Thesis

Supporting Principals to Lead Literacy Learning in Challenging Contexts

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Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

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ABSTRACT

Principals play a key role in the leadership of literacy improvement. Australian educational agendas at all levels articulate this expectation for Principals to lead sustained literacy improvement for a diverse range of learners. There is substantial research literature, mostly undertaken in contexts outside Australia, articulating what Principals should do to lead literacy learning.

Consideration of the complexities involved in meeting the needs of a diverse range of learners is important when leading literacy improvement in Australian school contexts. The focus for literacy improvement for all students is on the acquisition of Standard Australian English (SAE) skills articulated in achievement standards in *The Australian Curriculum*. Principals in challenging school contexts therefore require the capabilities to lead literacy improvement efforts that are inclusive of the literacy needs of students from Indigenous and English as a Second Language/Dialect backgrounds. However, there is scant Australian based research that addresses how principals can be supported to build the capabilities required to lead literacy improvement practices in such challenging school contexts.

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of coaching support that principals require to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging Australian primary school contexts. Three conceptual understandings informed the study; the dimensions of leadership of literacy learning, how literacy is defined within a context and the notion of 'difference' in SAE literacy acquisition.

A qualitative research methodology was employed to capture the complexities of supporting principals in challenging school contexts, where I, as the researcher, engaged in a critical analysis of interactions in the mentor-coach role as a Literacy Achievement Advisor (LAA) over a two year period, with principals in four primary schools in the Northern Territory. The LAA role was a key component of the *Principals as Literacy Leaders* (PALL) *Pilot Project*, which was led by the Australian Primary Principals Association, through funding from the Federal Government under the *Literacy and*

Numeracy Pilots in Low Socio-economic Status Communities initiative, in partnership with the Australian Catholic University, Edith Cowan University and Griffith University.

The methodology for the research was that of an ethnographic case study. Qualitative data analysis methods were employed. Multiple data collection methods were used to inform the study. These included field note observations recorded in a school journal for each school site, summarized contact information recorded in an electronic aide-memoir format, researcher journal reflections, semi-structured participant interviews, principal evaluations and relevant resource documents. These data sources were synthesized using a manual coding process. A purposeful synthesis methodology called *thematic analysis* was used to identify recurring themes evident in the data. A combination of *successive approximation* and *illustrative methods* of data analysis were also employed within the methodology to facilitate a cyclical process of drilling down to analyze and identify the specific nature of support provided relevant to the recurring themes.

The findings provide insight into the nature of the role that specially designated support officers can play in *coaching* principals to build literacy leadership capabilities within the Australian context. The study found that five dimensions of coaching support; *explicit instruction, literacy advice, school leadership advice, facilitation of learning conversations, and modelling of practice* are required to help Principals build the following capabilities for leading literacy improvement: *leading data literacy, embedding professional learning in practice, facilitating literacy improvement planning* and *focusing literacy teaching, learning and assessment on learner needs*. By employing a negative case methodology analysis a fifth area for support linked to *system mediation* was identified.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
NTDET	Northern Territory Department of Education
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
EAL/D	English Additional Language/Dialect
ES	Effect Size
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
IRSED	Index of Relative Socio Economic Disadvantage
LAA	Literacy Achievement Advisor
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NT	Northern Territory
NTCEO	Northern Territory Catholic Education Office
NTCF	Northern Territory Curriculum Framework
PALL	Principals As Literacy Leaders
RAAD	NT Reporting and Analysis Data NAPLAN database tool
SAE	Standard Australian English

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

There is an increased expectation in the field of education for school principals to lead learning to improve outcomes for all students (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2001; Halford, 2009; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). Particular emphasis has been placed on principals leading sustained commitment within schools to ensure improvement in literacy outcomes (Jay & McGovern, 2007; Reeves, 2008; DEST 2005). In the Australian context the mandated improvements for literacy, that are articulated in the Australian National Partnerships agreements for literacy learning (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2008), have implications for principal leadership. Principals are expected to effectively lead these mandated improvements in literacy learning in their schools to achieve the outcomes and targets set, regardless of the context or the nature of students' background.

To effectively lead improvements in literacy learning in challenging school contexts, principals require well developed skills, knowledge and understandings in a range of leadership dimensions (Dufour, 2002) together with a well-developed understanding of the complexity of literacy (Jay & McGovern, 2007; Reeves 2008). However, there is minimal research currently evident on the specific nature of support required to build the capabilities of principals to lead learning to improve literacy outcomes in challenging school contexts.

The prime aim of this case study was to explore the nature of support that principals require to lead literacy learning in challenging Australian primary school contexts. In this first chapter the context of the study is discussed and the research problem is identified. The purpose and significance of the study are outlined. The research questions that guided the study are articulated. Key terms used throughout the thesis have been identified and defined within the context of this study. In the final section of this chapter an overview of the organisation of the thesis is presented.

1.2   Context of the study

The new *Australian Curriculum* general literacy capability (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2013a) requires students to engage with "the literacy demands of each learning area" (p. 9). The *Australian Curriculum* mandates the development of literacy skills across all learning areas (ACARA, 2013a, p. 9) and highlights that "all teachers are responsible for teaching the subject-specific literacy of their learning area" (ACARA, 2013a, p. 9). The literacy expectation articulated in the *Australian Curriculum* is that all students will develop skills in "listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts" (ACARA, 2013a, p. 9) across all learning areas. Principals, in the challenging context of the Northern Territory, have been required to lead teachers in their schools to effectively implement the literacy requirements in the areas of English and Mathematics (Department of Education and Training, 2011) since the commencement of the 2012 school year. To meet these expectations, principals were required to lead a review of whole school literacy policy as well as related changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices in their school communities (National Curriculum Board, 2009).

Standard Australian English (SAE) is defined in the English section of the *Australian Curriculum* as "the variety of spoken and written English language in Australia used in more formal settings such as for official or public purposes, and recorded in dictionaries, style guides and grammars. While SAE is always dynamic and evolving, it is recognised as the 'common language' of Australians" (ACARA, 2013b, p. 15). Fullan (2003) contends that there is a "moral imperative" (p. 41) for principals in all schools to lead the cultural change required to "improve the learning of all students" (Fullan, 2003, p. 41). To improve the literacy outcomes of all students in Australian school contexts, principals need to lead learning that is focused on sustained improvement in the acquisition of SAE skills for students from a wide range of backgrounds. However, achieving this change in more challenging Australian school contexts is especially complex because principals need to understand the nature of effective literacy teaching and learning from the viewpoint of students whose first language is not SAE. This aspect needs to inform how principals lead the identification, planning, facilitation and evaluation of teachers' professional learning

and the embedding of quality literacy teaching, learning and assessment within practice (Dinham, 2009; Dinham, 2008).

1.3   The research problem

Not all principals have the leadership skills or developed knowledge of literacy to lead the learning required to improve student outcomes in SAE literacy (Fink & Resnik, 2001; Jay & McGovern, 2007; Reeves, 2009a).   Consequently, systems and individuals need to "rethink much of what currently passes for educational leadership development" (Duignan, 2006, p. 143) in order to provide appropriate support to build the capability of current and future principals to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

Determining the appropriateness and effectiveness of various forms of principal support has been a recurring theme in the literature (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Braun, Gable & Kite, 2008; Darling-Hammond, La Pointe, Meyerson & Orr, 2007; Dempster, Alen & Gatehouse, 2009). These studies highlighted the value of providing on-going strategic and practical support and advice for school leaders based on a solid conceptual and research aspects. Most commonly, these studies refered to coaches or mentors supporting principals in the general performance of their role (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LA Pointe & Meyerson, 2005; Duncan & Stock, 2010; O'Mahoney & Barnett, 2008) and improving overall student achievement (DuFour, 2002, Ingvarson, Anderson, Gronn & Jackson, 2006, Macbeth & Dempster, 2009; Robinson, 2007). However to this point, there has been limited research on the specific nature of professional support that principals require, from mentors, coaches and the like, to improve literacy teaching and learning in challenging school contexts.

In light of this background, the research problem addressed in this thesis aimed to determine the nature of the professional support principals may require to lead literacy improvement in challenging school contexts. In particular, the study investigated how professional personnel (for example those referred to as a *mentor* or *coach*) can provide support in such circumstances.

1.4   Purpose and significance of the study

This study explored the specific nature of support that is required for principals to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. The study is timely given the assertions espoused in recent literature on the impact of principals on student learning (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom, 2004; McKenzie, Mulford and Anderson, 2007; Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008) and the expectations that been articulated within the Australian education arena for school leaders to engage in leadership practices that establish learning environments and the promotion of sustained quality teaching to effectively address the literacy learning needs of all students within their school contexts (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008). Therefore this study has relevance in that it identified the specific nature of support the principals required to lead literacy learning in the intercultural educational contexts (Frawley, Fasoli, Arbon & Ober, 2010) of Northern Territory Catholic primary schools that cater for the needs of students from Indigenous, low socioeconomic, migrant and refugee backgrounds.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the nature of support the participating principals required to develop their capability to lead improvements in literacy learning in challenging school contexts and, in particular, to describe and analyse the role that specially designated support personnel play in the development of that capability. This study focused on clarifying the specific nature of the role of the specialist consultant in supporting Catholic primary school principals in the Northern Territory (NT) context to lead literacy learning. In this research, the role of the specialist consultant is referred to as the Northern Territory Literacy Achievement Advisor (LAA). The role of the LAA was to support principals to build their capabilities to lead literacy improvement. The LAA provided support and advice for the principals on aspects pertaining to literacy improvement relevant to the context of each school community. Support in using student achievement data to inform literacy improvement was also provided.

Principals from four low socioeconomic NT Catholic primary school communities, who were involved in the *Principals as Literacy Leaders* (PALL) Pilot Project, constituted the participant group for this research. The school communities from where the principal

participants were drawn operate under the auspices of the Northern Territory Catholic Education Office (NTCEO) within the diocese of Darwin in the Northern Territory. This diocese covers a diverse and vast geographical area. There are 80 cultures within the diocese including 26.8% from Indigenous backgrounds and 40% from language backgrounds other than English. There are 16 Catholic schools, made up of five secondary colleges, six primary schools and five remote schools, which operate under the auspices of the NTCEO. Eight of the schools are situated in the Darwin, Palmerston and surrounding area, five are located in remote areas, two are situated in Alice Springs and one school is located in Katherine. Further information about the operation and policies of the NTCEO can be obtained from their website (see http://www.ceont.catholic.edu.au/).

Enrolment data for the four Catholic primary schools, which was obtained at the commencement of this study, indicated that all four schools had significant numbers of Indigenous students and cohorts of students who were learning English as an additional language or dialect. Also schools operating under the auspices of the NTCEO participate in the *Smarter Schools National Partnerships Program* which aims to address disadvantage and support schools to improve Literacy and Numeracy. Consequently, factors associated with language and culture were taken into account in considering the nature of support principals required to lead literacy learning in these Catholic school contexts.

1.4.1   Overview of the PALL Pilot Project

The PALL Pilot Project was funded under the Australian Government *Literacy and Numeracy Pilots in Low Socio-economic Status School Communities* initiative and was cross jurisdictional and cross sectorial in nature. The governance of the PALL Pilot Project was collaborative between the Australian Primary Principals Association, the South Australian Department of Education and Community Services, Griffith University, the Australian Catholic University and Edith Cowan University (Dempster, Konza, Robson, Gaffney, Lock and McKennariey, 2012). The PALL Pilot Project was delivered in partnership with State and Territory government and non-government education authorities.

The design of the PALL Pilot Project had two key components that aimed to develop the capabilities of primary school principals to lead teaching and learning to improve student literacy achievement in their schools (Dempster et al., 2012). The first component of the PALL Pilot Project was the provision of a professional learning program that was designed to enhance the participating principals' knowledge of reading (Dempster et al., 2012). This component involved the development and trialling, over a two year period, of five professional development modules with sixty primary principals selected from low SES school communities in Queensland, the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. The first two modules, which "were designed to enhance principals' knowledge about the connections between leadership and learning and their knowledge about the teaching of reading" (Dempster et al., 2012, p. 6), provided the foundation for three later modules which were designed to build on this knowledge to focus on "how principals should lead the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of literacy interventions" (Dempster et al., 2012, p. 6) to improve reading outcomes in their school contexts. A synthesised overview of the focus and structure of the five professional development modules is contained in Appendix A. The *Principals as Literacy Leaders* (Dempster et al., 2012, pages 6 - 8) report also details the focus and content for the five professional development modules (see http://www.appa.asn.au/projects/PALL.pdf).

The principals were also requested to undertake some common tasks following the professional development modules. For example, the principals were initially requested to develop a School Profile to represent important elements of the context for and organisation of literacy in their schools" (Dempster et al., 2012, page 11). A template was provided for the development of this profile during the first module. Principals were also requested to use the "Leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint" (Dempster et al., p. 7) introduced in the first module, to focus discussions in their school communities in order to identify priorities for their literacy improvement action. Following the second professional development module, principals were requested to use the "leader's observational tool – the Literacy Practices Guide" (Dempster et al., 2012, page 11), which was provided and explained during module two, to analyse the teaching of reading in their school context to inform priorities for literacy improvement (Dempster et al., 2012). As follow up to modules four and five, the principals were requested to "design, with their teachers, using system quantitative achievement data and school level diagnostic data, literacy

interventions for their schools and evaluation of those interventions, with short reports on the impact of the interventions" (Dempster et al., p. 7).

The second component of the PALL Pilot Project was the provision of leadership mentoring to support the principals participating in the project from each state/Territory (Dempster et al., 2012). The equivalent of a full-time Literacy Achievement Advisor (LAA) was appointed to support up to 15 principals in each of the three participating states: Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, and in the Northern Territory (Dempster et al., 2012). In the Northern Territory this role was undertaken by one fulltime LAA. However, in Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia this role was shared between two part-time LAAs for each state. The primary role of the LAAs' was to mentor and coach the principals "through interaction over project tasks…in their school communities" (Dempster et al., 2012, p. 5) that were linked to the PALL Pilot project professional development modules.

The findings reported from the PALL Pilot Project on the role played by the LAAs during the two year period of the project highlighted that of the total 4363 contacts made with principals by the seven LAAs "approximately 68% were initiated by the LAAs" and "32% were initiated by the principals" (Dempster et al., 2012 p. 17). The most common form of interaction for the support provided by the LAAs in the broader PALL Project was reported as being "via email (50%), followed by phone (37%) and face-to-face (12%)" (Dempster et al., 2012 p. 17) contact. The report also highlighted that over 1200 of the interactions undertaken between the seven LAAs and school principals had a focus or function for discussing purpose, goals and expectations, professional development and coordination and management of the curriculum (Dempster et al., 2012 p. 17). Furthermore the report highlighted that another 1600 of the interactions between the LAAs and school principals focused on discussions of qualitative and quantitative data (Dempster et al., 2012 p. 17). The *Principals as Literacy Leaders* report (Dempster et al., 2012) provides more comprehensive detail on the focus and perceived effectiveness of the role of the LAAs in the broader context of the PALL Pilot Project (see http://www.appa.asn.au/projects/PALL.pdf).

