel like I can change the world, and really make a difference for these kids, but by Wednesday I feel like, why do I bother?"* (Interview, 8/5/02, Melanie). The RAP teachers are aware that their older students have struggled with the reading process since kindergarten, and as a result may have a poor attitude to reading. Melanie believes the students are thinking, *"I haven't been able to do it, I can't do it, and I still can't do it, and I don't want to do it"* (Interview, 8/5/02, Melanie). Consequently Melanie feels frustrated at times but adds, *"if you go cross at them you worry about what attitude you're giving them"* (Interview, 8/5/02, Melanie) as they already have a bad attitude towards reading.

Finally a classroom teacher described a low point of RAP pertaining to the feelings of the students involved in the program. When leaving to attend RAP class Catherine thinks the RAP students feel, *" 'Oh I've gotta go to RAP' (Catherine speaks in a depressed voice), like they're RAPPERS and the kids know"* (Interview, 2/4/02, Catherine). Despite this insight from Catherine the RAP students, it appears, did not express this feeling to me.

## Strengths of RAP

*This category included data that described aspects of the program that made it successful such as community support, parent training, decreased discipline problems and individual support for struggling students.*

The participants in this study were able to identify many strengths of the RAP. Perhaps the most obvious strength the RAP students were aware of was their ability to improve their literacy standards as a result of participating in the program. Students were able to explain how RAP could help them with their school work and later during their adult life- *“it makes things easier for [you]...so later when [you] get tests done [you] can read the questions, and maybe get a bit more right instead of less, and maybe get a better job”* (Interview, 14/3/02, Matt). *“It’s better to come here because you can read better and you get really good, and you can get good jobs, and good money when you get older”* (Interview, 15/3/02, Adam).

Students also considered their behaviour modification to be a strength, as one student said, *“it (RAP) helps you concentrate”* (Interview, 14/3/02, Matt). The RAP teachers also regarded changes in student behaviour to be a strength. Jennifer suggests the behaviour of students is improving, and she uses one student as an example, *“I’ve seen less of Peter down the office now, in terms of his behaviour, because he’s obviously feeling much better about himself, because he can now do things, he can read and function more easily in the classroom, so therefore his self-esteem is higher, he’s behaving in class and not getting sent down to the office to be taught and dealt with”* (Interview, 29/5/02, Jennifer).

The teachers at MWPS seem to believe one of the biggest strengths of RAP is the content it teaches. Many teachers were happy the RAP was focusing on the basics and teaching children the knowledge they had missed in earlier years- *“it just covers so much of the basics that the kids miss out on, and in a general classroom situation you don’t get that time to spend individual time with the children”* (Interview, 28/3/02, Bonita). *“I love that it goes back to basics and it looks at the sounds, and I think as I said we tend to get the kids up and running and then don’t go back to the initial sounds and blends”* ( Interview, 8/5/02, Melanie).

It might also be argued that the differences between the RAP and the ‘normal’ classroom setting are also strengths. Unlike ‘normal’ classrooms the RAP has volunteer tutors, one for every two students. Thus, due to the small student to adult ratio, the teacher and tutors are permitted to *“specialise for particular problems rather than having to cater for a wider range”* (Interview, 28/3/02, Bonita). Not only does the program benefit from having the tutors by developing a *“wonderful partnership between the school and the community”* (Interview, 29/5/02, Jennifer), but the tutors benefit also through the training they receive as this then *“enables them to help their own children at home”* (Interview, 29/5/02, Jennifer). Another difference between the RAP and the ‘normal’ classroom setting which the data suggests being a strength includes the physical layout of the room. Students are supposed to work by themselves at their desk, which may encourage students to be *“responsible for their own things...[and] to take responsibility for their own education”* (Interview, 26/3/02, Liz).

The class teachers of the RAP students suggest another strength of the program is its ability to affect the self-esteem of the students. As one teacher reported, *“it definitely raises their levels, plus as I said the confidence is there, and their self-esteem goes through the roof because they’re able to do things”* (Interview, 28/3/02, Bonita). Finally, it was proposed that the program could be considered as an early intervention for the younger children. This being the case, *“come third and fourth class these children will become just as strong and intelligent as the kids who are already in their class not doing the RAP”* (Interview, 8/3/02, Michelle).

## **Weaknesses of RAP**

*This category included data that described aspects of the program that were a hindrance to its success, such as large class sizes, not enough tutors, and students missing out on class work while attending RAP sessions.*

It seems, that one of the main weaknesses is, there are not enough tutors. The program’s design depends on tutors being available, and thus it experiences problems when they’re not. As Jennifer says, *“without the support of tutors the program doesn’t work, you can’t do it on your own”* (Interview, 21/2/02, Jennifer). However, quite often, the RAP teachers do not have tutors on which to rely. MWPS has tried to solve this problem by using older students as peer tutors for the younger children, but peer tutoring cannot be used for the older students. Melanie explains how she deals with this issue, *“I’m getting better at it. It was chaos term one, I didn’t cope with it very well at all, but I try to prepare as if there were no tutors”* (Interview, 8/5/02, Melanie). Organising enough tutors is not the only



problem of the program, sustaining these tutors has also proved difficult- *“sometimes they begin, and they don’t keep up with the commitment, so that can be difficult”* (Interview, 29/5/02, Jennifer).

Employing the right people for the position of the RAP teachers is vitally important. Some class teachers believed the original RAP teacher, *“wasn’t very effective as she had no control over the students...[thus] it wasn’t a success for those students”* (Interview, 28/3/02, Janet). Jennifer agrees that the program may fall down if the wrong person is employed as a RAP teacher, as *“the kids wouldn’t learn as fast as they wouldn’t be as interested with the person out the front”* (Interview, 29/5/02, Jennifer).

The class teachers identified a weakness, concerning RAP students missing out on class work. In some instances the RAP students are missing their class reading groups. Linda recalls hearing from *“one teacher that she never sees the bottom children for literacy so she has no idea what they’re doing”* (Interview, 14/3/02, Linda). For the year one teachers who do teach reading groups while their RAP students are away, they are *“left with three virtual non readers (the reading recovery students) and a really good group”*, which proves difficult if the teacher is wanting to extend the competent readers, as they must still spend ample time with the reading recovery students (Interview, 14/3/02, Linda). The Reading Recovery students are not permitted to participate in RAP as they are already on their own individual program.

Another weakness concerns the RAP class size. *“The groups are a bit too big, an ideal group would be seven to ten...but we just don’t have the time and the manpower to make*

*them smaller and we want to fit as many children on as possible*" (Interview, 14/3/02, Linda).

Finally, a weakness identified by the parent tutors refers to the 'running' of the lesson. A typical RAP session begins with a whole class lesson, and is then followed by individual activities. One parent tutor discusses her frustration concerning the whole class lesson component of the session, *"there's a lot of times when a lot of kids are already done and are sitting and waiting, while other children are being chastised"* (Interview, 26/3/02, Liz). During the whole class component of the session the students work as a class, however, there are some students who finish early and are not permitted to continue to the next activity until all students are ready to move on.

### **Suggested Changes to RAP**

*This category included data gathered from participants that discussed suggested changes that should be made to the program.*

When the RAP children were asked to comment on aspects of the program they wished to see changed, some students identified specific changes to the program itself. One student suggested the tables be rearranged (Interview, 8/3/02, Sally), an older student proposed instead of completing encoding each session, to change this lesson to a comprehension task (Interview, 15/3/02, Adam), while a third student recommended the class computer be used for spelling activities (Interview, 8/3/02, Josh). Other students desired to see the program operate daily and to implement word games regularly.