1.4.1 Northern Territory Implementation of the PALL Pilot Project

In the Northern Territory context, principals from government and non-government schools were invited to participate in the PALL Pilot Project through an expression of interest process. Fifteen principals from ten government and five Catholic schools in the Northern Territory were subsequently selected to participate in the PALL Pilot Project. A formal expression of interest application and merit selection process was used to determine the appointment of the Northern Territory LAA. Details of the expectations for the role of LAA within the context of the Northern Territory and the selection criteria for this position are articulated in Appendix H.

The focus of the current study has particular relevance for the Northern Territory Catholic Education authority in that it can inform policy and practice in supporting principals to develop their capacity to lead the literacy improvement agenda in challenging contexts such as the Northern Territory (Department of Education and Training Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce, 2010; COAG, 2008).

1.5 The Research Question and Sub Questions

The central research question for this study was:

> **What role has the specially designated principal support officer (known as the Literacy Achievement Advisor) played in supporting principals working in challenging school communities, to develop their capability to lead literacy improvement?**

The sub questions that informed the study are:

1. What forms of support were provided to Northern Territory Catholic School principal participants in the Principals as Literacy Leaders Pilot project (PALL)?

2. How effective were these forms of support?

3. What factors facilitated and what factors inhibited the provision of such support?

Answers to these sub questions provide insights into the nature of the LAA role, its effectiveness, its sustainability and its future as a means of providing support to principals leading literacy improvement in challenging settings.

1.6   Definitions of Key Terms

Definitions of key terms used throughout this dissertation are outlined below to provide clarity and consistency in understanding of their use.

1.6.1   Coaching support

In the context of this study, the term "coaching support" was used to describe the nature of the support that the LAA provided. This term was used because coaching focuses on the "skills development" (Bush, 2008, p. 44) and "changing performance" (Reeves, 2009a, p.75) of principals in relation to the day to day challenges of leading literacy improvement in their school contexts.

The focus of the coaching support role of the LAA in the context of this study was instructional and facilitative in nature (Bloom, Castagna & Warren, 2003). The intention was for the coaching support interactions to provide ongoing "support and practical guidance" (Reeves, 2009a, p.75) for the principals in building their capabilities to lead literacy learning. The term coaching support captures the complexity of the nature of the interactions between the principals and the LAA. In this study, the nature of the coaching support relationship between the principals and the LAA was one based on "trust and permission." The focus of the interactions addressed the identified developmental needs of each principal (Bloom et al., 2003). In addition, whenever necessary, the nature of the coaching support provided also challenged the principals to reflect on current practice (Bush, 2008).

1.6.2   Standard Australian English (SAE)

Throughout this dissertation the use of the term "SAE" was informed by the definition previously presented in Section 1.2 that was drawn from the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2013b). SAE is the dialect of instruction in Australian school contexts and is also referred to as the dialect of power because it is used in Australian society in more formal settings such as for official or public purposes (Education Department of Western Australia, 2000).

1.6.3   Aboriginal English

"Aboriginal English" has been used to describe a dialect of English "that has been modified by Aboriginal people to reflect and carry Aboriginal culture and worldview" (Education Department of Western Australia, 2000, p. 6). The dialect of Aboriginal English has some features in common with SAE but the words used carry Aboriginal cultural meanings. In Australia, the meaning of a word in Aboriginal English dialect may also vary depending on the context, region, circumstances and relationships in which it is used (Harrison, 2011).

1.6.4   English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D)

The term English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) refers to learners who come from language backgrounds other than SAE (ACARA, 2012). Learners who require additional support in the Australian learning context to develop their SAE language proficiency are referred to as "EAL/D learners" (ACARA, 2012, p. 3). This term is used to describe students from overseas backgrounds who do not have English as their first language. It is also used to describe Indigenous students whose first language is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language and includes Indigenous creoles and Aboriginal English (ACARA, 2012).

1.6.5 Literacy Achievement Standards

The achievement standards outlined in the *Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) Overview* (Department of Education and Training [DET], 2009) inform the "literacy achievement standards" referred to throughout this study. The achievement standards outlined in the *NTCF Overview* define "the range of levels of achievement expected of learners in Transition to Year 10" (DET, 2009, p. 9). The standards are linked to the *A – E Reporting Standards* that are also articulated in the *NTCF Overview* (DET, 2009). In these standards a "C" refers to the "expected NT level of achievement" (DET, 2009, p. 10). The achievement standards for each year level are illustrated in Table 1.1. The table depicts the range of levels of achievement expected within each year level. In this table the lower end of the achievement standard for a year level is equivalent to the C grade while the upper end of the achievement standard in the range depicted is equivalent to A and B Grades (DET, 2009).

Table 1.1

NTCF Achievement Standards

(Department of Education and Training, 2009, p. 9)

Year Level	Expected range of levels of achievement		
Transition	KPG2Comprehensive	to	Band 1
Year 1	KGP3 Solid	to	Band 1
Year 2	KGP3 Comprehensive	to	Band 2
Year 3	Band 1 Solid	to	Band 2
Year 4	Band 1 Comprehensive	to	Band 3
Year 5	Band 2 Solid	to	Band 3
Year 6	Band 2 Solid	to	Band 4
Year 7	Band 2 Comprehensive	to	Band 4
Year 8	Band 3 Solid	to	Band 4
Year 9	Band 3 Comprehensive	to	Band 5
Year 10	Band 4 Emerging	to	Band 5

Note. KPG = Key Growth Point

1.6.6 Wave 1 whole school literacy

The term Wave 1 was used in the PALL Pilot Project to describe the concept that guided whole school literacy practice and approaches to literacy improvement (Australian Catholic University, 2009; Dempster et al., 2012).

The term Wave 1 referred to whole school literacy practices that focused on meeting the needs of all students. At Wave 1, the expectation was that all students would receive high quality, effective literacy instruction that met their learning needs every day with their classroom teacher. Monitoring of student progress was on-going at Wave 1.   The evidence from this monitoring informed adjustments that needed to be made in literacy teaching to meet individual needs. Decisions regarding adjustments to the teaching and learning program were made at least once a term.

1.6.7 Wave 2 and Wave 3 intervention

The terms Wave 2 and Wave 3 described concepts used during the PALL Pilot Project to guide approaches to literacy intervention (Australian Catholic University, 2009; Dempster et al., 2012).

The term Wave 2 was used to refer to timely, targeted intervention designed to meet the identified literacy needs of students considered at risk in literacy. Targeted, specialist support was provided in addition to the high quality literacy classroom teaching at Wave 1. Wave 2 intervention was usually provided in two or three thirty minute blocks and was designed to address the identified needs of students at risk in literacy. Specific monitoring to determine improvement and progress in relation to the identified need was undertaken regularly and decisions regarding program adjustments were made at least once per month.

The term Wave 3 was used to refer to on-going, targeted, daily intervention that was especially designed to meet the literacy needs of students with identified learning needs. Targeted, one-on-one support was provided in place of Wave 1 and Wave 2 literacy

instruction. The intended outcome and nature of the literacy intervention was articulated in an individual education plan that focused on the learning needs of the individual student.

1.6.8   The Reading Big Six

The term "Big Six" was used in the PALL Pilot Project to highlight six, research based aspects that students were required to develop and use in the reading process (Dempster et al., 2012).   The Big Six, developed by Deslea Konza from Edith Cowan University (Konza, 2011; Konza 2010; Konza, 2006), was used as a framework throughout the PALL Pilot Project to guide the teaching of reading. The Bix Six informed the content of the second professional development module of the PALL Pilot Project: What leaders need to know about learning to read (Dempster et al., 2012).

The PALL Pilot Project report (Dempster et al., 2012) outlined the specific components that comprised the big six:

(i) linguistic knowledge: the underpinning importance of early literacy

experiences and the significance of ongoing exposure to effective

language use at home and in the child's out-of-school life;

(ii) phonological awareness, and in particular, phonemic awareness;

(iii) letter/sound knowledge; (iv) vocabulary; (v) fluency; and

(vi) comprehension (Dempster et al., 2012, p. 7).

More detailed information on the big six can be obtained from the Australian Primary Principals Association website for the Principals As Literacy Leaders project (see http://www.appa.asn.au/pall.php)

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by the number of participants and the nature of the purposive sample. The participants were principals drawn from four, urban and rural Catholic primary schools which operated under the auspice of the Northern Territory Catholic Education Office. The principals were selected due to their involvement in the broader PALL Pilot Project. To keep the study manageable, the sample was limited to principals in the Catholic system.

The study is further limited by the context and timeframe in which it took place. The nature of the support required to lead literacy learning that is reported in this study needs to be interpreted in relation to the fact that the interactions and support provided by the LAA occurred within the broader context of the PALL Pilot Project over a two year period. Therefore the nature of the support the principals required to lead literacy learning could have been influenced by the requirements and focus of this broader project.

Also the principals in the study were leading literacy improvement within what are considered to be challenging school contexts under the auspices and operation of a particular educational system; the Northern Territory Catholic Education Office. In addition, during the period of the study the schools involved were in the initial stages of curriculum change linked to the implementation of the new *Australian Curriculum*. Therefore these elements need to be considered when interpreting the findings on the nature of support the principals required from the LAA that are reported in this study.

Given the limitations of this study, the findings cannot be generalised to principals in all schools. Further research will be required in school contexts beyond those discussed in this study in order to determine the nature of support that principals require to build their capacity to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

1.8 Organisation of Thesis

The five chapters presented in this thesis cover different aspect of the current research project. The organisation of the chapters emerged from the qualitative, case study

methodology employed in the study. Headings and sub-headings have been used to provide additional focus points throughout the dissertation.

Chapter 1 described the context of the study. It outlined the nature and significance of the study. A statement of the research problem has been provided and the research questions presented. Key terms used throughout the thesis have been explained. Limitations of the study have also been identified.

A review of the relevant academic literature is presented in Chapter 2. Literature pertaining to principal leadership of learning and the principal's role in leading literacy improvement are discussed. Consideration of the literature related to the complexities of leading literacy in challenging school contexts has been provided. Current literature pertaining to specially designated support roles and programs that focus on supporting principals are presented.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology and design. Details of the theoretical framework and methodology employed in the study are discussed. The data gathering methods are described. The qualitative data analysis methodology used in the study is outlined. A discussion of the ethical considerations is provided, along with an explanation of the limitations and delimitations of the research study.

Chapter 4 presents the data from the study in relation to the research questions and the sub questions which informed the study. Five dimensions of coaching support and five key areas where support was provided to build principal capabilities to lead literacy learning that emerged from the analysis of the data are presented.

In Chapter 5, the interpretations of the findings that emerged are discussed in relation to the literature review. The discussion is presented in accordance with the themes that emerged from the findings. This chapter concludes with recommendations regarding the nature of support principals require to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. Directions for further research are suggested.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature of support principals required to develop their capability to lead improvements in literacy learning in challenging school contexts. In particular the study aimed to describe and analyse the role that specially designated support personnel play in the development of that capability.

Chapter 2 examines the literature regarding principal leadership of literacy learning as well as the literature relevant to enhancing principal literacy leadership capabilities. Initially dimensions relating to the role of principals in leading learning evident in the literature are examined. Secondly, the literature focusing on the role of the principal in developing and sustaining commitment to ensure improvement in literacy outcomes is discussed. Next, literature pertaining to principal leadership of literacy improvement in challenging school contexts is examined. The nature, focus and effectiveness of current principal leadership development and support highlighted in the literature are discussed. Finally the literature that identified emerging trends in providing support and professional learning for both practising and aspiring school leaders is presented.

The literature review is presented under the following themes: principals leading learning, principals leading literacy, leading literacy in challenging school contexts and supporting principals leading literacy learning: specially designated support roles and programs.

2.2 Principals leading learning

In this section a selection of the relevant literature outlining the dimensions for the role of principals in leading learning is presented. Recent studies identified critical dimensions for the role of the principal in leading learning (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008). These included the principal's role in leading effective professional learning, evidence informed conversations with staff and the development of cultures of inquiry to promote and embed learning to improve student outcomes (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Earl & Timperley, 2009; Earl, 2009; Swaffield & Dempster, 2009). While the research provides details of leadership dimensions and strategies that can be employed by principals to lead learning (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Marzano et al., 2005; Reeves, 2009a), a significant amount of the studies reported are situated in school contexts outside of Australia (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008).

Research by Robinson (2007a) explored the "direct and indirect links between leadership and student outcomes" (p. 6). Her inductive meta-analysis of 26 studies, published between 1978 and 2006, identified five leadership dimensions that affect learning. The leadership dimensions were: establishing goals and expectations; strategic resourcing; planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. Of the studies analysed, only one was from Australia and only 18 of the 26 studies focused solely on the leadership role of the principal. The effect sizes reported from 11 of the studies in relation to each of the five leadership dimensions are detailed in Table 2.1. (Robinson, 2007, p. 8)

Table 2.1

Leadership Dimensions and Related Effect Sizes

(Robinson, 2007, p. 8)

Leadership Dimension	Effect Size Estimates
Establishing goals and expectations	Average ES = 0.35
	(SE=0.8)
	49 effect sizes from 7 studies
Strategic Resourcing	Average ES = 0.34
	(SE=0.9)
	11 effect sizes from 7 studies
Planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum	Average ES = 0.42
	(SE=0.7)
	79 effect sizes from 7 studies
Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development	Average ES = 0.84
	(SE=.14)
	17 effect sizes from 7 studies
Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment	Average ES = 0.27
	(SE=0.9)
	42 effect sizes from 7 studies

Note. ES = Effect size

In educational research effect sizes are used to assist in determining aspects that have the greatest influence on student learning (Hattie, 2012). According to Hattie (2012), in educational research, an effect size of above 0.4 is considered to be above average. Therefore, the effect sizes of 0.84 and 0.42 for two of the dimensions in Table 2.1 are significant because they highlighted the importance of the principal's role in curriculum leadership and participation in professional learning with staff. However, findings on the specific nature of the support that principals required in relation to embedding these aspects in their practice were not evident in the research.

Related research by Robinson and Timperley (2007), which was conducted mainly in New Zealand primary schools, employed a backward mapping strategy to examine the empirical research from 17 selected studies, relating to effective professional development of teachers. Leadership aspects were systematically extracted and synthesised in this

research to capture key characteristics of how school leaders enhanced the learning of teachers to improve outcomes for students (Robinson& Timperley, 2007). Five broad leadership dimensions were identified; providing educational direction, creating a community that learns how to improve student success, ensuring strategic alignment, engaging in constructive problem talk and leadership through selecting and developing smart tools (Robinson & Timperley, 2007). Although this research contributed to our knowledge of what leaders need to do to lead learning, it must be noted that significant leadership initiatives highlighted in the studies were carried out by personnel external to the school rather than by the principal (Robinson & Timperley, 2007). It was evident from this research that principals required support in leading and facilitating the processes required to identify appropriate courses of action to be taken to ensure improvement in student outcomes and to facilitate change in teacher practice. This aspect highlighted the challenges principals face in developing the repertoire of skills and knowledge required to lead professional learning conversations and strategies to improve learning that are informed by evidence. However, information on the specific nature of the forms of support required to grow principal capability in leading learning was not evident in this research.

Earl and Katz (2006) presented the view that principals should play a key role in leading the collaborative inquiry processes required in schools to use literacy related data effectively to improve learning. They described three key elements that principals need to develop in their repertoire of leadership capabilities in order to lead effective inquiry processes in schools that ensure data informed decision making is used to improve learning. The three elements identified by Earl and Katz (2006) were: "the development of an inquiry habit of mind, creating a culture of inquiry and being data literate" (p.17). The interconnectedness of these three elements is represented in Figure 2.1. The three interlocking circles reinforce the need for principals to develop their leadership capabilities in relation to all three elements.

Figure 2.1
Leadership Capabilities Required to Lead Inquiry Processes
(Earl & Katz, 2006)
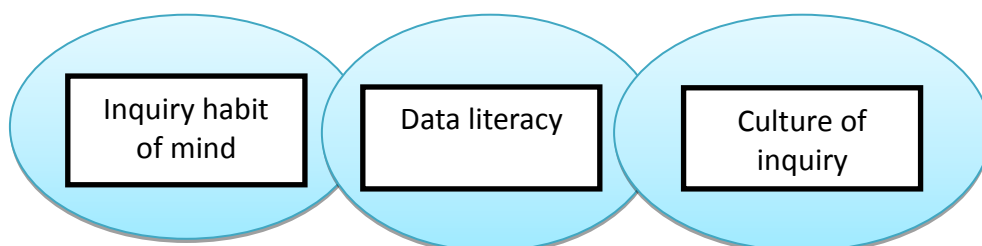
Earl & Katz (2006) also asserted that principals who lead learning through an inquiry habit of mind display the following three characteristics. Firstly, they "value deep understanding" (p.18) and therefore "do not just presume an outcome" (p.18). They allow for uncertainty and lead data analysis processes that "search for increased understanding and clarity" (Earl & Katz, 2006, p.18) to inform literacy improvement efforts. Secondly, principals "reserve judgement" and "tolerate ambiguity" (Earl & Katz, 2006, p.18). They are willing to put up with disagreement or incongruity while investigating and exploring ideas to determine the implications for improving learning and the achievement of students. Thirdly, they consider "a range of perspectives" (Earl & Katz, 2006, p.18) and ask "focused questions" (Earl & Katz, 2006, p.18) to determine answers or solutions to inform improvement efforts. However, details on how to support principals to develop these leadership skills and capabilities are not identified.

Research undertaken by Oberman and Symonds (as cited in Reeves, 2009b) identified that schools that reviewed data at regular, scheduled intervals were "far more likely to close achievement gaps than those that reviewed data only a few times a year" (p. 89). The role of the principal in leading processes in schools to interrogate data to inform improvements in teaching and learning was also espoused in the literature. Militello, Rallis & Goldring (2009) asserted that principals need to develop the habit of leading collaborative reflection processes (Militello, Rallis & Goldring, 2009) in order to use literacy data productively. Hoerr (2008) also asserted the need for principals to facilitate dialogue among teachers and parents about how to measure what counts in school contexts and how to use that information to inform decision making for improvement in learning. In addition, Love (2004) highlighted the need for principals to lead "powerful conversations" (p. 24) about data with staff to ensure improved teaching and learning. However, Wu (2009) highlighted that principals required well developed data literacy skills in order to lead collaborative reflection that is informed by data. Principals need to have a highly developed "ability to read and understand data in order to answer meaningful questions" (Wu, 2009 p. 9). Furthermore, Reeves (2009b) contended that in order to lead effective discussions about data, principals require the ability "to examine not only the data, but also the stories behind the numbers" (p. 90). He highlighted the need for school leaders to be able to "articulate the 'why' behind the data" (Reeves, 2009b p. 90) in order to "turn the lens on teaching and leadership behaviors" to "understand 'how' to improve professional

practice" and "determine the best options for improving outcomes for students" (Reeves, 2009b, p. 90).

The research undertaken by Pettit (2009) in the Australian context, highlighted further that principals have a key influence on facilitating or impeding the effective use of data to identify priorities for improvement. In his research, Pettit (2009) discussed the "crucial leadership role" principals play "in the analysis, use and reporting of data from national tests of literacy and numeracy as an element within the wider context of evidence–based leadership" (p. iv). His study also identified the need for school leadership to routinely plan for and lead the interpretation of data and feedback from external testing as part of the evidence base to inform planning for improvement.

Sharratt and Fullan (2012), also highlighted the importance of principals leading the effective use of data to improve instruction in each class across the school so that teaching, learning and assessment aligns with school visions for improvement. In the reporting of their research, Sharratt and Fullan (2012) highlighted the importance of the role of the principal in leading "on-going attention to evidence about what is working and what needs to be modified" (p. 3) and "moving and inspiring teachers to use data to pinpoint action that will be effective within the school context" (Sharratt & Fullan, 2012, p. 2). This research reported that principals need to lead the generation, interpretation and use of data in "a way that makes the child come alive in the minds and actions of teachers" in order to determine best practice for the teaching, learning and assessment relevant to the school contexts. The need for "leaders to put faces not only on student data but also on teacher performance data" (Sharratt & Fullan, 2012, p. 168) was discussed.

Principals play a key role in leading and facilitating evidence informed conversations with staff to ensure improved teaching and learning (Earl & Timperley, 2009; Love, 2004; Hoer 2008). Principals are expected to have the capability to lead "powerful conversations" (Love, 2004, p. 24) about data with staff to facilitate evidenced informed decision making for improvement. Irvin, Meltzer and Dukes (2007) argued that "establishing the expectation" (p. 163) and "ensuring that time is used to examine data to improve instruction is the role of the principal" (p.171). Love (2004) also asserted that it is

important for principals to make the time to lead "dialogue about multiple data sources to uncover the achievement gaps and specific student learning problems" (p. 25). Principals need to consider relevant research in order "to understand the possible causes and solutions to produce sustained improvement in student learning" (Love, 2004, p. 25). In addition, Principals, require the capabilities to lead data analysis processes in school contexts that enable teachers to look for intersections in multiple measures of data (Bernhardt, 2009) to inform teaching and learning that is focussed on improving outcomes for all students.

It is evident from the literature reviewed that Principals require well developed leadership capabilities in collecting, analysing and making sense of multiple sources of data (Earl, 2009; Bernhardt, 2009) to inform improvement efforts. Furthermore, they need well developed capabilities in leading the use of data to effectively stimulate discussion, challenge ideas, rethink directions and monitor progress in relation to improving learning (Earl and Katz, 2006). Principals require the capabilities to lead decision making regarding what data is most appropriate, useful and relevant to inform improvement within their school contexts.

However, not all principals have the highly developed capabilities required to lead and facilitate the evidence informed practices required to guide decision making for improvement. The research reviewed (Earl & Katz, 2006; Pettit 2009; Wu, 2009) indicated that data may not be used effectively to inform improvement in teaching practice to address student learning needs because school leaders may lack the training and practice in data literacy leadership skills required to create, understand, analyse, interpret and use data. Pettit (2009) concluded from his Australian based study, which involved all principals in a Catholic school system, that "the lack of explicit leadership within schools was found to inhibit the potential effectiveness of data analysis and use" (p. iv). He asserted that there was a need within Australian school contexts to establish an understanding of "the professional purpose" (Pettit, 2009, p. 242) of using NAPLAN literacy data alongside other sources of evidence, to inform the effective leadership of literacy learning that is focussed on achieving improved outcomes for all students.

While the research detailed leadership dimensions and strategies that principals could employ to improve student outcomes (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Marzano et al., 2005; Reeves, 2009a), there was scant evidence on the specific nature of support principals required to develop their capacity to implement these strategies effectively to improve student outcomes in challenging school contexts (Reeves, 2009a). This contention was further supported by Ogram (2010). Her research was concerned with how principals lead learning. It was a qualitative study that examined the expectations for primary principals in leading learning. She concluded that further research was required to determine the nature of the professional development principals may need to clarify the meaning of leading learning (Ogram, 2010).

Research has articulated the expectation for principals to play a key role in leading learning. Several dimensions for the focus of principal leadership of learning have been identified in the research. In particular the literature highlights the role of principals in leading evidence informed practices to improve learning. The literature also acknowledged that some principals may require support in developing the capabilities to lead data literacy practices in school contexts. However, specific detail on what support principals may require to build their capabilities to lead learning was not evident in the research literature. In addition, insights into how this support could be provided were not articulated in the research literature.

2.3 Principals leading literacy

Principals have a significant role in developing the sustained commitment within schools to ensure literacy outcomes improve. Fullan (2003) argued that Principals have a "moral imperative" (p. 41) to lead the cultural change required in literacy learning. They need the capabilities to lead discussions with staff about how the classroom literacy experiences of students differ based on a range of evidence because "data sources are not independent of one another" (Irvin et al., 2007, p. 162). Furthermore, Principals require the capabilities to lead conversations to sufficiently disaggregate a range of data sources to generate understanding of the full gamut of aspects impacting on literacy achievement in order to determine what must be done to address improvement (Barton & Coley, 2008).

Principal leadership of literacy planning, implementation and monitoring processes that clearly articulate priorities for consistent and comprehensive approaches to improve the teaching of literacy and the facilitation of students' progress in their acquisition of SAE literacy skills are critical. The Australian "*National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy*" (Department of Education, Science and Training [DEST], 2005) reported that "successful literacy teaching and learning occurs best where there is leadership that develops consistent and comprehensive whole-school literacy approaches that are specified in literacy planning" (p. 15). Furthermore, the inquiry found that principals needed to lead and direct the implementation of literacy approaches and actions articulated in planning to ensure that all teachers took responsibility for literacy improvement across the curriculum (DEST, 2005). However, principals may not have the depth of understanding and knowledge of the complexity of literacy required to create the conditions to effectively lead learning within challenging school contexts to improve literacy outcomes (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Fink & Resnik, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Fullan, 2003; Reeves, 2009a).

As discussed in Chapter 1, in the Australian context, literacy is seen as a set of skills that include reading, writing, viewing, speaking and listening.

> Literacy conventionally refers to reading, writing, speaking, viewing, and listening effectively in a range of contexts. In the 21st century, the definition of literacy has expanded to refer to a flexible, sustainable mastery of a set of capabilities in the use and production of traditional texts and new communications technologies using spoken language, print and multimedia. Learners need to be able to adjust and modify their use of language to better meet contextual demands in varying situations (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p.6).

With the implementation of the *Australian Curriculum*, the development of many literacy skills in the Australian context will be facilitated through the teaching and learning of English. However, the development of literacy skills is not confined to the English learning area (ACARA, 2013c). Literacy capabilities have been embedded within all learning areas of the *Australian Curriculum* and the expectation has been articulated that all learners will

be supported to develop and consolidate their literacy skills in the contexts of all learning areas (ACARA, 2013c).

The initial review of the literature found limited substantive studies on how principals actually lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. Searches of relevant educational leadership databases between 1990 and 2011 including EBSCO, A+Education, ProQuest, Education Research Complete, CBCA and library journal catalogues using the key words "principals leading literacy" returned zero results. A more recent search returned four results.

One was the PALL Pilot project report (Dempster et al., 2012) that outlined the findings from this project. Two findings on the role of the LAAs were reported from this project. These findings emerged from the analysis of the numerical data generated in relation to three aspects linked to the *Leadership for Learning Framework* (Dempster et al., 2012): the type and frequency of support between LAAs and principals, the frequency and focus of meetings, and the perceptions of the extent of support offered by LAAs. The first finding highlighted the significance of the LAAs role in "supporting principals to apply their inter-module tasks" and in "supporting principals in facilitating improvements in the teaching and learning of reading" (Dempster et al., 2012, p. 57). The second finding highlighted that the characteristics the LAAs had brought to their mentoring role had contributed to "enhancing principals' literacy leadership capabilities" (Dempster et al., 2012, p. 57). However, no further information was reported regarding the specific nature of the support that was provided to build principals' capabilities to lead literacy learning. In fact in the recommendations for further research, the point was highlighted that the "growing interest in the use of coaches to support principals" warranted further research in order to gain "a more detailed understanding" (p. 59) of the impact these types of roles have on building principals' capabilities. Two of the other articles located were published by Dempster. One article (Dempster 2009) detailed a framework that was subsequently used to inform the Leadership for Learning Framework (Dempster et al., 2012) for the PALL Pilot Project. The second article (Demspter, 2012) detailed aspects on how the Leadership for Learning Framework was applied in the PALL Pilot Project to guide principal action.

The fourth document located was a doctoral thesis from the University of South Carolina by Lofton (2006) that was published through ProQuest. This study examined the perspectives of literacy coaches on how principals' instructional leadership impacted on teachers' incorporation of literacy initiatives. It also examined the coaches' perceptions on how the principal's level of management and communication support for literacy initiatives impacted on student achievement scores in the *Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test* and the *High School Assessment Program*. Survey data was obtained from 94 literacy coaches, from elementary, middle and high schools across the state of Southern Carolina to inform the findings for this study. The literature reviewed in Lofton's study highlighted the behaviours expected of principals in leading learning that have relevance to this current study. However, the findings reported did not provide any information in relation to the nature of support that principals may require to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. In fact the study stated that "additional research regarding literacy, coaching and leadership is needed to continue to influence student achievement" (Lofton, 2009, p. 88).

Subsequent searches between the period 1980 and 2012, using the key words "principals AND leading AND literacy" identified 15 journal articles of which only three contained studies with limited information. In one of these studies of how principals work to improve literacy learning, Reeves (2008) reported findings based on a survey distributed to 130 schools across three school systems. He reported that principals needed to develop an understanding of literacy to be able to:
- articulate whole school approaches for literacy learning,
- define what good literacy teaching involves, and
- ensure balance between consistency of every day, whole school literacy practice and catering for the needs of individual students.

The need for principals to lead the development of coherent, whole school approaches to literacy learning relevant to the needs of students in particular school contexts was reinforced in the *Australian National Inquiry into the Teaching of Reading* (DEST, 2005). Several leadership frameworks, evident in the research, articulated dimensions and models that are pertinent to principals leading literacy learning (Earl & Katz, 2006; Dinham, 2008; Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2006). Of current relevance to the Australian context was the

outline of the Leadership for Learning Framework provided by Dempster (2009) which was based on findings reported from four international meta-analytical research studies and one Australian based study. The Leadership for Learning Framework was used as a "blueprint" to inform "the kind of leadership actions expected of principals" (Dempster et al., 2012, p. 6) during the PALL Pilot Project.