*Researcher: If you could change two things about RAP what would they be Chris?*

*Chris: Do it all week.*

*Researcher: Do you mean just for an hour of everyday, or for the whole day everyday?*

*Chris: All the time.*

*Researcher: So this would be your own class. Is there anything you'd like changed?*

*Chris: To play games like hangman with our spelling words and stuff like that.*

(Interview, 8/3/02, Chris)

*Researcher: What would you like to change about RAP?*

*Matt: Make it more exciting.*

*Researcher: How would we do that?*

*Matt: Like get a tape recorder and put music on and then the kids spell the words and write it down.*

*Researcher: Have you got any other ideas?*

*Matt: Play games with words, like we play bingo except she (Linda) just says the words, like we play bingo and she spells it out...*

*Researcher: So spelling bingo?*

*Matt: Yeah.*

(Interview, 7/3/02, Matt)

When asked to comment on this issue some students recognised personal changes, rather than identifying specific modifications to the program. One student wanted the program to change, so as to allow him to move up his reading levels quicker, and finish his spelling base lining (i.e. being able to successfully spell all the spelling words) (Interview, 2/4/02,

Andrew). Other students desired the same changes. Trent's answer to the question of RAP and change was, *"Just like going up different levels because it makes me feel happier. I like going up different levels because that means I'm reading very well, and I just know that I will be very good at reading"* (Interview, 2/4/02, Trent).

Modifying RAP to incorporate literacy games was a need also discussed by the RAP teachers. Melanie proposed organising a games day, where you reinforced the sounds from the previous weeks through a collection of literacy games (Interview, 29/5/02, Melanie). Melanie also suggested incorporating a back wall display *"that's a word garden and ...have flowers and all the sounds"* (Interview, 29/5/02, Melanie) positioned inside the petals. It was also put forward that perhaps the program could do with some *"updating just in it's presentation"*, (Interview, 29/5/02, Melanie) for example the student worksheets could be made to look more attractive. But perhaps the biggest change that the RAP teachers wished for was more time. Melanie argued, *"as a teacher I could do more assessments if I had a group and then I had twenty minutes afterwards to sit down and write more things and say that's a need for that child. Or even keep one child back while the others went to their classroom and do a greater analysis of what they're problem is"* (Interview, 8/5/02, Melanie).

Finally a tutor proposed that perhaps more communication with the parents was needed. Liz suggested to *"send home the sound which the children are learning weekly and maybe the sight words"* (Interview, 26/3/02, Liz). This home follow-up would hopefully reinforce for the students what they had been learning in class.

## **RAP and its perceived success**

*This category included data that discussed whether or not the participants thought the program was successful and why or why not.*

Overwhelmingly the data suggests that all participants believe the RAP is a successful remedial program. Jennifer explains why she believes the program has been successful, *“it is a hugely successful program, even in just small achievements, in the small areas which the children make achievements in day to day. It’s successful because the kids learn, they’re actually taken out and intensively worked”* (Interview, 29/5/02, Jennifer). Another teacher believes the program is successful, *“because it’s grouping children together, allowing them to work more closely together with the skills they need to develop”* (Interview, 2/4/02, Catherine). While a parent tutor replied, *“I’m pretty, very impressed with the program. I couldn’t really fault it”* (Interview, 8/3/02, Michelle).

However, like most remedial reading programs there is always room for improvement. One teacher believes the program can be more successful if they target the children with reading difficulties earlier, *“the earlier you get these kids with the problems then hopefully by the time they get to years five and six, they’re starting so early they won’t have the problems”* (Interview, 28/3/02, Bonita). Jennifer believes, *“it could be more successful with more funding and teacher time and being able to bring more children through...it would be more successful with more tutors...more support”* (Interview, 29/5/02, Jennifer).

## **Interpretation of Results**

### **Implementation of RAP at MWPS**

When MWPS elected to implement the RAP the first step conducted was to research the program and view it in action. This was followed closely by determining the gap between the present and desired levels of students' achievement, which according to Dimmock (1993) is the starting point of site-based curriculum. The RAP teachers soon realised these initial assessments would take "days and days" (Interview, 29/5/02, Jennifer), thus acknowledging early into the implementation phase "the increased effort site-based curriculum requires of participants" (Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995, p32).

While the data seems to indicate that the implementation of RAP was a busy time for the RAP teachers, it also suggests that it was a period of perhaps frustration and uncertainty for other staff members. One teacher said, "there was a lot of resentment" (Interview, 14/3/02, Linda) during this stage. According to Hansen (1998) this is a normal reaction. Site-based curriculum encourages change, and as a consequence some "teachers negatively perceive [the] project" (Hansen, 1998, p147) as they are unwilling to change, or possess fears and reservations concerning the new changes. To counteract this initial hostility all staff members should be encouraged "to participate individually, and collectively in decision-making for the new educational context" (Hansen, 1998, p166). While MWPS did discuss the RAP with the staff, it was "squashed into this tiny little time frame, while a lot of teachers came out not really knowing what it was" (Interview, 14/3/02, Linda). It may be argued therefore, that the staff was not provided with "adequate information to make

informed decisions” (Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995, p32). This may explain the initial resentment and hostility towards the implementation of the RAP.

MWPS’ experience with site-based curriculum perhaps reinforces the need for a whole school commitment, which can be achieved through a “discursive development between...professionals” (Hansen, 1998, p171). The implementation of RAP at MWPS highlights the need to ensure site-based curriculum is a verbal interaction between all those involved, and strengthens the belief that a lot of added teacher time is required. However it may be assumed that once staff members are able to “adapt to changes and face new challenges” (Gamage, 1996, p3), site-based curriculum if implemented effectively can be very rewarding.

## **Student Learning**

A behavioural problem is one of the reasons for reading failure proposed by Gillet and Bernard (1989). RAP is a program that is designed to address poor work habits and behaviour modification. As one tutor said, “you have to be disciplined with the children, you have to stop them fidgeting” (Interview, 8/3/02, Michelle). The ability of the program to change the behaviour of the students, to a behaviour that is compatible with learning, may explain why the students are learning while participating in RAP.

The repeated reading component of RAP sessions may also account for the success rate for student learning in RAP. Santa and Høien (1999) discovered repeated reading increased the speed and accuracy of students’ oral reading. It appears this activity is having the same

effect on the RAP students. Not only is it increasing the accuracy of their reading, but also providing them with valuable experiences to learn new strategies. As Trent said, “I didn’t make any mistakes, since I made my mistakes yesterday” (Interview, 3/4/02, Trent), this suggests the students are learning new literacy strategies and practising them daily.

### **Support needed for the RAP teachers**

Evaluators of literacy pullout programs are regularly stressing the importance for intervention programs, to be congruent with the classroom reading programs of the students (Spiegel, 1995; Santa & Hoiem, 1999; Hedrick & Pearish, 1999). At the time of writing the teaching of literacy in the classroom, and the school as a whole at MWPS, did not appear to have been influenced by the RAP. It can be argued that there is limited teaching support of the RAP principles in the regular classrooms. Instructional programs that offer, “approaches to reading that [are] philosophically different from those offered in the classroom” (Santa & Hoiem, 1999, p54), have the ability to confuse the literacy process for struggling readers. The data suggests that some teachers at MWPS encourage the children to continually practice the strategies they have been taught in the RAP, and to use them when completing class activities, while other teachers it appears make little reference if any, to the literacy strategies modelled in the RAP. Therefore it may be argued that the RAP is lacking connection with the regular classroom instruction, and at times the classroom instruction may even be competing with the principles taught in the RAP.

As the RAP is currently in its second year of implementation at MWPS, perhaps the staff has not had the time to see the long-term results of the program, and may not become



comfortable with the new changes within their work environment, until they see such results. It will be at that stage that the program may begin to change the way literacy is taught in the school as a whole.