Eight aspects were identified in the Leadership for Learning Framework (Dempster, 2009, Dempster 2012; Dempster et al., 2012) to guide principal action in leading literacy learning. The framework placed emphasis on principals leading the development of an agreed moral purpose with their staff. The framework highlighted the need for principal leadership and "scaffolding of disciplined dialogue" (Swaffield & Dempster, 2009, p. 109) to engage teachers in the use of a "strong evidence base" (Dempster, 2012, p. 51) to inform planning for improvement and monitoring of outcomes. The need for principals to participate in professional learning with teachers was also reflected in the Leadership for Learning Framework. This viewpoint is in line with the importance placed on this aspect in the research undertaken by Robinson (2007a). Effectively leading improvements in the conditions for learning commensurate with the coordination and management of the curriculum and teaching pedagogy are key elements also embedded in the framework. The Leadership for Learning Framework highlights the importance of sharing leadership responsibility for literacy improvement. The need to connect with and engage community support for learning are also highlighted as key components for the leadership of literacy learning within school contexts (Dempster, 2012). However, the effectiveness of this framework, in supporting principals in leading literacy learning within the reality of challenging school contexts, remains a focus for research.

The literature espoused the moral imperative (Fullan, 2003) for principals to lead literacy improvement in their school contexts. Research has also identified key dimensions for principal leadership of literacy. These dimensions for principal leadership of literacy are reflected in the Leadership for Learning Framework used in the Australian based PALL Pilot Project. However, research on how principals actually apply these dimensions to lead literacy improvement in Australian school context is limited to the findings reported to date on the PALL Pilot project. Paucity is also evident in current research on how

principals can actually be supported to build their capabilities to lead literacy in Australian school contexts.

2.4   Leading literacy in challenging school contexts

It is important within this study to clarify the concept of a challenging school. Research undertaken in the United Kingdom and Australia by Ansell (2004), which investigated strategies for supporting principals in schools facing challenging circumstances, reported that principal leadership in challenging contexts was "disproportionately harder, both in professional and personal terms" (p. 4) than in "comparatively sized schools in less socially disadvantaged areas" (Ansell, 2004, p. 5). The literature also highlighted that in some instances, difficulties may be experienced in attracting suitably qualified applicants to fill leadership vacancies in challenging schools because the role of the principal may be viewed as being too demanding (Ansell, 2004; Mulford, 2003). Furthermore, Mulford (2003) argued that there was a need for school leaders to receive training (p. 3) that prepared them for the demands of principal leadership in challenging school contexts. This view has been posited because an increasing number of schools require effective responses from school leadership in order to face significant challenges in meeting the needs of students from a diverse range of backgrounds (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

The review of the literature identified several elements that characterize challenging schools (Ansell, 2004; Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Jang & McDougall, 2007; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Potter & Reynolds, 2002 and Masters; 2011) which all had relevance to the leadership of literacy improvement for the schools in my study. Firstly, challenging schools generally have higher numbers of students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds (Ansell, 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Potter & Reynolds, 2002) due to their proximity to families experiencing "poverty or deprivation" (Chapman & Harris, 2004, p. 222). In Australia, contextual factors that are used to determine if a child is from a low SES background are based on "parent income, education and occupation, indigeneity, student mobility and rurality" (Dempster et al., 2012, p. 8). In Australian educational contexts the Index of Community Socio – Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is used to identify aspects of "socio economic disadvantage, remoteness and other complex factors" (Department of Education and

Training Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce, 2010) impacting on schools. While the average national ICSEA rating for schools in Australia is 1000, the rating for the majority of schools in the Northern Territory is around 734 (Department of Education and Training Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce, 2010, p. 6). Secondly, "significant or greater proportions of students from diverse ethnic and/or Indigenous backgrounds who have specific literacy learning needs" (Harris, 2013, p. 1) may be evident in the profile of challenging schools due to the fact that the students are learning English as a second language. These two elements pertaining to challenging schools are particularly relevant for leading literacy improvement in schools in the context of the Northern Territory because "a large percentage of children begin school significantly behind the rest of Australia and never catch up" (Masters, 2011, p. iv). This is due to high proportions of Indigenous students, the historical multicultural ethnic mix of the population, increased migration into the area and the implementation of resettlement programs for refugee families into urban and rural communities of the Northern Territory (Department of Education and Training Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce, 2010; Northern Territory Treasury, 2011). Thirdly, challenging school contexts may have cohorts of students who are disadvantaged due to low literacy development or who may have specific learning difficulties that need to be catered for in the mainstream learning environment (Ansell, 2004; Jang & McDougall, 2007; Potter & Reynolds, 2002). This aspect is of particular relevance to principal leadership of literacy improvement in schools in the Northern Territory because of the low average student performance levels, particularly for Indigenous students, that are evident in Literacy NAPLAN results (Department of Education and Training Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce, 2010; Masters, 2011).

Another element that makes schools challenging is that in schools where significant numbers of students are at educational risk for a range of reasons, there is a tendency for high staff turnover rates due to the intensity of the working conditions and ongoing classroom management concerns (Greenlee & Brown, 2009). In addition, in the context of the Northern Territory, there is a recognized high rate of teacher transience between schools and education systems both within the Territory and interstate (Masters, 2011). Coupled with this are high rates of student transience within, to and from the Territory (Masters, 2011). Consequently, "significant disruptions to some children's learning are

occurring as they move between teachers with limited or no histories of their past learning" (Masters, 2011, p. vi).

The impact of the principal on student learning is another element that requires consideration in relation to the leadership of literacy learning in challenging school contexts. Earlier research held the view that principals had little or no impact on student learning (Dinham, 2008, Dinham 2009). However, in more recent research (Cranston, 2013; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; McKenzie, Mulford and Anderson, 2007; Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008; Robinson, 2007b; Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008) the viewpoints expressed have argued that effective school "leadership is important for student learning' (McKenzie, et al., 2007, p. 51) and that principals have a "professional responsibility" (Cranston, 2013, p. 129) to position themselves as leaders of learning in order to ensure sustained improvement in student outcomes. Consequently there has been a renewed interest in determining the impact of the principal on student learning (Dinham, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004). Within the current research, there has also been an acknowledgement of the limitations experienced in measuring and conceptualising the extent of principal impact on student learning, due to the myriad of factors that influence student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; McKenzie, et al., 2007). The argument expressed is that school leaders "can play major roles in creating the conditions in which teachers can teach effectively and students can learn" (Dinham, 2008, p 15). It has also been argued that the extent of the impact of principal leadership on student learning is predominantly indirect, rather than direct (Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens & Sleegers, 2012; McKenzie, et al., 2007, Mulford, 2007; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). The conclusion drawn was that principals indirectly impact student learning through focused attention on "influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers" (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008, p. 9). In addition, Robinson (2007b) highlighted that "the more leaders focus their professional relationships, their work and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes" (p. 12). In particular the active involvement of principals in the promotion and leadership of quality teaching (Dinham, 2009; Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Mulford, Cranston & Ehrich, 2009; Robinson et al., 2008; Robinson & Timperley, 2007) that is relevant to the context and identified needs of students (Hallinger, 2007; Robinson, 2007b) was considered to have a positive impact on

student learning. The assertion was also made that the extent of principal participation in, and leadership of, professional learning aimed at promoting teacher development indirectly impacts student learning (Cranston, 2013; Robinson & Timperley, 2007; Robinson et al., 2008). Furthermore, Leithwood et al. (2004) argued that the extent of the impact of principal leadership on student learning is "considerably greater in schools that are in more difficult circumstances" (p. 5).

All the elements discussed above contribute to the complexities of leading literacy improvement within challenging school contexts and therefore have implications for the provision of professional learning and the leadership roles of principals in contexts like the Northern Territory (Masters, 2011). Furthermore, Hallinger (2007) argues that principals must consider, understand and address the constraints and opportunities that exist within a school context when leading learning to improve student outcomes. In addition, Leithwood and Riehl (2003) argue that "principals must respond to increasing diversity in student characteristics, including cultural background and immigration status, income disparities, physical and mental disabilities, and variation in learning capacities" (p. 1). Therefore the nature of support provided for principals to enhance their capabilities to lead improvements in literacy in challenging school contexts in the Northern Territory needs to be targeted at meeting the professional learning needs of each principal (Masters, 2011; Mulford, 2003).

In challenging school contexts, principals are expected to effectively lead literacy teaching and learning that caters for the cultural differences and diversity of a range of students, including those from Indigenous, migrant, refugee, transient and low SES backgrounds (Duncan & Stock, 2010). The *Australian Curriculum* articulates the expectation that all students will be provided with teaching and learning programs and experiences that meet their needs regardless of their background or geographic location (ACARA, 2012). The agreed outcomes, articulated in the *National Education Agreement: Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations* (COAG, 2008), reinforced the need for school leaders within the Australian context to understand the pedagogical, organisational and community factors which support effective teaching of literacy and to lead the alignment of school vision and moral purpose to ensure improved literacy outcomes. Under this agenda principals are required to lead literacy improvement in their school contexts that is

aimed at halving the gap in the reading and writing outcomes achieved by Indigenous students within a decade (COAG, 2008).

When leading learning in challenging school contexts, principals need to be sensitive to the context and cultural background of the school community to ensure that the literacy needs of all students are met (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Burke (1990) argued that in order to cater for the literacy needs of students from language backgrounds other than Standard Australian English (SAE), principals need to be aware of and give attention to "the cultural distance which may exist" (p. 26) between literacy competency expectations for SAE and the primary discourse cultural experience, skills and understandings of students from non-English speaking backgrounds. The *Language Iceberg* as developed by Konigsberg and Collard (2000) draws attention to three crucial parts of language difference that principals need to understand and consider when leading literacy improvement in school contexts that are catering for the needs of EAL/D learners. In leading literacy improvement efforts that focus on enhancing the SAE competencies of EAL/D learners, attention needs to be given to (i) the parts of language that are exposed and obvious, (ii) the parts that are very hard to get at, and (iii) the parts that are hidden (Konnisberg & Collard, 2000).

The three parts of language difference that are represented in the Language Iceberg (Konnisberg & Collard, 2000) are depicted in Figure 2.2. Like the parts of an iceberg that are exposed to the air, some language features are very obvious. They are easily observed in speech and writing. Secondly, some aspects of language are almost irretrievable, just like the part of the iceberg that is just under the water. Lastly there are aspects of a language which cannot be understood without being deeply submerged in the culture. This is reflective of the heart of the iceberg which is deeply submerged and hidden from view but is the core part to which the other components are connected.

Figure 2.2

The Language Iceberg

(Konigsberg & Collard, 2000)
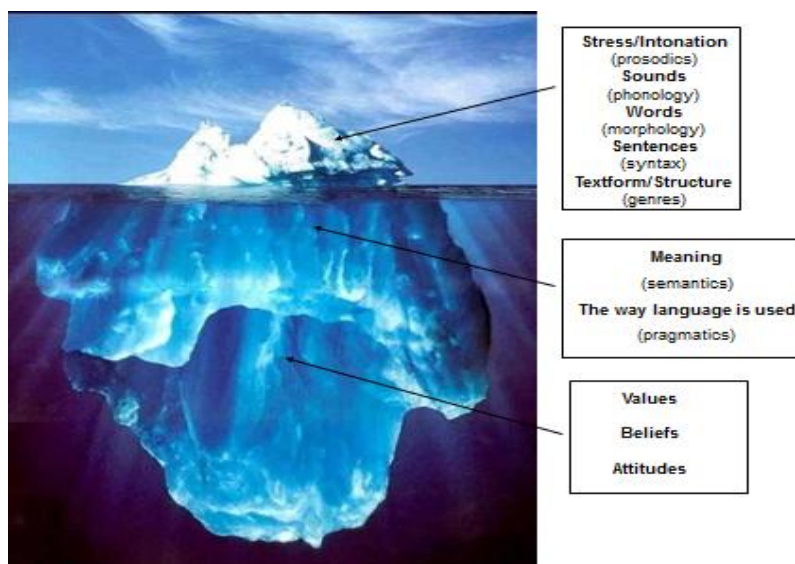
The obvious exposed language features include those aspects that educators are often most concerned with in literacy improvement endeavours. They are: the prosodics, which include features such as stress and intonation; the phonology, which relates to the sounds that a language employs; the morphology, which involves the form of the words: the syntax, which relates to the way sentences are put together; and the genres used in a language for specific purposes and audiences. The use and construction of the text structures within these genres is also a key aspect to be considered in literacy improvement.

The part of the iceberg just visible under the water is used to describe those features of a language that are harder to get at. They include aspects of semantics, which are the meanings employed relevant to a dialect/language, and the pragmatics, which is the way the rules of the language determine how the language is used within different contexts and for different functions.

Lastly, deep under water, the core of the iceberg is used to depict the values, beliefs and attitudes that underpin everything within a particular language or dialect. This is referred to as "the world view" that learners bring to their acquisition of language.

Research undertaken over a seven year period by a collaborative team of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers from the WA Department of Education and Training and Edith Cowan University through the *ABC of Two-Way Literacy and Learning Project* (Department of Education and Training, 2007; Cahill, 1999; Malcolm et al., 1999*)* has relevance to the leadership of literacy in school contexts catering for the learning needs of Indigenous students. The research provided new insights into the linguistic, cultural and conceptual features of Aboriginal English and the implications for Indigenous students' acquisition of SAE. The study increased understanding of the existence of Aboriginal English and its significance in catering for the needs of Indigenous students in literacy learning. Key aspects highlighted in this study in relation to assisting Indigenous students to broaden their linguistic repertoire and to achieve full control of SAE language use for a wide range of purposes have implications for principals who are leading literacy learning in school contexts charged with improving Indigenous students' acquisition of SAE.

Principals need to understand the importance of acknowledging and valuing what a child brings to the literacy learning context from their home language. In particular, when leading literacy learning in culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse school contexts, principals need to consider the notion of difference rather than deficit in relation to students' language acquisition (Cummins, 2006; Gibbons, 2002; Harrison, 2011; Zuengler & Millar, 2006). Research in the field of second language acquisition teaching and learning argues that a notion of difference (i.e. arising out of the different social, cultural and economic circumstances of students) rather than deficit (i.e. implying a notion of failure or lack of ability) should inform views on current literacy achievement and the means needed to improve outcomes for students from backgrounds other than SAE (Cummins, 2006; Gibbons, 2002; Harrison, 2011; O'Neill & Gish, 2008; Zuengler & Millar, 2006). The conceptual framework depicted in Figure 2.3 summarises key aspects identified by Cummins (2006), Harrison (2011) and Zuengler & Millar (2006) that should be embedded within practice when a notion of difference language acquisition model is adopted. Principals need to share and promote these understandings and practices when leading

conversations with staff, in order to effectively meet the literacy learning needs of Indigenous students (Cahill, 1999; Harrison, 2011; Konigsberg & Collard, 2000).

Figure 2.3

Notion of Difference Language Acquisition Model

(Cummins, 2006; Harrison, 2011; Zuengler & Millar, 2006)

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Student's language background valued │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Leadership of literacy learning in   │
│  challenging school context values    │
│  difference                           │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Diagnosis of literacy needs          │
│  considers primary discourse          │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
          ↓                  ↓
┌──────────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Teaching and learning │  │ Assessment practices      │
│ program               │  │ recognize and value       │
│  - values primary     │  │ language difference to    │
│    discourse          │  │ inform focus for literacy │
│  - explicit teaching  │  │ improvement interventions.│
│    of SAE             │  │                           │
└──────────────────────┘  └──────────────────────────┘
                  ↓
        ┌─────────────────────────┐
        │ Improved Student Outcomes│
        └─────────────────────────┘
```
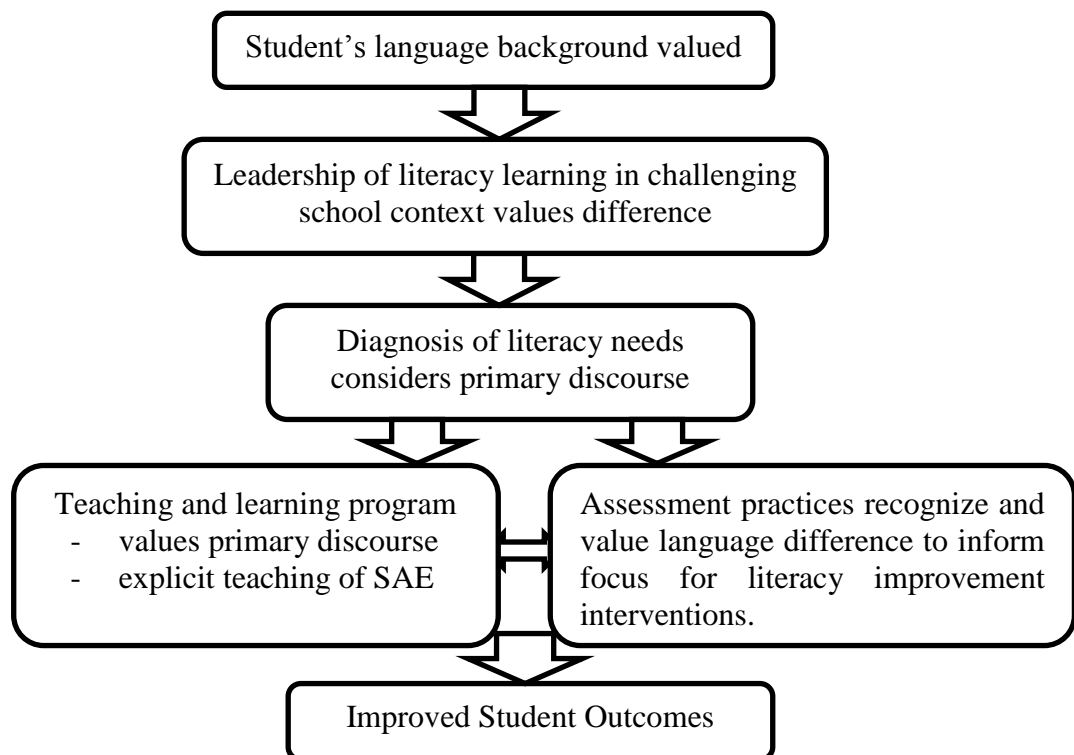
In the notion of difference language acquisition model (Cummins, 2006; Harrison, 2011; Zuengler & Millar, 2006) the view is held that the EAL/D learner is a skilled participant in their first language and what they bring to the literacy learning experience from their primary discourse is valued (Cummins, 2006; Harrison, 2011; Zuengler & Millar, 2006). Employing a notion of difference approach to literacy learning acknowledges that EAL/D learners need to be provided with opportunities to know and understand differences between their own discourse and that of school before being able to switch between and competently use both discourses relevant to communication purpose, audience and context (Harrison, 2011, Hudson & Berry 1997). Harrison (2011) reported that catering for the literacy needs of Indigenous students is a great challenge in schools and emphasised the

importance of viewing and addressing the literacy needs of Indigenous students from a difference rather than a deficit perspective. When diagnosing literacy needs, consideration needs to be given to the primary discourse in order to determine the most appropriate action required to facilitate language acquisition in SAE. Taking a difference rather than deficit approach to improving the acquisition of SAE skills of Indigenous students and students from backgrounds other than English also has implications for literacy teaching pedagogy. In the difference model teaching, learning and assessment values and builds on what the child brings from their primary discourse within the literacy learning context (Cummins, 2006; Harrison, 2011; Zuengler & Millar, 2006). Students are explicitly taught about SAE discourses. Literacy expectations clearly articulate that EAL/D children can develop SAE skills, knowledge and understanding. The primary discourse and subsequent world view the child brings to the learning experience are valued in the teaching and learning experiences and are taken into consideration in assessment practice. When a notion of difference (Cummins, 2006; Zuengler & Millar, 2006) informs literacy practice in challenging school contexts students see their ways of being valued, they are supported to develop code switching skills and shared moral purpose is focussed on an increased valuing of difference and diversity (Hudson & Berry, 1997).

However, in reality not all principals may have the depth and breadth of knowledge, understanding, skills and experience required to lead the nature of literacy learning that is required in such complex and challenging environments (Duncan & Stock, 2010). Moreover, Australian research on the specific nature of the support that principals require to lead improvement in literacy outcomes in school contexts with students from low socio-economic status and Indigenous backgrounds is limited. Consequently, within this study, consideration has been given to addressing this gap in order to identify the nature of support that principals require to develop their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

The findings from a related study that focused on leadership of leading in challenging environments, that was the research by Frawley et al. (2010) undertaken in the Northern Territory context, also has relevance to the current study. This research reported that educational leadership capabilities relevant to principals effectively leading learning to improve outcomes for Indigenous students required an intercultural quality. The purpose of

the study was to explore the range of issues impacting on educational leadership in remote settings in order to inform the development of an educational leadership framework that would outline the skills, knowledge and attributes required for effective leadership in Indigenous contexts. Interviews, personal narratives, visual metaphors and focus group discussions were used to gather data from a range of over 100 Indigenous and non-Indigenous informants. This included input from 15 current and past, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, male and female principals, who had extensive experience and engagement in Indigenous communities. Two of the research questions used in the data gathering process have specific relevance to my study: "What kind of leadership is needed? And "How are leaders supported and encouraged?" (Frawley et al., 2010, p.5). Two inductive analytical approaches were used to identify recurring relational themes and issues in the data. The findings from this research are significant because they identified an additional leadership capability not highlighted in the studies previously discussed relevant to the role of the principal; namely that leaders require intercultural sensitivity to effectively lead learning in intercultural educational contexts. How this quality is evident and developed will be investigated in this study, specifically in relation to the content and process of the support provided to the principals to build their capabilities to lead learning to improve literacy outcomes for Indigenous students.

The literature highlighted that leadership of literacy in challenging school contexts is complex. The requirement for Principals to have well developed intercultural leadership capabilities and an understanding of appropriate pedagogical practice, in order to lead improvements in literacy learning in challenging school contexts was articulated in the literature. Research from the PALL Pilot Project reported details of professional development that can be provided for principals to build their understanding of reading and the implications for leading improvements in reading. This research also provided some insight into the type of mentoring supports principals may require in order to develop their capabilities to lead improvement in reading. However, there was limited additional research evident in the literature on the specific nature of support principals may require to build their capabilities to lead the complexities of literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

2.5 Supporting principals leading literacy: specially designated support roles and programs

Worldwide trends in leadership development reflect the need to provide support for both practising and aspiring school leaders (O'Mahony & Barnett, 2008). Findings from current research indicate that professional learning for school principals should include a research base, be experienced in authentic contexts, use cohort groupings and mentors, and be established in ways that facilitate collaborative activity (Davis, et al., 2005). Two prominent studies of pre and in service principal leadership development programs in America (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Levine 2005) questioned the extent to which conventional leadership programs effectively prepared principals for the realities of their role. A study by Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) also reported that principal professional learning programs that linked "coursework and clinical work using problem-based learning methods" (p.22) and that "amplify the effects of formal learning through such collective supports as cohorts and professional networks" (Darling-Hammond et al., p. 22) engaged participants more effectively in leadership practices linked to the realities of the principal role.

To date there have been limited studies that report on how principals can be supported in leading literacy learning. However, recent research reported by Dempster, Alen & Gatehouse (2009) stressed that support for principals needed to be targeted at individual needs and must be relevant to the realities of the school contexts in which they operate in order to develop the leadership capabilities required to generate, embed and sustain on-going improvement in literacy learning. In addition, the recent review of international policy research on school leadership development projects in three major education system projects reported by Macpherson (2009), concluded that there was a need to move away from formalised programs on principal leadership. This research indicated that on-going professional learning that focused on developing pedagogical and curriculum leadership tailored to the needs of individuals and linked to the contexts of school communities in which principals' work was required (MacPherson, 2009). Fullan's (2003) work also supports this view in which he articulated that "leaders learning in context and fostering leaders at many levels is the core strategy of this decade" (p. 79).

Mentoring support and coaching support are both presented as viable options for addressing the professional learning needs of school leaders (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Fullan and Knight, 2011, MacPherson, 2009, O'Mahony & Barnett, 2008) However, researchers agree that there are distinctions between coaching support and mentoring support (Bloom et al., 2003, Bush, 2008; Duncan & Stock, 2010) and that these distinctions are important considerations when addressing the professional learning needs of principals. It is also important to note that coaching, as distinct from mentoring, has been increasingly promoted in research findings as being a more effective strategy for providing professional support for principals in the development of their capabilities to lead learning (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Bush, 2008: Duncan and Stock, 2010; MacPherson, 2009; O'Mahony & Barnett, 2008). Consequently, the differences presented in the research literature (Bloom et al., 2003; Bush, 2008; Duncan & Stock, 2010; NHS Leadership Centre, 2005) in relation to the nature and purpose of coaching support, as distinct from mentoring support, require due consideration in this study in order to determine the specific nature of support principals may need to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

Mentoring has been defined as the provision of support by senior people from within an organisation who have the same job experience or positions as the person being mentored (Bloom et al., 2003). Bush (2008) asserted that the focus for mentoring relationships involved a process whereby a more experienced leader "provided support and challenge to another professional" (p. 43). He argued that mentoring relationships encouraged development through being both "collaborative and investigative in nature" (Bush, 2008, p. 43). Duncan and Stock (2010), also stressed that the role of a mentor was that of "an advisor, critical friend, guide, listener, role model, sounding board, strategist, supporter and teacher" (p. 297). Furthermore, they asserted that mentoring relationships were different to coaching relationships because they focused on the need to "ask questions, challenge productively, encourage risk taking, offer encouragement, provide feedback, promote independence, and share critical knowledge" (Duncan and Stock, 2010, p. 297). The literature also argued that "the nature of mentoring relationships was not conducive to developing instructional leadership" (Bloom et al., 2003, p. 2).

In contrast the research stressed that coaching relationships were considered to be an effective form of support because of their instructional nature (Bloom et al., 2003; NHS Leadership Centre, 2005) in dealing with the day to day challenges experienced by principals and their "facilitation of strategies" (Bloom et al., 2003, p. 4) to build reflective practice. Coaching support, in concert with focussed and targeted development of leadership skills and competencies has the potential to "shift the individual's views, values and sense of purpose" (NHS Leadership Centre, 2005, p. 7), according to the review of the literature on coaching effectiveness in the report by the United Kingdom National Health Service .

A further distinction between mentoring and coaching lies in the fact that coaching involves the provision of support by a "highly skilled professional" (Duncan & Stock, 2010, p. 297) generally from outside the context of the school and without line management influence over the individual being coached (Bloom et al., 2003). The research findings also indicate that the profile of coaches and the selection of individuals to undertake coaching roles should be carefully linked to the needs of those accessing the coaching support (NHS Leadership Centre, 2005) because the nature of coaching relationships requires coaches to have particular knowledge, skills and expertise in areas relevant to the identified professional development needs of the individual with whom they work (Bloom et al., 2003, Duncan and Stock, 2010). The research highlights that this consideration must be given to the needs of the individual being coached in order to ensure that the nature of coaching relationships established are focused on "improving performance" (NHS Leadership Centre, 2005, p. 3) and on "skills-related learning and growth" (Duncan and Stock, 2010, p. 297). In addition, a coach must act as "a change agent" (Duncan and Stock, 2010, p. 297) in supporting the individual being coached to "achieve higher levels of performance" (Duncan and Stock, 2010, p. 297). Also, it was argued that individuals undertaking coaching roles required a capacity to draw on their own experience in order to "accelerate individual learning and development" (NHS Leadership Centre, 2005, p.15) of the person receiving coaching support.

Bloom et al., (2003) and Bush (2008) asserted that coaching relationships are a more effective form of support than mentoring relationships, because they promote and nurture growth in leadership capabilities and skills for principals over a period of time. However to

be effective, coaching relationships must be negotiated and "transformational" (NHS Leadership Centre, 2005, p. 7) in addressing the learning needs of the individual being coached. Furthermore, it is stressed by Bush (2008) that coaching support should be provided in a contextualised, on-going, "safe and confidential" (p. 44) relationship that is "integral to the wider learning processes" (p. 45) and the identified needs of the individual being coached.

Duncan and Stock (2010) note that effective coaching support should involve "modelling, observing learner performance, and providing encouragement, diagnosis, directions and feedback" (p. 297). However, it is also acknowledged in the research that the effectiveness of coaching support relies on the need for both the coach and the person receiving coaching support to fulfil their respective roles within the coaching relationship (NHS Leadership Centre, 2005).

It can be synthesised from this review of the research that three key aspects need careful consideration when determining the nature of coaching support that principals may require to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. These three aspects are crucial to ensure that coaching support is effective, individualised and focused on the professional learning needs of each principal (Bush, 2008). Firstly, the person undertaking a coaching role must have the skills required to provide support that is focused on the developmental needs of the individual being coached (Bloom et al., 200; Bush, 2008; Duncan & Stock, 2010). Secondly, the individual providing coaching support should be detached from the supervision and performance management of the person receiving coaching support (Bloom et al., 200; Bush, 2008). Finally, coaching support should be an on-going process focused on the development of instructional leadership (Bloom et al., 200; Bush, 2008).

The points highlighted in the discussion of the research on coaching and mentoring have implications for the current study. The clarity of the distinction between the role of a coach and that of mentor stresses the need to consider in more detail the notion of using coaching support to build principal leadership capacity. In particular the distinctions made between coaching and mentoring relationships need due consideration in identifying and determining the nature of support that the principals in the study required to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning in their challenging school contexts. However, caution

would need to be applied in using the findings of their study to make judgements about the nature of support required by principals in culturally diverse school contexts. For example, the homogenous sample group for the research reported by Duncan and Stock (2010) consisted of 274 experienced and neophyte principals from Anglo-American school contexts. The survey instrument was designed to ascertain the principals' perceptions of their coaching and mentoring needs in various areas of leadership development. Whilst the data indicated that there was a response rate of 68.3% from the total cohort of principals surveyed, it is important to note that the majority of the responses were from rural primary school principals. This research did however support the premise that, regardless of the length of time in the role, principals required support in developing the capabilities required to effectively lead learning. Consequently, consideration needed to be given in the current study, to the differences presented in the literature in relation to the focus of the role of a mentor and coach because the differences articulated have implications when determining the nature of support that may be provided for principals to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning.