### **Student work level**

One of the benefits of site-based curriculum is the ability of the school, to decide how best to use its resources to meet the needs of their students (Crowther, 1998). It seems that MWPS has achieved this purpose by implementing a program which the students enjoy attending, while at the same time enabling them to improve. The data provides many examples where the RAP students describe the work in their classroom as difficult. Fitzgerald (2001) states that, “children who do not learn to read well in early grades usually continue to do poorly in subsequent grades” (p28); this may explain why the RAP students find it difficult to understand their own grade appropriate material. It may be assumed then that the RAP students have experienced numerous failure with schoolwork due to poor word recognition, a slow reading rate, and a weak reading fluency. This knowledge assists in understanding why the RAP students enjoy RAP sessions. The RAP, teaches the students initial sounds and decoding skills. It appears struggling students appreciate this back to basics approach, as it allows them time to engage with learning tasks that are designed at their own individual work level, thus allowing the students to experience success with literacy.

## **Scaffolding**

Walker (1992) believes children who are constantly situated in circumstances where learning is difficult; develop “inappropriate compensatory strategies” (p14). Maybe this is the reason why the RAP teachers and tutors constantly demonstrate how to use literacy strategies in an effort to scaffold student learning. Wasik (1998) deems a program successful if it provides considerable time modelling appropriate techniques and strategies so the child is able to use them effectively. There appears to be evidence of such modelling occurring in the data, as the RAP teachers are regularly demonstrating how to decode and encouraging students to use a range of strategies when reading. Not only is it important to demonstrate literacy strategies to students, but also it is also necessary to provide them with appropriate time on task (Spiegel , 1995). The data suggests the RAP teachers and tutors are scaffolding the students successfully in relation to these points. Not only are students watching the demonstrations, but also they are remembering the strategies, and calling upon them regularly when faced with literacy challenges. This suggests the students are gradually becoming more comfortable with the new concepts and the learning is becoming internalised, thus gradually the scaffolds will not be needed.

## **High points of RAP**

Struggling readers, in particular older non-readers, often possess feelings of low competence and confidence (Labbo & Teale, 1990). However this no longer appears to be the case with the RAP students. It can be assumed that the expectations of the teachers, parents, tutors and peers in relation to learning to read, have been extremely influential for these young readers. Many students reported that their highlights of RAP included times

when they completed a new reading level or received praise for trying. Although these children are often “not achieving in the classroom” (Interview, 29/5/02, Melanie) they are aware that they are achieving in RAP sessions and are learning to be proud of their efforts.

Similarly to Hedrick and Pearish’s (1999) study, the classroom teachers of the RAP students identified benefits for using a pullout program. The RAP allows class teachers time to intensively work with the high achieving readers in order to extend their literacy acquisition. The program has also proved valuable through its ability to provide the teachers with knowledge concerning the reading process. This outcome was also evident in Leslie and Allen’s (1999) study, as they discovered their program provided teachers with knowledge, which they could implement in all classrooms.

### **Low points of RAP**

The majority of existing remedial reading programs are designed to cater for the needs of students between the years of kindergarten and year two. This is most likely due to the belief the longer a child is left to fail, the harder the problem becomes to rectify (Clay, 1993). Student distractions or avoidance behaviour, and poor motivation, identified by the stakeholders may have resulted from the older students experiencing too much reading failure (Honig, 1997). It appears the older students have participated in remedial programs before with little success, and thus are not willing to give a 100% effort to this program for fear of failing once again, which further emphasises the difficulty of rectifying the problems of older non-readers.

## **Strengths of RAP**

The stakeholders of the study believed the content taught and lesson structure of the RAP sessions were strengths of the program. Perhaps this mix has proved successful as RAP is based on the same teaching strategies as another well-known and successful remedial reading program- Reading Recovery. The lesson structure of RAP is fast paced, and according to Hedrick and Pearish (1999), fast paced lessons provided to small groups helps improve the reading of young students. The added advantage of providing instruction to small groups, is it enables the teacher and tutors to provide individualised assistance when necessary. The role the tutors play is a vital and beneficial component of the program also. In the past, evaluations have proved tutoring programs to be successful (Innvernizzi, Juel, & Rosemary, 1997), and when provided with classroom instruction is “generally considered to be the most effective way of increasing students’ achievement” (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes & Watson Moody, 2000, p605). The tutors in the RAP are considered to be a strength of the program as they strongly enforce reading strategies and encourage students to discover words for themselves.

## **Weaknesses of RAP**

Wasik (1998) considers it is vital for schools to find ways to ensure that tutors will attend regularly. While the RAP does have loyal tutors who attend regularly, there is a constant need to find new tutors and to replace those who have new commitments. It can be suggested that perhaps the tutors do not stay for long periods of time as they don’t establish a solid relationship with the students they are working with. Wasik (1998) believes tutors should tutor the same child each session in order for the child and tutor to build a trusting

relationship. This does not happen in RAP as tutors are often moved around, rarely tutoring the same child each week. Another reason to account for why the tutors do not attend regularly may be due to a lack of ongoing training and feedback. The tutors receive an introductory session to RAP at the start of the year and then receive no further training. Wasik's (1998) research has discovered that not only should tutors be trained in order to possess a basic understanding of the reading process, but they should also be provided with opportunities to share experiences with the teacher and other tutors. RAP does not provide a specific time when such a situation can occur.

Another area that is a weakness concerns the schoolwork students are missing out on while attending RAP. Most teachers structure their day so as to teach literacy tasks to the rest of the class while their RAP students are at RAP. The consequence of this is that some teachers "never see the bottom children for literacy so [they have] no idea what they're doing" (Interview, 14/3/02, Linda). This data suggests that perhaps some teachers have become complacent, and have forgotten that it is not just the RAP teacher who is responsible for assisting the RAP children with literacy, but the class teachers are also expected to play a major role. The school as a whole may need to look at what is happening in the classrooms while RAP is occurring, and ensure the RAP students are not constantly missing their own class reading groups or literacy lessons.

### **Suggested changes to RAP**

RAP is designed to provide structured and routine lessons, and while this format is intended to best suit children who have concentration problems, it can at times become monotonous.

It is vital for the program to remain interesting, as, for some of the older students this will be their last form of remedial instruction before entering high school, and thus there is a strong need to help children read confidently before leaving. To maintain interest, thus ensuring success, the RAP may wish to incorporate some of the suggested changes.

### **RAP and its perceived success**

While the stakeholders believe the RAP is successful, it isn't without its faults. Site-based curriculum requires extra effort and constant evaluation to ensure the desired student achievement levels are being reached. The data appears to suggest that student literacy levels are improving. It also seems to indicate that the stakeholders view this program as valuable and necessary for student literacy development.

### **Concluding Comments**

The RAP is considered to be successful by the stakeholders at MWPS for numerous reasons. The program helps to change student behaviour, provides individualised assistance for students in need, and positively influences student self-esteem and confidence. Yet despite its success, the program does have its weaknesses, mainly the need for more volunteer tutors and a unified whole school support. If RAP is to continue to experience success it may need to address its weaknesses and implement the suggested changes.

Chapter five will present a summary story of what RAP has achieved at MWPS, and a set of recommendations that the major stakeholders may find useful for the future running of the program.

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**CHAPTER FIVE:**

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND**

**CONCLUSIONS**

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## **Introduction**

As the purpose of this study was to conduct a Responsive Evaluation, one of the major outcomes of the inquiry should be the provision of a set of recommendations of the evaluand (in this case the RAP), to the major stakeholders, for the purpose of improving the merit and worth of the program. It is also legitimate in such a study to go beyond these recommendations and comment on any theoretically interesting findings that were by-products of the inquiry. This chapter will present the recommendations for the RAP, and will then comment on any such theoretically relevant conclusions that can be made in relation to the results of the study.