Particular consideration must also be given to the cautions offered in the research in relation to the provision of coaching support. It is reported that those providing coaching support for principals need to have expertise in designing and implementing learning opportunities in the delivery of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008). Individuals undertaking coaching roles need to be seen by principals to have legitimacy and credibility and to be flexible in the nature of the support they provide to meet individual needs (O'Mahony & Barnett, 2008). To ensure sustained change in leadership practice, people undertaking coaching roles must be able to provide the depth and breadth of support required to address the developmental needs of the individuals for whom the coaching support is being provided (NHS Leadership Centre, 2005). Consideration must also be given to whether an individual has the well-developed interpersonal skills that are required to undertake the complexities of a coaching role (NHS Leadership Centre, 2005).

Research has suggested that, regardless of length of time and experience in the role, principals may require support in building their leadership capabilities. The literature also highlighted those distinctions in the nature and intent of forms of support that need to be

taken into consideration when determining the nature of support that may be required by individual principals to build their leadership capabilities. In addition the literature identified key characteristics and attributes that are required by a person to act as an effective coach. The nature of coaching support and the conditions required to ensure the effectiveness of coaching relationships, presented in the literature, have particular relevance for the current study. All the aspects identified in the literature have implications for ensuring an effective match between the focus of individual skills development required by a principal and the nature of the support provided. Consequently, careful consideration was given to these aspects in the current study in order to determine the nature of support principals may require in building their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

2.6 Conclusions

The review of the literature suggested that the capability of principals to lead literacy improvement in their schools should be linked to a range of leadership dimensions. It also highlighted that the extent to which principals have developed the capabilities required to lead learning is determined by the effectiveness of their leadership preparation and their ability to apply skills linked to the leadership dimensions within the realities of a school context. Furthermore, the review of the literature indicated that there are benefits of providing coaching support for aspiring, neophyte and experienced principals in aspects pertaining to school leadership if the nature of the coaching provided is targeted to individual needs.

However, the review of the literature indicated a paucity of research relating to the specific nature of the support required to build the capabilities of principals to effectively lead learning to improve literacy outcomes in challenging school contexts. The need for further research, in order to provide more explicit clarity around the type and nature of support that principals require to build their capability to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts, is expressed in the report findings on the recent PALL Pilot Project (Dempster et al., 2012). Therefore, my study provides additional information, not previously reported in this field, on the role that specially designated support officers can play in the development of principals' capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

The review of the literature discussed in Chapter 2 highlighted key aspects related to principal leadership of literacy learning in challenging school contexts and reinforced the need to investigate further how professional personnel (for example those referred as *mentors* or *coaches*) can provide support in such circumstances.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological considerations of the study. The qualitative research methodology and design was chosen in order to explore the nature of support that principals require to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. The justification for the adoption of this methodology and research design was that it provided the research structure required to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the research question that informed the study:

What role has the specially designated principal support officer (known as the Literacy Achievement Advisor) played in supporting principals, working in challenging school communities, to develop their capability to lead literacy improvement?

An exploration of the related sub questions was also facilitated:

(i)   What forms of support were provided to Northern Territory Catholic primary school principal participants in the Principals as Literacy Leaders Pilot project (PALL)?

(ii)   How effective were these forms of support?

(iii)   What factors facilitated and what factors inhibited the provision of such support?

A conceptual outline of the research methodology and design components is outlined in Figure 3.1. A qualitative paradigm and subjective epistemology underpin the study because the aim was to explore, from the perspective of a participant observer researcher (Creswell, 2008), my lived experiences in my interactions to support the principals in four challenging school sites to lead literacy learning. The theoretical perspective for the study is informed by the congruence and interrelatedness of the dimensions of leading learning, definition of literacy and the notion of difference that were presented in the review of the literature. The participants in the study were principals of four Catholic primary schools situated in the Northern Territory. Data gathering occurred over a two year period using commonly accepted qualitative data gathering methods (Creswell, 2008, Neuman, 2006). The data was analysed using a range of thematic analysis methods commensurate with purposeful synthesis methodology (Bethel & Bernard, 2010).

Figure 3.1

Research Methodology and Design Components

Theoretical Framework	Ontology and Epistemology	Constructivist Interpretive
	Theoretical Perspective	Dimensions of Leading Learning Definition of Literacy Notion of Difference
Research Methodology	Interpretive naturalistic methods	Qualitative ethnographic case study
	Participant Selection	Opportunistic Sampling
	Position of Researcher	Participant Observer
Data Collection	Qualitative methods	Observation Interviews Document analysis
Data Analysis	Purposeful Synthesis Methodology	Thematic Analysis Methods ▪ Content analysis ▪ Successive Approximation ▪ Illustrative ▪ Negative Case

The research methodology and design details are presented in the following sequence. Initially an overview of the theoretical framework that influenced the choice of

methodology for the study is discussed. I then discuss the methodology chosen for the research study. An account of the school sites in which the research was situated, along with a description of the sampling procedure and research participants, is provided. A detailed overview follows of the data collection methods used and the forms of data analysis that were employed to investigate the central question and three sub questions that inform this study. Finally, issues pertaining to ethics and trustworthiness are discussed.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

3.2.1 Epistemology

The theoretical framework for this study is informed by the relativist ontology from constructivist theory (Creswell, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Krathwohl, 2009) which acknowledges that there are "multiple constructs of realities" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). The interpretive paradigm from constructivist theory (Creswell, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Krathwohl, 2009) guides the set of beliefs that inform this study. The focus in determining the phenomenological meaningfulness is on exploring the lived experiences of the researcher in the study (Creswell, 2008). The goal of the interpretive researcher is to gain a deep understanding of what is meaningful and relevant for the participants in the context of the study. The researcher "enters the research process from inside an interpretive community" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 21). People's interpretations and sense makings of their experiences in a given context in relation to the phenomenon are explored (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The researcher interprets the events and situations to inform the conceptualisation of the study.

The interpretive researcher has a lot of direct contact with participants in order to gather comprehensive and detailed qualitative data on the nature of interactions in the context in which they occur (Neuman, 2006). Denzin & Lincoln (2005) point out that the researcher is the primary gatherer and interpreter of meaning within the methodology of an interpretive theoretic framework. They contend that an interpretive social science approach also provides the opportunity to employ a wide range of interconnected methods to develop a more comprehensive, contextualised understanding of the subject matter under study. Observations, field research and analysis of transcripts from interactions with participants are some of the techniques used by the interpretive researcher (Creswell 2008; Neuman, 2006).

The interpretive paradigm theoretical framework underpins this study and informed the research methodology employed. Throughout the study the interpretive paradigm was applied to the research methodology to enable the accurate recording of my own observations and lived experience in supporting principals in leading literacy learning in my role as LAA in concert with the meanings that principals also brought to the interactions.

3.2.2   Theoretical Perspective

A combination of three conceptual understandings informed my theoretical perspective in relation to the exploration of the support required by principals to lead literacy learning in challenging, Northern Territory primary school contexts. The three conceptual understandings that underpin my study are: the dimensions of leadership for learning, the definition of literacy and the notion of difference.

The three conceptual understandings that impact on the what and how of leadership of literacy learning in challenging school contexts are depicted in Figure 3.2. When exploring the nature of support that principals require to lead literacy improvement in intercultural school contexts due consideration needs to be given to the conceptual understandings pertaining to:

(i)   the leadership of literacy learning dimensions,

(ii)   definitions of literacy and

(iii)   notion of difference.

In Figure 3.2 these three conceptual understandings are presented within the outline of the triangle which is set within the sphere of the intercultural school context. The purpose is to illustrate that all three conceptual understandings are interconnected and that they need to inform practice in leading literacy learning in challenging school contexts. The implications for the role of the principal in leading literacy learning and for the nature of support that principals may require are illustrated through the use of two way interconnected arrows. More detailed discussion follows on the implications that these three conceptual understandings have for the nature of principals' work in leading literacy

learning in challenging school contexts and for the related nature of support they may require to undertake this role.

Figure 3.2

Theoretical Perspective that Informs the Study

Intercultural school contexts

Nature of support principals require to lead literacy learning

Principal leadership of literacy learning in challenging school contexts

Notion of Difference

Dimensions of leadership of literacy learning

Definitions of
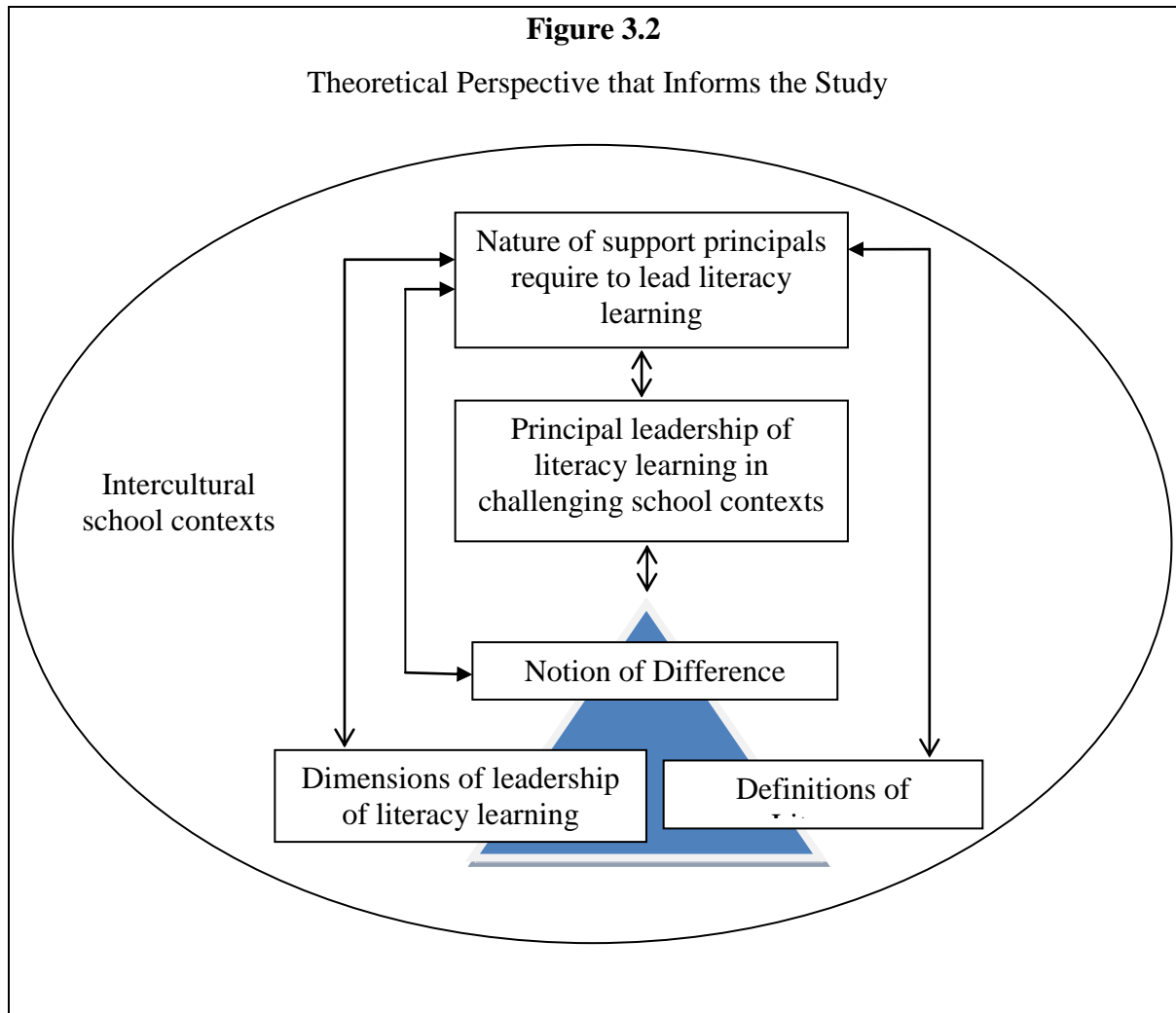
Firstly, the eight dimensions in the Leadership for Learning Framework (Dempster et al., 2012) discussed in Chapter 2, inform the theoretical basis for leading literacy learning. The eight dimensions are: a shared moral purpose; a strong evidence base; disciplined dialogue; shared leadership; professional development; conditions for learning; curriculum and teaching; and parent and community support. The Leadership for Learning Framework was used in the PALL Pilot Project to link key aspects of leadership and learning to the improvement of literacy outcomes. Consideration of the eight dimensions depicted within this framework had relevance because my study emerged from within the context of the broader PALL Pilot Project research.

Secondly the definition of literacy that informed this study was drawn from the *Australian Curriculum* literacy capability requirements (ACARA, 2013a). The definition was based on the following aspects of literacy development outlined in the *Australian Curriculum* for the English Learning area (ACARA, 2013c):

> Literacy is developed through the specific study of the English language in all its forms, enabling students to understand how the English language works in different social contexts and critically assess writers' opinions, bias and intent, and assisting them to make increasingly sophisticated language choices in their own texts. The English learning area has a central role in the development of literacy in a manner that is more explicit and foregrounded than is the case in other learning areas. Students learn literacy knowledge and skills as they engage with the Literacy and Language strands of English. They apply their literacy capability in English when they interpret and create spoken, print, visual and multimodal texts for a range of purposes (para. 6)

Literacy is complex and can be approached from many varied perspectives (DEST, 2005). In this study the focus for determining the nature of support principals require to build their capability to lead literacy learning was explored through the reading and writing aspects of literacy. The literacy requirements from the *Australian Curriculum* for reading and writing were aligned with the standards and expectations for literacy improvement articulated in the revised *NT Curriculum Framework* (DET, 2009) and the Northern Territory Education Department Literacy and Numeracy strategy for 2010 – 2012 (Department of Education and Training Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce, 2010). In addition, in this study a particular emphasis for literacy improvement was placed on improving student outcomes in the acquisition of SAE given the context in which the research was undertaken, the literacy backgrounds of the student populations of the schools involved in the study and the subsequent implications for principal leadership of literacy improvement in these challenging school contexts.

Thirdly, in this study the "difference perspective" (Cummins, 2006) was used to inform the cultural aspects and English language acquisition perspectives impacting on literacy improvement in the NT context. Students were viewed as being skilled participants in their first language. The skills, knowledge and understandings brought to the learning context

from students' primary discourse were valued. Emphasis was placed on the need for students to know and understand the differences between their home language and that of SAE in order to develop the skills to separate the languages and develop the ability to switch between both discourses appropriately according to context, purpose and audience. The subsequent implications for principal leadership of literacy learning within a context where attention must be given to assisting students to acquire code switching skills (Berry and Hudson, 1997) in order to "achieve control over Standard Australian English, while not discarding their home language (p. 25)" were explored in this study.

Therefore, in this study, the interconnectedness of these three conceptual understandings was a lens through which the nature of support principals required to build their capability to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts was examined. The role of the LAA in supporting principals to develop their capability to lead literacy improvement was subsequently investigated with reference to these conceptual understandings.

3.3   Research Methodology

3.3.1   Ethnographic case study

Qualitative research methodology is suited to developing a more comprehensive understanding of complex aspects (Creswell, 2008; Neuman 2006). Ethnographic case study is a qualitative research methodology that enables a wide variety of aspects to be examined within the context in which the study occurs. This methodology facilitates an in-depth exploration of the research problem (Creswell, 2008; Neuman, 2006). Within educational settings case studies are well suited to gathering data about the consequences and lived realities relevant to the focus of the study and thereby provide the opportunity to examine the wider implications linked to the context of the study (Walford, 2001). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) also contend that "the use of multiple methods or triangulation" in qualitative research "reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (p. 5).

An ethnographic case study methodology was chosen for this study to facilitate an in-depth examination of my specific interactions, in my role as the LAA, in providing support for principals across four primary school sites. This study also represented that of a "bounded

system" case study (Creswell, 2008, p. 476) in that it emerged, in terms of time and place, from the insights and lived experiences of my role as the LAA during my interactions with a group of principals within the larger context of the PALL Pilot Project. The principal participants and school sites were drawn from within the Northern Territory Catholic Education system. The "case" (Creswell, 2008) for this study was the in-depth investigation of the specific nature of support provided by the LAA for principals in four challenging Catholic school sites in the Northern Territory. The intention was to develop a comprehensive and meaningful understanding of the nature of support that principals required to lead literacy learning in these challenging school contexts. The case study research methodology facilitated the exploration and questioning of the what and how of the complexities of the research focus, as it relates to principal leadership of literacy learning in challenging school contexts. This qualitative research methodology provided the mechanism to explore the depth of complexities inherent in the research problem: what professional support principals in challenging school contexts require to lead literacy improvement. In particular, this methodology facilitated the in-depth exploration of how professional personnel can provide coaching support in such circumstances.