## **Recommendations**

As a consequence of applying the analytic procedures described in chapter three to the data, several inhibitory features of either the program itself (i.e. “programmatic features”) or the way it was being implemented (i.e. “procedural features”) were identified. The recommendations which follow are based on the assumption that once such inhibitors are identified, options for dealing with them should be made explicit so the major stakeholders can take steps to modify and therefore improve the evaluand. The recommendations provided are of equal importance. Below, is an overview of the recommendations which will follow:

### **Staff Involvement**

- Regular Professional Collaboration
- Centrally Determined Curricular Goals

### **Teacher Preparation**

- Training Opportunities
- Professional Development
- Class Time

### **Volunteer Tutors**

- Training Workshops
- Communication Meetings
- Peer Tutors

### **Lesson Structure**

- Parent/Caregiver Component
- Lesson Variety

### **Staff Involvement**

- *Regular Professional Collaboration:* Because MWPS used a site-based curriculum approach to implement RAP; it is vital the whole staff remains continually updated regarding the progress of the program. While the RAP teachers do relate the improvements and problems of individual students to the relevant classroom

teachers (via the use of weekly student evaluation sheets), an additional, weekly whole staff information session may prove beneficial. The RAP teachers formally communicating the successes, weaknesses and general ideas for the program during staff meetings may achieve this. Such regular professional collaboration will place the responsibility, and decision-making powers of the site-based curriculum onto all staff members. Not only would such collaboration ensure all teachers possessed an important role towards positively influencing the program, but it would also provide a forum in which teachers could discuss their concerns and suggestions in regard to the RAP.

- *Centrally Determined Curricula Goals-* Seeing as this is the second year of the RAP's implementation, it is necessary for MWPS to revisit the outcomes that it was hoped the program would initially achieve. It is recommended that the staff as a whole discuss and view the list of desired student outcomes (which may have been recorded before the program's implementation), and to use this evaluation, along with other forms of information (such as anecdotal evidence and test scores) to measure the actual outcomes of the students against the original desired outcomes. MWPS must ensure the program is heading in the right direction and develop a list of guidelines to ensure the program's continued success. If student outcomes are not being achieved new outcomes may need to be established. The benefit of this exercise is, if the staff work as a unified team, they will develop a school with centrally determined curricula goals, which in turn influences the effectiveness of site-based curriculum.

## Teacher Preparation

- *Training Opportunities-* Because RAP teachers need to be trained before beginning with the program, problems arise when one of the RAP teachers is unable to teach. Instead of cancelling RAP sessions, it would be more beneficial to call upon an adult who has been trained as a RAP teacher and can fill in during such circumstances. Such an adult may be a casual teacher, or a member from staff who is willing to be trained.
- *Professional Development-* In an effort to strengthen the teaching of literacy throughout the school, and thus develop a whole school approach to teaching literacy, it is advised that all teachers be given an opportunity to view a RAP session in progress. Not only would this help diminish any false perceptions the classroom teachers may possess, but it may also introduce them to different strategies or teaching techniques that they may wish to incorporate in their own lessons.
- *Class Time-* Currently it isn't possible to provide the RAP teachers with time after each session to write notes, or work with a student individually due to the busy RAP timetable. It was discovered however, that more time was needed to perform such tasks. Perhaps once a week the RAP teachers could choose one day and organise for all RAP sessions on this day to finish ten minutes early. These ten minutes after each session could be used by the RAP teachers to work one on one with a student to perform a greater analysis of that child's needs, to write anecdotal notes, or to complete student assessments.

## Volunteer Tutors

- *Training Workshops*- While the volunteer tutors did receive a one-hour information session at the beginning of the year introducing them to RAP, there are no formal training sessions offered to these volunteers. Tutors would benefit from ongoing training and feedback. It may be helpful to provide training workshops at the beginning of each year, or each school term, (depending upon when the greatest volunteer uptake occurs) to provide tutors with a basic understanding of the reading process.
- *Communication Meetings*- The way the program is currently structured there appears to be no opportunities for the volunteer tutors, to meet outside of RAP to discuss their involvement with the program. If the tutors and the RAP teachers were able to meet on a monthly basis, this would prove to be a valuable professional opportunity. Tutors and RAP teachers alike would be encouraged to share their experiences with each other. While such a meeting would provide feedback regarding the performance of all involved, it may also allow the tutors time in which to ask questions of clarification, inquire upon new strategies which could be used for specific students, and provide suggestions concerning the future implementation of the program.
- *Peer Tutors*- Peer tutors are called upon when there are too few volunteer tutors available, and often different peer tutors are used. When this is the case, the RAP teacher must give a brief summary of the role of the tutors to the students before beginning the lesson. The program would be more efficient if peer tutors knew how the program functioned beforehand. This could be achieved by gathering a list of

names of the students who are willing to act as peer tutors at the start of the school year. These students should then attend an information session which would explain what was expected of them, and attend a couple of RAP sessions so as to familiarise themselves with the procedure of the lesson. The students' names, classes, and times when they are available to help should be divided into three groups. Each RAP teacher then has a list of trained peer tutors to call upon when required.

## **Lesson Structure**

- *Parent/Caregiver Component*-The instructional time of RAP sessions could be extended by having the students take materials home for reading to parents or others. The weekly sound focus and spelling words could be sent home in an effort to reinforce the learning that is happening in class.
- *Lesson Variety*- Although RAP has been praised by many of the stakeholders for its fast paced, repetitive lessons, there is a need (especially for the older students) to provide variety. Perhaps two students a session could complete a comprehension task or a spelling activity on the class computer. Or perhaps a games day could be organised monthly. This would require the RAP teachers to gather a collection of literacy games in which to reinforce the sounds and learning concepts from the previous weeks.

## **Other Theoretical Findings of Interest**

### **Site-Based Curriculum**

MWPS' attempt to carry out the responsibility of site-based curriculum is a good illustration of Gamage's (1996) research findings as discussed in chapter two. The staff of MWPS realised their program for working with students with learning difficulties was ineffective. However, when RAP was first introduced as an alternative, teachers experienced feelings of resentment towards the new changes. This initial hostility towards the RAP appears to be one of the pitfalls often associated with site-based curriculum. This study informs those who wish to do something similar of the importance to thoroughly discuss all new changes with the staff, and the need to entrust the help of someone who has been involved in the site-based curriculum process, or has participated in the desired program, to speak with the staff about their experiences. MWPS' involvement with implementing a site-based curriculum highlights the importance to plan, professionally collaborate, the need to be prepared for an extra workload, and to help staff members adapt to changes and face new challenges.

### **Consequences of Reading Failure**

The older struggling readers in RAP appeared to display the consequences of reading failure as depicted by Labbo and Teale (1990) (i.e. poor word recognition, slow reading rate and weak reading fluency). Coupled with these reading deficits the older RAP students did at times experience poor motivational levels. What was interesting to note was that

many researchers (Clay, 1993; Labbo & Teale, 1990; Honig, 1997; Gillet & Bernard, 1989) have studied and discussed the poor motivational levels of older struggling readers, but when it comes to practice there is little done differently when teaching these students. The most obvious evidence of this was the reading material given to students. There was very little appropriate motivational material available to older children who were reading at lower levels. A student who was in year five and reading level six books, read the same picture books as a year one student on the same level. Perhaps the reading material given to older students is one factor, which contributes to their poor motivational levels where reading is concerned.

## **Reading Recovery**

It can be assumed RR is a good model for RAP for a number of reasons. Firstly the ability of the RAP teachers to work with the students in a highly scaffolded manner is a component also evident in RR, and discussed by Lyons et al (1993) in chapter two. When the theory of scaffolding was put into practice during RAP sessions the benefits were obvious. The RAP students were continually provided with strategies in which to test the correctness of their answers. Gradually I began to see students relying less on their RAP teacher and tutor, and more on their own knowledge. Secondly implementing the RR strategies proved beneficial too for the RAP teachers. The program not only teaches the students, but it also provides instruction for the teachers. The RAP teachers were able to solely concentrate on one key learning area, and as a result they began to become experts in their field. It was discovered that the literacy knowledge of the RAP teachers was enriched due to their involvement in the program.



## **What principles underpin an effective site-based remedial reading program?**

In chapter two the guidelines for developing a successful remedial reading program as discussed by Spiegel (1995) and Wasik (1998) were presented. While many of these successful guidelines were evident in the RAP, there were a few others that deserve a mention. Firstly, the ability of the students to receive rewards due to their literacy improvements appeared to be a very successful attribute of the program. Not only did the rewards recognise the progress made by the students, but the rewards were also a motivational booster for many students. Secondly the opportunity for students to experience regular success through the completion of work they understood, and the ability to work with other students who were experiencing the same problems, created a non-threatening and encouraging environment for the students. Finally the expectations of the staff at MWPS and the tutors appeared to play a vital role towards the successful participation of the RAP students. It seems the students knew they were expected to achieve and thus answered questions that they may not have done so back in their classroom.

## **Limitations to the Study**

It is necessary to recall that this is just one evaluation, that there are limits to the evaluation that must be considered as well, and that these limits recommend that the results should be interpreted carefully, especially with regard to future site-based curriculum decisions about similar remedial reading programs.

Due to the limited time frame available in which to conduct this evaluation it was not possible to interview all stakeholders. Consequently there was a relatively small teacher and volunteer tutor sample used, which may have been unrepresentative of the larger teacher and volunteer tutor populations. Another limitation to this study concerned the peer tutors. This population was not represented in this study, thus it must be remembered when reading the results, that the thoughts and suggestions from this population are absent.

## **Suggestions for Further Study**

Future research on the RAP is needed to investigate several factors, including the following: (a) Which components of the RAP contribute to its effectiveness? (b) To what extent does the RAP teachers' prior knowledge about literacy affect outcomes for the RAP students? (c) How do the RAP teachers' characteristics interact with tutors' characteristics to improve or discourage the progress of the RAP students? (d) Has the learning behaviour and participation of the RAP students in their regular classrooms changed since their involvement in the RAP?

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the inquiry was designed to conduct a Responsive Evaluation of MWPS' RAP, so as to determine the merit and worth of the program as it applied to the major stakeholders. This was achieved by describing the RAP, observing and describing the

participants' involvement in the RAP, discovering the participants' opinions of the RAP, and discussing the implications of these opinions for the future implementation of the RAP.

Although this evaluation was simply a glimpse in time, it was enough time to capture the relevance and importance of this program to the major stakeholders. It is hoped that the results of this evaluation will inspire the staff at MWPS to continue implementing this program, and to consider the recommendations put forward. If the program continues to experience success in the future, then hopefully there will be more struggling readers who experience the same benefits of the program as experienced by Trent: *"RAP's my favourite thing and it's very helpful, it helps all of us read, it helps all of us write...It's just that we don't know how to read very well, but now that we've come to RAP it's helping us a lot"* (Interview, 3/4/02, Trent).

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# APPENDICES

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# Appendix 1

**18.2.02**  
**1.45pm-2.45pm**  
**RAP Room 1- Field Notes**  
**Year 5 Group: Jennifer**

The purpose of today's lesson was to model to Melanie how to teach the RAP. Six year 5 students attended, while one was absent. Upon entering the room they were asked to sit on the floor in front of Jennifer (who was also sitting on the ground). To start with their conversation was informal. Jennifer greeted each student personally. She appeared to know about each child individually. She took time to ask questions of each of the students. She asked one child about the progress of their saxophone lessons, and another about their holiday activities. It was then stressed to the students that they were not forced to participate in this program. It was strictly their choice to be there. As a reminder students were asked to explain in their words the purpose of RAP. Bree answered the question immediately, "Because we need a little more help with our reading". Jennifer appeared happy with this response, she replied, "That's exactly right Bree, I thought you were going to say something else and I would have told to reword your answer, but you're right. You're here because you need a little more help with your reading. Not a lot, just a little". Next Jennifer continued by introducing the other adults sitting in the room (Linda MacDonald, Melanie Ross, and myself). She explained our roles and told the students they would be meeting for two sessions a week instead of three, and this was because they had improved. Jennifer also discussed the fact that not everyone would finish the program this year; some students may leave early, while others will continue on next year. Students were then given instructions to locate their RAP folders and find a desk to sit. It was emphasised that nothing was to be touched once they were seated.

Jennifer was now standing at the front of the class. Three students and Melanie sat in the front row, and myself and two students sat in the second. Jennifer provided a brief overview of the lesson. She then stopped and said to me, "I think I've told them too many instructions, I told them 5 things, that's too many, let me check". With that Jennifer asked Mitchell to repeat the five instructions- he could only remember three, which proved Jennifer had provided too much information initially.

The lesson started with an Encoding activity. Almost immediately the children started to fidget. I wasn't aware of this until Jennifer brought my attention to it, I hadn't noticed the situation as I had been taking notes. But it was true. The children appeared to find it extremely difficult to concentrate. Bree would continually call out, while the others would play with the pencil tins, dictionaries or swing on their chairs. A big part of the program is changing the way children behave in class. They constantly needed to be reminded to concentrate and face the front. Usually each child would be sitting next to a tutor, which is probably why they were restless today- they didn't have that constant supervision.

Jennifer began the Encoding lesson by writing the word 'hat' on the board. She then asked a student to read the word. When the child was successful she asked the students to read 'at'. She then asked them to say the 'a' sound. She asked Bree to describe what happened to her tongue when she said the 'a' sound. Bree showed Jennifer what happened by opening her mouth, but she was unable to verbalise the process. Jennifer provided help, by asking "Where is your tongue?", "How does your face feel?".

Jennifer then introduced the concept of the 'bossy e'. She changed 'hat' to 'hate'. With the use of sound the children discovered what happened to the 'a' sound in the word 'hate'. They learnt that the bossy 'e' makes the vowel say its name. Jennifer made the children verbalise the two different 'a' sounds numerous times to ensure they could hear the difference. To further enhance their learning two other examples were used. They were 'pip' and 'pipe', and 'hop' and 'hope'.

Jennifer then added an ending to the words and asked the children to determine whether the new words she had made were real, and if they thought they were real words they had to put the word in a sentence for everyone to hear. The words were:

- Hated
- Hater
- Hates
- Pipes
- Hoper

With every word there were some students who thought the word was real and others who didn't. Having the students place the words in sentences reinforced for those students who were struggling whether or not the word was real.

The children then used the same words for the decoding task. Jennifer said the words, ensuring to drag out the sounds, the students then wrote the words down. While children were writing she observed some students were not holding their pencils properly.

The children then participated in a daily writing exercise. Jennifer dictated a sentence using the three words from the encoding activity. She introduced one new word. The sentence was- I hate the pipe and hope it breaks. Most children spelt the word 'break' incorrectly. Jennifer gave them the first few letters which were 'bre..' and then clearly said the remaining sounds. The children were then able to spell the word correctly.

The lesson ended with the children sitting on the floor. Jennifer said goodbye to each child individually, and then the school bell rang.

Jennifer was only able to complete part of a normal RAP session. But then it was more of a demonstration for Melanie and I than a lesson. Also the fact that the tutors weren't there, made it difficult to ensure the children were constantly focused.

**20.3.02**  
**9am-10am**  
**RAP Room 1 – Field Notes**  
**Year 2 Group: Melanie**

There were five boys, two girls and three tutors. Just enough children to tutors.