3.3.2   Position of the Researcher in the study

Qualitative research methodology enables the researcher to be located within the context they are studying in order "to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3). In qualitative case study methodology the observations of the researcher can be undertaken through the researcher being part of the events or interactions being studied. The researcher is referred to as a "participant observer" (Creswell, 2008) when they are involved in interactions in the research site they are observing as well as having permission to write down relevant observations. There also tends to be a higher probability that a researcher will collect and record more relevant data linked to the research question when the researcher has an extended length of time with the participants in context than when a researcher is removed or less familiar with the context (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002).

My position, as the researcher in this case study, is that of a participant observer linked to my role as the Northern Territory Literacy Achievement Advisor (LAA). I had permission from the four principals involved in this study to take field notes and write down my

observations in relation to the interactions at each site relevant to the research problem. On occasions when it was not feasible to record my observations during the interaction, due to the nature of my role at the time, I would write down my observations immediately after I left the school site (Creswell, 2008).

What the researcher brings to the qualitative case study is also an important consideration (Creswell 2008, Newman 2006). My background is that of a non-Indigenous female educator who was appointed on merit to the position of the LAA at the commencement of 2009. I have 35 years of experience in education, the majority of which has been spent working in challenging schools and educational contexts that catered for a diverse range of learners. I have extensive school and education system experience in leading literacy improvement in the Kimberley and Northern Territory contexts of Australia. My skills, knowledge and understandings have been shaped through extensive training and experience in leading and facilitating curriculum change, school improvement, literacy improvement and two way cultural approaches in a wide range of educational contexts. I have been a principal and deputy principal in primary, district high and remote school contexts where I have led learning to cater for the needs of a wide range of primary and secondary students, including those from low socio-economic, Indigenous and EAL/D backgrounds. I have developed and delivered an extensive range of literacy and school improvement leadership professional learning for principals and school leadership teams in the educational contexts of Western Australia and the Northern Territory. I was selected, on merit, to undertake the Northern Territory LAA role because I had the prior primary school principal experience and acknowledged expertise in literacy and leadership required for the position. I had a demonstrated commitment to literacy learning in the primary school context, as well as, the recognised capacity to lead, mentor and coach others.

3.4 Participants

3.4.1 Participant sampling technique

A purposive sampling procedure, defined as "opportunistic sampling" (Creswell, 2008), was employed to determine the sample group of principals from four Northern Territory (NT) Catholic primary school sites. This sampling procedure is appropriate because the research problem arose out of unfolding events and issues that occurred during the implementation of PALL Pilot Project in the NT context. The group of principals from the

four NT Catholic primary school sites reflected a homogenous sample (Creswell, 2008) in that they were PALL participants and had responsibility for leading literacy learning in their challenging school contexts.

3.4.2   Selection of participants

Circumstances arising from principal changes in two of the four school sites throughout the two year period of the PALL Pilot Project impacted on the selection of the four principal participants for this study. At the commencement of 2009, the incumbent principals at that time, of the four school sites in which this study was situated, were nominated by The NT Catholic Education Office, to participate in the PALL Pilot project. However, principal changes occurred in the four school sites involved in this study during the period of the PALL Pilot Project. When a principal change occurred there was an unwritten expectation that the acting or new contract principal appointed to that school would participate in the PALL Pilot Project. Consequently, during the two year period of the PALL Pilot Project, the LAA provided support for all the individuals who undertook the principal role in the four school sites in which this study was situated.

Four principals, from the NT Catholic primary schools sites, who had been involved in the PALL Pilot project for one or more years, were selected to participate in my study. The four principals were all females and were at different stages in their career as a principal. Two participants were early career principals, but had previous experience in assistant principal and curriculum support leadership roles in primary schools. The other two participants had between four and fifteen years of experience as a principal. Three of the principals had more than three years of experience working in the Northern Territory Catholic Education system. All the principals agreed to participate in this research project in line with Australian Catholic University ethical requirements for participation in research studies.

3.4.3 School Contexts

The principal participants were from urban and rural primary Catholic school contexts in the Northern Territory. The four primary schools in the study operate under the auspices of the Northern Territory Catholic Education Office (see http://www.ceont.catholic.edu.au/). The student populations of the four Catholic primary schools in this study ranged from 230 to 330 students. The profiles of all four primary schools, which were collated at the commencement of the PALL Pilot Project, identified that a number of the elements that characterise challenging schools were evident in all four school contexts.

All four schools had a percentage of Indigenous student enrolments which ranged from 11% to 22%.   All reported having EAL/D student cohorts from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, with the most common being students from South East Asia, Africa, Sudan and the Philippines.

As discussed in section 2.4 of the literature review, in Australia educational contexts disadvantage, is determined by a range of factors including language background other than English, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, low socio-economic background and geographical isolation. The socio-economic status (SES) ratings of schools in the Northern Territory are determined through the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Index of Relative Socio Economic Disadvantage (IRSED) and ABS School Enrolment. The socio economic status IRSED ratings for the four school sites in this study fell between the ranges 970 to 1012 which indicated that these four schools were slightly above the Northern Territory ICSEA average of 734 but within the average range of ICSEA rating of 1000 for other Australian schools. Consequently three of the schools sites had a SES decile rating of 6 but the fourth school was rated at 4.

Student transience was also reported in the profiles of each school. Transience rates of students in the four school sites ranged from 10% through to 33 %. Key reasons cited for student transience by the schools were the movement of Indigenous students between urban/rural and remote locations, the relocation of defence force personnel families linked to active deployment or transfer and movement of other families for employment purposes.

The rate of staff transience was not reported in the profiles of each school. However the duration of the time that the staff had been at each school was reported in terms of the number of years at the school within the following ranges: 0-5 years; 6-10 years; 11-15 years, 16-20 years and over 20 years. In one school 78% of the staff had been at the school for less than 5 years. In another 70.5 % of the staff had been at the school for less than 5 years. In the third school 57% of the staff had been at the school for less than 5 years and 33% for less than 10 years. In the fourth school 30% of the staff had been at the school for less than 5 years and 60% for less than 10 years. Only six staff members across all of the four schools reported being at the school for greater than 10 years. It is also important to note that during the two year period of the study all four schools experienced changes in their school leadership team. In all four schools at least one change in the person appointed to the role of curriculum coordinator across the school occurred during the period of the study. In two schools there were also changes in the person undertaking the role of deputy principal. All four schools also experienced some changes in principal during the period of the study. All schools experienced a least one extended period of time during the two year study where an acting principal was appointed to the school due to the substantive principal taking either extended sick leave, long service leave or moving from the school. In two instances a new substantive principal was appointed to the school during the period of the study.

Consequently, the principals in my study needed to give due consideration to their capacity to lead appropriate literacy improvement efforts to address the challenges evident in their school contexts (Masters, 2011). This reflection then informed the nature of support each individual principal requested from the NT LAA to build their capacity to lead improvements in literacy learning in their challenging school contexts.

3.5   Data Collection Methods

The theoretical framework underpinning this research, together with the qualitative case study methodology, informed the choice of data collection methods. The collection and analysis of a range of data within qualitative methodology ensures interpretations and explanations are complex and rich. Silverman (2006) posits that observations, interviews, document analysis, and recording and transcribing the activity of participants are valued

methods for data collection when applied appropriately within a qualitative research methodology. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) also contend that the collection and analysis of a range of data within qualitative research methodology ensures interpretations and explanations are complex and rich.

Gaining a depth of insight from multiple perspectives, as well as enhancing validity, was paramount in determining the data collection methods used in this study to explore the lived experiences of the role of the LAA in supporting principals in challenging school contexts. Interviews, observations and document studies were chosen because these data gathering methods are frequently used in qualitative case study research (Creswell, 2008; Neuman, 2006) to facilitate the collection of the depth of data required in relation to the research problem.

In depth case study data collected in this study came from the lived experiences of the LAA in four Catholic primary school contexts. The data collected, synthesised and analysed in this research study was related but distinct from the data analysed and reported in the findings of the broader PALL pilot project (Dempster et al., 2012). A key feature of the data analysed and presented in this study, is that it provides multiple perspectives of the insights and details on the how and what of the nature of support that principals in the study required to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning. The intention in collecting and analysing multiple forms of data during this study, was to identify the contributing factors and emergent themes relevant to the nature of support that the principals required to build their capability to effectively lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. These aspects have not been captured or reported to date in other research.

A summary of the data sources that informed this study are outlined in Table 3.1**.** Column one lists the types of data collected. Column two details the data sources related to each type of data collected in column one. Details of my observations and journal reflections relating to my interactions with the principals of the four school sites during my LAA role, were collected, collated and analysed. These data were examined alongside principal interview data and data from relevant documents that informed the study focus. The use of these multiple types of data (Bernhardt, 2009) obtained from multiple perspectives

facilitated the collection of a range of evidence in words rather than numbers. This assisted in capturing the complexity of the focus for the research (Neuman, 2006) relevant to the challenging context in which the study was situated. Examination of this range of data was important in order to provide an in-depth description of the research problem (Creswell 2008, Neuman, 2006).

Table 3.1

Type of Data and Data Sources

Type of Data	Details of the data and data source
Observations and journal reflections	Data reported from perspective of "participant observer" researcher Synthesis of activity from Aide Memoir text reports Personal observations and reflections recorded in Aide Memoir Observation reflections recorded in generic research journal Field notes and observation reflections for each school recorded in school journal Anecdotal information on discussions with principal participants recorded in email transactions, report documents, interview data and journals. Feedback and formal evaluations from professional learning sessions.
Participant interview data	Semi structured open ended one on one interviews undertaken by LAA with each principal. Responses to open-ended questions recorded in email transactions and evaluation report information throughout the project on role/support provided by LAA. Data from formal NT principal interviews on role of LAA (done by external Australian Catholic University research officer)
Document analysis	Context specific documents that were not used in the wider PALL Pilot Project including: NT Catholic Education system documents, NT DET electronic support materials/systems used in transactions with principals Documents developed by LAA in support role related to NT context and nature of support required by principals

The triangulation of data arising from multiple sources is an important consideration in establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative research studies (Creswell, 2008; Guba, 1981; Neuman 2006). By triangulating data, hunches and assumptions can be tested rather

than drawing conclusions from a single measure (Love, 2004, p.24). The use of multiple sources of data facilitated the capturing of multiple perspectives of the lived experiences of the LAA within the context of this study. Furthermore, the concept of saturation (Mason, 2010) also informed the decision to use multiple data sources in this study because in qualitative studies "researchers generally use saturation as a guiding principle during their data collection" (para.3).

Saumure and Given (2008) assert that in research methodology "saturation is the point in data collection when no new or relevant information emerges with respect to the newly constructed theory" (p. 196). If data saturation is not attained in qualitative research then "any resulting theory may be unbalanced, incomplete, and essentially untrustworthy" (Saumure & Given, 2008, p. 196). Mason (2010) argues that "qualitative samples are drawn to reflect the purpose and aims of the study" (para. 49). Therefore the use of multiple data sources means that the nature of a small participant "sample size becomes irrelevant" as the quality of data collected "is measurement of the value" (Mason, 2012, para. 50). Consequently the decision to collect, analyse and triangulate data from multiple sources pertaining to the work of the LAA was made to address the limitations if data were only drawn from interviews with the principal participants. The use of multiple measures of data ensured that depth and richness of consideration could be given to the connections and interrelatedness of the data from these sources in order to address the complexities inherent within the sub questions that informed the study.

3.5.1   Observations and Journal Reflections

My field observations that were recorded in the individual school journals, the transcripts of my interaction with each principal that were recorded in the Aide Memoir, and my observations and reflective comments recorded in my general reflective journal reflections from my interactions with the four principals during my role as LAA's were collected and collated to inform this study. These observations, recorded from my perspective as participant observer in field notes and reflective journal entries, were used to inform this study. The principals were informed of the research purpose for collecting this data linked to the nature of my support role as the LAA during the PALL Pilot Project. They gave permission for the data to be recorded in the school journals. The four principal participants also provided additional informed consent for the collection, collation and

analysis of the data recorded in the school journals for the specific research purposes of this study. Given that this study emerged out of my LAA interactions with the principals of the four school sites during the PALL Pilot Project, the use of this data source to inform my study was valid, because using data sources that have already been collected, in order to "ask about issues not thought of by the original research," is "increasingly being used" in current research practice (Neuman, 2006, p. 333).