Melanie started the lesson by revisiting the letters studied by the children during the week. These letters included” b, l, t, a, ll. Melanie continued to check understanding, She asked, “What letter makes ‘a’?” After this she repeated the sound numerous times. The child who answered gave the sound of the letter ‘a’ not the name. She then continued after the correct response was given, “Can you remember a word we had with a double ‘l’ at the end?”, one student provides the word ‘bell’. Alex becomes distracted and starts trying to form words using the letters on the board, he locates the word ‘bat’ and calls it out. Melanie reminds him to concentrate.

Encoding: The children are all then given cards with letters on them. They are asked to spread the cards out and to locate the letters which Melanie calls out. She says, “Can you find me an ‘o’?”. The children then find the cards and place them in front of them. The next cards they are asked to locate are: ‘m’, ‘t’, ‘r’, ‘d’. There are two cards left, ‘c’ and ‘k’. Melanie asks the children to say the letter names and sounds of these letters. She then says, “Which letter usually comes first in words?”. The correct response is given, which is ‘c’. Melanie then repeats the task, but instead of using the letter names she asked children to identify the correct letter after she gives the letter sound. Children then form words using the cards. Melanie provides the students with the words. The first word is: rod. She stretches the word out as she says it, rrrrooooo. Alex spells this word as: rot. Melanie works with him, he also pronounces the word as rot. Finally he hears the ‘d’ sound and changes his spelling. Alex also has trouble with the word, ‘rock’, he spells ‘rok’. It takes a few explanations of the ‘ck’ relationship by Melanie before he changes his spelling. I said, “What’s the other letter which goes with the ‘k’?” and then he understood. The other words were: rom and rot. The children then write these words onto their encoding sheets.

Decoding: Students are asked to read over their ‘i’ word sheet which has been stuck onto to their decoding sheets. Kyle has trouble reading the word fib, he reads it as fip. Melanie has to remind him of the difference between the ‘b’ and ‘p’ sound, he then attempts the word again and reads it correctly.

Daily Writing: Melanie reads a sentence to the class. The children then repeat the sentence and write it onto their sheets. The sentence is: The rod is on the rock. Students start writing the sentence. Some students benefit from hearing their tutors stretch out the words as they write them. Melanie reminds the students to use full stops and capital letters, and asks children to read their sentence back when they have finished. The children stamp their own work after it has been corrected.

The tutors and Melanie are constantly providing the students with feedback and praise.

Reading: Kyle points to the words as he reads. He also looks at the picture and discusses what is happening in it at certain times. Kyle has trouble reading the word 'climbing' so his tutor sounds the word out for him. When he reads a word incorrectly his tutor stops him and asks him to have another go. Alex tries to interrupt Kyle and the tutor several times, as he wants to read to the tutor. When it's Alex's turn he uses different voices for each character, his tone varies.

Melanie listens to students read also. When the girl she is listening to approaches a word she doesn't know, she stops and looks to Melanie for help. Melanie says, "Don't look at me, work the word out", "Use our strategies", "sound it out", "I don't want you to guess, work it out", "See you can work it out".

Spelling and reading: Kyle has difficulty spelling the word 'one', he writes oun. Kyle learnt eight new words today.

The children finish the lesson by completing a stencil which asks them to match the 'i' words to the correct picture.

## Appendix 2

### 8.5.02

#### RAP Room 1

#### Interview with Melanie

**Researcher:** I guess it's difficult once the students get up to the higher grades and they're still having reading difficulties.

**Melanie:** I think the big thing is the attitude isn't there, and they don't want to try. In year three I've noticed too and with my year four group, there's kids that have struggled, I've had these kids in kindergarten as a teacher and now they're back in the RAP program, so they've had a struggle with reading since I've known them, and they're now in year four. And their attitude is the problem, I don't now if it's like 'I haven't been able to do it, I can't do it and I still can't do it, and I don't want to do it' and I think that's the same with the year five group. It's an attitude thing more than a learning thing.

**Researcher:** So what's their motivation like compared to the younger children?

**Melanie:** Year five there is no motivation, unless I'm giving out certificates every five seconds and then we have a lucky draw. That's, they do it because of that, there's no internal motivation there. The littlies still have that internal, they want the certificate, they want the smile, they want the joke of I'm going to give you a big kiss, they like all that, whereas, the younger more immature kids might like it, but year five, you think you've got them, but then you say, alright I want you to go on with your guided reading while you're reading with someone else they're inevitably not doing what you've asked them to do, they're swinging on their chair basically, not doing what you asked them to do. Unless you say I want you to read now they won't which is hard because they already have a bad attitude towards reading, and the RAP program I don't want to be seen as grabbing them and saying, if you don't do this and just going cross at them because that stage if you don't make reading positive, so it's very difficult, cos they'll come and do nothing for an hour, but if you go cross at them you worry about what attitude you're giving them. I can see there's a little girl called Bree, and she has a really bad attitude, and I think I just want to kill her, but if I do I think she already hates reading 'why do I have to read this book?' or 'why do I have to finish this book?' and I think if I just keep yelling at her she's going to hate RAP and it's the only thing for her.

**Researcher:** So what do you think the strengths are of RAP?

**Melanie:** I love that it goes back to basics and it looks at the sounds, and I think as I said we tend to get the kids up and running and then don't go back to the initial sounds and blends and I can see with the year three some of them don't know, you think why aren't

they reading and you go back, and then they'll read to you and they'll say 'p' instead of 'b', and 'g' instead 'j', and there's some basic sounds that they still don't know let alone the double sounds or the vowel sounds that are like 'ea' and things like that. I like that it goes back, getting back to your question it goes back to what they haven't picked up and looking at the sounds, and we do a little bit of that, but I think we're basically whole language based, just when we get the kids up and running and we think they're alright, it's not till you withdraw them that you actually realise what they don't know. And I think that teachers would be horrified to know what some of these kids don't know. When I get them here, I go oh my goodness they don't know that, like with my year three group, I went oh they don't know their vowel sounds, so I did lots of vowel sounds, and they still don't know them, and as I'm going I thought oh some of them don't know their initial sounds, so it's like going backwards and backwards and backwards. And in a mainstream classroom, in a stage two classroom I don't think that the teacher would know that they don't know their initial sounds, it's not till I withdraw them.

**Researcher:** I guess they get lost in the big group.

**Melanie:** Yeah, yeah.

**Researcher:** Are there any weaknesses of the program?

**Melanie:** It's very structured and if the kids aren't motivated like my year four group, I think they get a bit bored with it and they don't want to keep doing it. It's also I often see other programs that I'd like to incorporate, I often think oh that would be fun, a more fun way of doing that, but I know I have to sort of stick to the program. Sometimes I just think we need a day of language games and forget about the program, but I haven't done the program long enough to know oh well that's ok we'll just have a day of language games, sort of thing. It's very structured and repetitive, but that is a strength in another way. What is a weakness can also be a strength. But overall I think it's a good program, I think it could do with some updating just in its presentation. Like I just think sometimes I'd like to redo to pages, whether they look more attractive or just the general layout, the way they we tick off or that sort of thing, I think after I get familiar with it I'll probably change it or I think the lady that actually developed it might be making a more commercial product at the moment so I'd like to see what she does with it and what she changes because some of it I just think that's a bit here or there and she doesn't provide the lists, that's a big weakness of the program it doesn't , it might say work through the syllabus and do the initial sounds but it doesn't provide the material to do it, and that's ok for the littlies because you're just doing it, but as it gets older it gets harder to incorporate the activities, if you're just doing the sound 'str' is doesn't provide a list of words.

**Researcher:** So where have you been finding the word banks?

**Melanie:** We had to spend a lot of money on basis phonics books. There's a series I bought and they all go together, and after I used those after a while the kids get a bit bored, and that's why I've got these books (points to a pile on books on the table) I'm looking at how else I can do it. And for my year three group, I have the bottom year three group, nothing is working, so I'm looking, I think there is a missing link between too easy and too hard, so

I'm looking at making it more simple for them. You interview the student, Jason who came in and watched.

**Researcher:** Is he in KBC?

**Melanie:** Yeah (laughs).

**Researcher:** What did he learn?

**Melanie:** I said to him at the beginning of it, have you worked with this group before? And he said no, and I just left it at that. And at the end he just caught my eye and nodded. It's like the lights are on but nobody's home. I might as well of been talking to Jason for the whole time. They're the bottom group, and some of the kids have actually been tested for IM, and haven't reached, they didn't get IM, their teachers have been concerned that they're not getting anywhere with them, I feel like I've got a group of special ed kids. For those kids, the real bottom of the barrel I don't know that this program will work, unless you got them at any early age, if you got them earlier.

**Researcher:** You've mentioned some things that you'd like to change, but is there anything else which you think would make it more successful?

**Melanie:** More time, because as a teacher I could do more assessments if I had a group and then I had twenty minutes afterwards to sit down and write more things and say that's a need for that child, or even keep one child back while the others went to their classroom and do a greater analysis of what they're problem is, rather than say oh my goodness they can't do anything, if I could actually assess it, and there are tools to do that sort of thing, but I don't have the time to do that.

**Researcher:** I noticed there were progress sheets on the desk when I came in, do you fill them out for yourself or the parents?

**Melanie:** I just, there is another one that I'll show you that is filled out for parents last term. Linda and I had two days last week to do them. I did that for myself because I wanted to see at a glance what the children were up to, because they're all on different lists and so I've put them in front of their folder and so I can just look and it and see that they're up to level 6.

**Researcher:** So you don't have to flick through their folders?

**Melanie:** Yeah, or keep separate records. I'm conscious that when they go up a level I have to run to my desk to write it down and then I have to worry, and I thought well I still have to put it down on paper, so if I can trust myself to just do it on that, as in not let the children have too much control, you know what I mean? Then that can be my document. The only thing I'd do differently would be to leave a space on the guided reading to write a date. But you can scribble one in somewhere, but I'll see how that goes.



## Appendix 3

### 26.3.02 RAP Room 1 Interview with Liz

**Researcher:** How did you become involved in RAP?

**Liz:** My children are at school, but they don't need any help, but I want to help the other children who do, it's very important to me.

**Researcher:** How did you find out about the program?

**Liz:** Just...by a meeting with Mrs Carey, she just mentioned it. It was one of the early meetings, I think it was also in the brochure you get from school outlining the program and everything. So I've helped at the last school as well. Not in the RAP program, but it was a remedial program.

**Researcher:** What do you think are the strengths of the program?

**Liz:** I think how they all have their own folders, they're all sort of working at mostly their own level, they're all responsible for their own things which is important. They've got to learn to take responsibility for their own education, that's important. And just concentrating on the basics, that is what these children need, the sounds. And their handwriting is important. And just being able to sit up and focus. Not to fiddle, they can't help themselves, they're always fiddling. Even just the basics of sitting straight and paying attention, just seems for some children to be hard. They fall into these bad habits and that's when they start missing out. So they've got...I think that's what we need to do in school, we've got to get back to the basics, and a lot of kids need that discipline, and they're not disciplined, they slouch, and they're not focused.

**Researcher:** So is there anything in the program that you think might be a weakness?

**Liz:** Sometimes I think the teacher...well it depends, the children are they learning to be here as a class, because these a lot of the times when a lot of the kids are already done and are sitting and waiting and other children are being chastised, and waiting for other people to be organised. It's a shame we can't tailor it more for an individual and then they can just fly threw. However, there's also the lesson that they have to work as a class, they have to have the patience and tolerance to work with other children, so I guess it depends on what we are teaching them. Are we teaching them just the work alone? If it was just the work alone then they should be able to fire on when ready, but I think they're trying to teach them to work as a class, and as a class there are things we have to put up with, and to function as a group. So it depends, if this is a group lesson or an individual lesson. I think it's more a group lesson, I think, sometimes I feel a bit frustrated for the children, because

that's where they get bored, and unfortunately this is just a part of public education where they do get bored, and unfortunately that's just part of life and part of school, they just have to tolerate it. That's one thing I think they do get frustrated sometimes, and sort of wasting time, and we're always waiting for somebody to finish and I guess they just have to learn to put up with that frustration so I guess that is part of this lesson.

**Researcher:** What have you learned after being a tutor in the program?

**Liz:** (Laughing) Not to distract children with the cards. If this had been the first time I'd tutored they'd be lots of things, but because I've done this for three years now, not this particular program, but I've tutored with children. Well just getting to know the program and I've learnt that all the children are different, and there's some things that I shouldn't do in first class that I can do in second class. I gave the cards out to second class and they're fine, so just trying to remember their limitations. There's a lot of children in this class who really are kindergarten age.

**Researcher:** Has RAP changed the way you now teach your own children to read and write?

**Liz:** Definitely. It just reminds me to really focus on the sounds, how important sounds are and we play eye spy a lot in the car, and again I think if children played that sort of game, they wouldn't have as much trouble as they do with sounds. With the reading it's a good reminder to me to just how important these basics are, pointing to the words, working left to right, and sounds definitely sounds. Just reinforcing what I already knew, but it's a good reminder to me that these things are important, sitting up straight and paying attention is important, it's part of learning.

**Researcher:** What advice would you give to a parent who was interested in becoming a RAP tutor?

**Liz:** Oh do it, it makes a difference. They need more helpers. It's great, I feel the children are going well, and if I've made a difference to that, terrific. Oh no I would thoroughly recommend it, it's good, you feel like you're doing something, the children are achieving and they know they are achieving and getting better. It makes a difference.

**Researcher:** Do you have any suggestions as to how the program could be improved?

**Liz:** Perhaps more communication with the parents. Teachers could send home the sound, which the children are, learning weekly and maybe the sight words. There need to be home follow-up. If the teachers don't have time I'll write the words down and photocopy them, that's why they have helpers.

## 2.4.02

Liz approached me and wanted to add that she likes the letter cards Linda uses during encoding. Liz thinks this is a strength of the program. She thinks it is a good visual and hands on exercise.

**28.3.02**  
**The Staffroom**  
**Interview with Bonita Crotty**

**Researcher:** Do you have children participating in RAP this year?

**Bonita:** No

**Researcher:** How many children from your class last year participated in RAP?

**Bonita:** I had three.

**Researcher:** What grade were they in?

**Bonita:** Year five, three year fives.

**Researcher:** Did you notice any improvements in these students after they had started participating in RAP?

**Bonita:** For all of them I did. The main thing was their self-esteem came up, so they were more willing to take on the challenges and have a go rather than giving up to start with. But two of them in particular their class work improved, their oral reading, the whole bit.

**Researcher:** Were the improvements predominantly in one area of literacy such as mainly reading or mainly writing?

**Bonita:** Well the RAP covers both, so you could see improvements in both.

**Researcher:** Did RAP affect the way the children behaved in class?

**Bonita:** Not really, most of the kids were reasonable kids to start with, so there weren't behaviour problems or anything really.

**Researcher:** Did you support the principles of RAP in your classroom?

**Bonita:** Yes

**Researcher:** How did you do this?

**Bonita:** Just following up, you know how they were following letter patterns and things like that, so you'd reinforce the concepts, and go over the decoding strategies as well. So you'd use those sort of cue systems with the whole class rather than just them.

**Researcher:** How did you decide which children to send to RAP?

**Bonita:** We selected kids that we thought were under achieving, then they were tested by Jennifer and the other RAP teachers and then the decision was made as to which kids were more in need.

**Researcher:** What do you think are the strengths of RAP?

**Bonita:** I think it just covers so much of the basics that the kids miss out on and in a general classroom situation you don't get that time to spend individual time with the children. So it definitely raises their levels, plus as I said the confidence is there, and their self-esteem goes through the roof because they're able to do things, they realise they're not dumb.

**Researcher:** Is there any weaknesses of RAP?

**Bonita:** Not really. Sometimes it was difficult when they were missing out with what we were doing in class, but it was a matter of then structuring what we did to complement what they were doing. So we had reading groups when they had reading and so forth. And it was still capable if RAP was off, or on the other two days when RAP wasn't on they could join in and do parts of that as well, so it kind of matched up together pretty well.

**Researcher:** In your opinion has RAP been successful?

**Bonita:** I do, yeah I think it is. Obviously with more kids there's more evidence of development, there's some kids, but all kids did develop to some rate, some just developed more than others.

**Researcher:** Do you think it could be more successful?

**Bonita:** Well these kids only started in year five so the earlier you start, and obviously that's what's happening now. The earlier to get to these kids with the problems then hopefully by the time they get to years five and six, they're starting so early they won't have the problems to start with.

**Researcher:** Has RAP changed the way you think about teaching literacy?

**Bonita:** I'm just more aware, as I said the decoding and focusing in on parts rather than just assuming, rather than making assumptions they know how to do this, you go back and say ok we do this and this and so forth, look at how you're teaching that as well.

**Researcher:** Do you think RAP has changed the way literacy is taught in the school as a whole?

**Bonita:** I don't really know. I suppose it has, I mean all the teachers are aware of what RAP entails. The success of it, everyone's going to know what is going on, so hopefully, yes.

**Researcher:** If a colleague from another school approached you about RAP, and wanted to implement the program what advice would you give them?

**Bonita:** Definitely, if the kid falls into that category then the RAP program can actually assist them yes, definitely. Do it , have a go. If you have concerns about your child you have to follow up with anything you can that will help, so seeing what will help I suppose.

**Researcher:** How is RAP different from normal classroom instruction?

**Bonita:** Smaller numbers, more one on one, which is definitely an improvement from one on thirty. More keying in on those particular problems that those children have so you're specialising for particular problems rather than having to cater for a wider range.

**Researcher:** How do you receive feedback about your students' progress in the program?

**Bonita:** Well the RAP teachers, we see each other all the time so we get verbal feedback. So they do a program sheet, which indicates what they've done, so what the children have succeeded at and what needs to be done and so forth. So there's verbal communication but also written communication. They have evaluation sheets a few times during the year, for individuals, and I know Jennifer does the interviews with the parents as well, so it follows up that way as well.

## Appendix 4

### The Coding of the Core Data

1. The data was collected in a 'natural' setting via audio taped interviews, participant observations and RAP artefacts.
2. The audiotapes were transcribed and field notes typed.
3. The analysis process began with reading all the data at once and then dividing the data into smaller, more meaningful units. The following excerpt from the field notes conducted on the 28/2/02 provides an example of this.

*Jennifer starts the lesson by asking the boys to tell her the name of the vowels. Quickly hands are raised by the students and the following responses are given: e, a, u...there is a pause, before the following letters are said, v, y. With this Jennifer begins to say the vowels in another context, a,e,i...and the boys add o,u. When the vowels are said in a familiar order the boys instantly remember the remaining vowels.*

The first underlined sentence in the above field notes was named lesson organisation, while the second underlined sentence was referred to as scaffolding.

4. During this phase the data was closely examined for similarities and differences and questions were asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data. The following interview excerpts, show similarities regarding the impact the RAP has on students after completing the program, as discovered after reading the data:

*Adam: It's better to come here because you can read better and you get really good and you can get good jobs, and good money when you get older. (Interview, 15/3/02, Adam).*

*Matt: Well it makes things easier...so later when [you] get tests done [you] can read the questions, and maybe get a bit more right instead of less, and maybe get a better job. (Interview, 14/3/02, Matt).*

Whereas the next excerpts show differences found in the data.

*Researcher: Do you think RAP has changed the way literacy is taught in the school as a whole?*

*Bonita: I don't really know. I suppose it has. I mean all the teachers are aware of what RAP entails. The success of it, everyone's going to know what is going on, so hopefully yes. (Interview, 28/3/02, Bonita).*

*Researcher: Do you think RAP has changed the way literacy is taught throughout the school as a whole?*

*Catherine: It allows you to do more extension work with the children when the RAPPERS go, so that they're getting their individual work so they can sort of extend, do some extension work which is good. On a whole school basis I don't think it's changed.* (Interview, 2/4/02, Catherine).

This difference in response encouraged me to consider the following questions:

- Why do some teachers believe the teaching of literacy in the school as a whole has changed, while others do not?
- If the teaching of literacy hasn't changed, what needs to be done to change this?
- Is it necessary for the teaching of literacy to change in the school as a result of the RAP?

5. The sentence was chosen as the basic unit of data and thus each discrete idea, incident or event was given a name or label (category) that represents a phenomena. The following interview excerpt is an example of this process.

*Jennifer: When the kids come into RAP, they become more and more familiar with the strategies that they have lacked that they need to use in their reading and writing process. They end up gaining the confidence and the patterns to put into place when strategies that they didn't have become more natural.* (Interview, 21/2/02, Jennifer).

The first underlined sentence in the above excerpt was considered to be a discrete idea and thus categorised as scaffolding. While the second underlined sentence was categorised as a strength of the program.

6. The categories were flexible and were modified as further data analysis occurred. During the analysis process the themes and their explanations (that is rules for assigning data to a particular theme) remained provisional. Once coding was achieved the explanations could be accepted. Below is a section of an interview conducted with a RAP teacher on the 14.3.02:

*Linda: ...they're (the children) working at their levels. They're quite; well they seem to be quite happy because they're working at their level. They'll answer questions that they won't do in the classroom.*

While analysing the data it became apparent that the category called strengths, was in fact quite broad. The sentence ideas underlined in the data above were initially placed into the strengths category, but as I began to realise the broadness of this category I began to modify it further, one of the new categories to develop from this larger category was children working at their own level, therefore the information underlined above was thus moved to this new category.

The final categories were:

**The implementation of RAP at MWPS-** This category included data which discussed why the RAP was needed, how the program was implemented, and the feelings and attitudes of the staff present at the time of implementation.

**Student learning-** this category included data that made reference to student learning in RAP, student improvements, and knowledge students have learnt.

**Support needed for teachers-** This category included data relating to RAP training sessions, extra support identified by the RAP teachers as necessary for the success of the program, and the teaching of literacy in the classroom and the school as a whole at MWPS.

**Student Work Level-** This category included information that discussed the ability of RAP students to work at their own level, and how this strategy affects the students.

**Scaffolding-** this category included information related to teacher/tutor modelling or demonstration of literacy strategies, and how this affected the students.

**High points of RAP-** This category included data that referred to participants' favourite aspects of RAP.

**Low Points of RAP-** This category included data that referred to participants' least favourite aspects of RAP.

**Strengths of RAP-** This category included data that described aspects of the program which made it successful such as community support, parent training, decreased discipline problems and individual support for struggling students.

**Weaknesses of RAP-** This category included data that described aspects of the program that were a hindrance to its success such as large class sizes, not enough tutors, and students missing out on class work while attending RAP sessions.

**Suggested Changes to RAP-** This category included data gathered from participants that discussed suggested changes that should be made to the program.

**RAP and its perceived success-** This category included data which discussed whether or not the participants thought the program was successful and why or why not.