During the two year period, in my role as LAA, I recorded field notes, observations and reflections, relevant to my interactions at each school site, in individual, hand written, bound journals that I had established for each school site. Additional, more general observations and reflections in relation to the nature of support that the principals across the four sites had required were recorded in my generic research journal. The data recorded in the school journals and my generic research journal during the two year provided "open-ended, first-hand information" (Creswell, 2008) of my interactions in supporting the principals to lead literacy learning in their school contexts. The nature of data recorded in these journals is outlined in Table 3.2. The types of data collected are listed in the first column and the details of that data is explained in the second column.

Table 3.2

Nature of Data Recorded in School Journals

Type of Data	Data Details
Field notes	Date of interaction, Nature of support that had been requested. The actual support provided during the interaction. Follow up or further action/support negotiated.
Observations	LAA's reflective observations during or immediately following the interaction.

Comments	Principal comments regarding
	    the nature of support provided,
	    aspects pertaining to leadership of literacy learning, or
	    further support required.

Additional support
    required
	Information outlining related or linked interactions with
	    other leadership team members and/or staff.

3.5.2   Aide-Memoire Database Entries

Qualitative data from my LAA Aide-Memoire Database entries for the four school sites was used to inform this study. Categories of data recorded in this database included date of contact, school site name, type of contact, initiator of the contact, focus of the meeting linked to dimensions of the Leadership for Learning Framework (Dempster, 2012; Dempster et al., 2012) and issues and outcomes from meetings. A screen shot of the LAA Aide-Memoire electronic data entry format is shown in Appendix B. During my LAA role, I regularly collated and synthesised the information I had recorded in the individual school journals from my interactions at each school sites against the categories in the LAA Aide-Memoire Database.

A synthesis of my observations and reflections were also recorded, when relevant, in the "personal observations or reflections of LAA" section of the Aide Memoir. The qualitative information contained in this section of the aide-memoir was used as a data source to add to the trustworthiness for this study (Guba, 1981; Lichtman, 2010; Shenton, 2004) because it provided specific data that established the contribution that I had made as the participant observer researcher in the construction of meanings for this study.

3.5.3   Interviews

Interviews are used in qualitative research methods to capture participants' perspectives on the phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I conducted semi-structured, open ended, face-to face interviews with the four principals after the conclusion of the PALL Pilot Project to inform the evaluation of the effectiveness of the LAA role. The principals' did not want these interviews taped. Therefore to ensure that the data was collected uniformly (Krathwohl, 2009) a template, which included the research questions, was used to hand record each principal's responses during the interview process (see Appendix C). I wrote down the principal's responses during the interview on a copy of the template and then checked back with each principal at the conclusion of their interview to ensure the accuracy of the information I had written down. I later transcribed and collated this information.

Formal structured interviews were also undertaken with each principal by an independent research assistant, on behalf of the Australian Catholic University, as part of the formal

evaluation of the effectiveness of the role of LAA to inform the PALL Pilot Project evaluation report. The qualitative data from the interviews with the four principal participants in this study were accessed and collated to provide further triangulation in the data measures used to inform this study.

The transcripts of the four principals' open-ended responses to emailed questions collected at key reporting times throughout the PALL Pilot Project were also collected and collated to facilitate further triangulation in the data measures used to inform this study.

3.5.4   Document Analysis

Resources developed by the LAA during her provision of support for the principals in the four school sites were also accessed and analysed. In addition relevant documents used when providing support to principals from the NT Catholic Education and the NT Department of Education were collected and analysed where required to inform the study Email documents and anecdotal documented information collected from principals, along with the written feedback and evaluation data from professional learning sessions that I facilitated in my LAA role were also collected and analysed to inform this study.

3.6   Analysis of the data

3.6.1   Purposeful Synthesis Methodology

In ethnographic case study research design, data analysis methods employed by researchers facilitate the interpretation of qualitative data in order to make sense of the information relevant to the purpose and context for the study (Creswell, 2008). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) assert that qualitative researchers use "a wide range of interconnected interpretive methods' in order to "make more understandable the worlds of experience they have studied" (p. 21). Data analysis methods that facilitate the distillation, identification, coding and labelling of key features from the data into themes are used in qualitative case studies (Creswell, 2008). A range of data analysis methods can be used to represent and present the lived experiences inherent in a qualitative study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The principles of "purposeful synthesis methodology" (Bethel & Bernard, 2010) influenced my choice of data methods and data analysis for this study. In qualitative research approaches, purposeful synthesis methodology facilitates the "purposeful exploration and interpretation of data in order to gain a deep understanding" of the complexities relevant to the focus for the study. In this methodology, emphasis is given to purposeful data analysis linked to the epistemology of the research paradigm" (Bethel & Bernard, 2010, p. 235)

Decisions regarding the choice of data analysis methods were explicitly tailored to explore and explain the focus and complexity of the research questions (Bethel & Bernard, 2010). My decision to use purposeful synthesis methodology was guided by the nature of the evidence collected in my study and the purpose for the synthesis in relation to the research problem. The intention of this study was to add breadth, depth and richness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) in examining the nature of the support that principals require to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

3.6.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is used in purposeful synthesis methodology, to undertake a theme based analysis of qualitative data. Bethel and Bernard (2010) contend that within current research practice, thematic analysis is a flexible and structured way to analyse diverse qualitative evidence bases. They assert that in purposeful synthesis methodology, "thematic analysis" is used by researchers to synthesise and summarize patterns (themes) within data in qualitative research findings according to thematic headings.

The nature of the evidence elicited from the data sources in my study, together with the purpose and focus for the synthesis of the data, guided my decision to use the purposeful synthesis methodology of "thematic analysis". By employing this data analysis method I was able to extract, collate, identify, and synthesise recurrent themes evident in data pertaining to the role of the LAA. Recurrent descriptive themes, related to the research questions, were summarised to inform the findings reported in Chapter 4. A description of the specific data analysis strategies employed and interwoven to facilitate the thematic analysis of the data are presented in the discussion of the four stages of data analysis that follows.

3.6.2.1 Stage One - Qualitative content analysis

In the first stage of the data analysis process I collated and explored three facets of the data contained in the LAA Aide-Memoir database reports for the four school sites. I used content analysis to collate and analyse the occurrences of text data in the "Type of Contact", "Initiator" and "Focus" sections of the database reports for each LAA interaction in the four school sites over the two year period. Content analysis involves counting the number of times a certain phrase, word or concept appears in a document (Mutch, 2005). Content analysis was applied to the text in this instance for the following purposes: to determine who initiated the need for support, to identify the mode of delivery preferred by principals for the provision of LAA support and to ascertain the focus categories where LAA support was most frequently required.

3.6.2.2 Stage Two - Successive approximation

I used the data analysis strategy of "successive approximation" (Neuman, 2006) to identify and synthesise the recurrent themes evident in the data in relation to:

- the specific nature of support that was provided by the LAA,
- the effectiveness of the support
- factors that facilitated or hindered the provision of support.

Successive approximation (Neuman, 2006) enables the researcher to "repeatedly move back and forth between the data and more abstract concepts or themes" (p. 469). In this analysis process, the synthesis of the raw data and the collection of ideas are adjusted and refined in each cycle (p. 469). A diagrammatic representation of the cyclic nature of this process is provided in Figure 3.4. The arrows represent my continual movement back and forth between the raw data in these data sources and the concepts that I was extracting and synthesizing. The direction of the arrows linked to the raw data and concepts sections in this diagram represent the constant process of refocusing and adjustment that was required to synthesize the raw data in order to elicit concepts to determine the key themes evident in the data.

Figure 3.4.

Successive Approximation

(Neuman, 2006, p. 481)
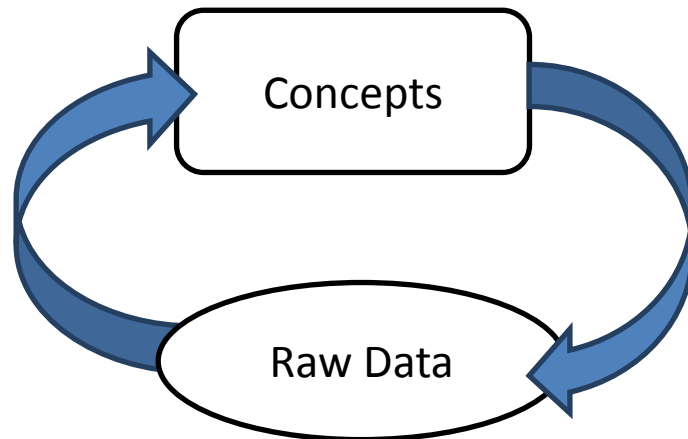
I applied the successive approximation process to the analysis of the following qualitative data sources that informed the study;

- the "issues or outcomes from the meeting" section of the school reports from the LAA Aide- Memoir,
- the observations and reflections recorded in the school journals,
- the generic observations and reflections recorded in the LAA journal,
- the qualitative data from the interviews and
- the additional data extracted from email transactions, professional learning evaluations and report feedback data.

General procedures for the "coding" of qualitative data (Creswell, 2008; Neuman, 2006), which are outlined later in this chapter, were employed to facilitate a movement from the "vague ideas and concrete details" (p. 469) to a reduction of the data into key themes. Such details related to links between the categories of the Leadership for Learning Framework and the nature of the support principals required to lead literacy learning.

3.6.2.3 Stage Three - Illustrative method analysis

Illustrative method analysis refers to a form of data analysis where the researcher "takes the theoretical concepts and treats them as empty boxes to be filled" (Neuman, 2006, p. 469) with specific descriptions from the synthesis of the data. Once I had identified the key themes pertaining to the type of support provided by the LAA, I then employed the illustrative method of data analysis (Neuman, 2006 p. 469) to determine the effectiveness of the support required in each of the areas identified in the conceptual framework, and related contributing and inhibiting factors. A diagrammatic representation of this method is provided in Figure 3.5. In applying this data analysis method I took the key concepts identified in the conceptual framework and "treated them as empty boxes" (p. 469) and filled them with specific examples and descriptions" from the analysis of the raw data in order to specify the nature of support principals required to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts and the effectiveness of that support.

Figure 3.5

Illustrative Method

(Neuman, 2006, p. 481)
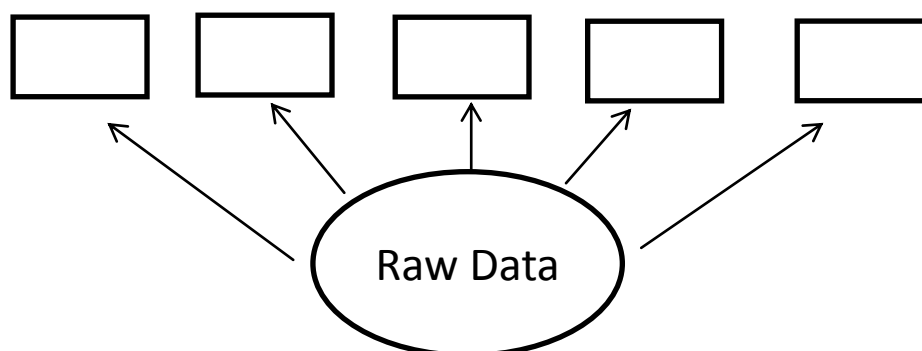
I made coloured copies of the coded data from the three data sources from each school from the successive approximation process. I then cut this data up and placed each item onto one of five large sheets of paper in groupings, on a matrix format linked to each of the key themes. I then re-read and synthesised the data in each grouping to craft a summary statement that captured and represented the specific nature of the support required. I also recorded the frequency of requests that were evident in the data relevant to each summary

statement. These summary statements were then transferred, along with the frequency of the support provided in the specific areas to an overall summary matrix for each key area identified in the conceptual framework. I used the same process to synthesise, summarise and record the details pertaining to the effectiveness of the support provided and the factors that facilitated or hindered the support. The details of this stage of the data analysis along with and synthesis of the findings are presented in Chapter 4.

3.6.2.4   Stage four - Negative case method analysis

'Negative case' methodology systematically examines the absence of what is expected in order to identify what is not explicit in the data (Neuman, 2006, p. 478).   I employed this methodology to examine the data to identify any aspects in the data from the 4 school sites involved in the case study that did not conform to what was expected based on the theory that had supporting evidence from the other school sites. (p.478) Through applying this analytical method I was be able to uncover some additional unknown local factors that the major theory had not taken into account (Neuman, 2006, p. 480) in relation to aspects that were hindering the provision of support and aspects that were impacting negatively on the effectiveness of the support provided.

3.6.2.5   Generic data analysis methods

The generic data analysis methods (Neuman, 2006) outlined below was used in this study to facilitate the thematic analysis of the data.

I used coding of the data to organise and systematically reduce the data into manageable components for subsequent categorization. Neuman (2006) explains that in the coding of qualitative data, the researcher is "simultaneously undertaking data reduction and categorization of data" (p. 460). During this process "labels are attached" (Neuman, 2006, p.460)   to the textual data to identify relationships and discern patterns in the data.

The following steps were undertaken to facilitate the content analysis and coding of the data. A "hand analysis" (Creswell, 2008, p. 246) of the qualitative data was employed to facilitate detailed text coding. Initially I undertook a "preliminary exploratory analysis" (Creswell, 2008, p. 250) of the Aide Memoir report and journal for one school to formulate a general sense of the data set. Ideas relevant to the organisation of the data were annotated in the margins of the text. Next, a "lean coding process" (Creswell, 2008, p.252) was used to segment and label the data to establish descriptions and broad categories of support linked to the dimensions in the Leadership for Learning Framework (Dempster, 2012; Dempster et al., 2012). Similar codes were listed and redundant codes were collapsed and streamlined during this process. Once this organising scheme was verified, an "axial coding process" (Neuman, 2006, p. 462), using highlight colours and margin annotations, was applied to the remainder of the data to aggregate the major and minor themes that were most appropriate for describing and developing the key themes evident in the data.

I then used "selective coding" (Neuman, 2006, p. 464) to scan all the data sources to identify illustrative cases linked to these themes. These were labelled and colour highlighted. Finally, a layering themes analysis (Creswell, 2008) was applied to articulate the nature of the support principals required to lead literacy learning, and identify the specific role played by the LAA in relation to that support. The illustrative cases that have been identified were linked to the appropriate junctions and components in this layering process.

I also used analytical memo writing throughout the data analysis process whereby I wrote down my thoughts and ideas about the coding process to assist with the formation of rough theoretical ideas. Links were consequently "forged between the concrete data and raw evidence" which in turn facilitated "more abstract, theoretical thinking" (Neuman, 2006, p. 464) that led to the development of the conceptual framework of this study.

I also employed outcropping within my qualitative data analysis process in order to "recognise events or features that represented deeper structural relations" (Neuman, 2006, p. 466). This facilitated the examination and organisation of the observable data so that "the degree of structures or forces" that were "unseen" but evident "beneath the surface" (Neuman, 2006, p. 466) of the data were identified and reported. This aspect was linked directly to the negative case method that was used to determine the aspects that were

hindering the provision of support by the LAA and aspects that were impacting negatively on the effectiveness of the support provided.

Diagrams, charts and conceptual frameworks were also used throughout the data analysis process to "organise ideas and systematically investigate relations in data" (Neuman, 2006, p. 483). Where relevant they have been included in this dissertation to "communicate results" (Neuman, 2006, p. 483). Draft copies of diagrams, charts and conceptual framework generated throughout the data analysis, along with other working documents, have been retained and filed as part of the audit trail for this study.

3.7   Ethical Matters

3.7.1   Ethics Approval

The research presented in this study was undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Human Research Ethics Committee and processes required by the Australian Catholic University, for this research study. An 'Application for Ethics Approval – Research Projects with Human Participants' (N2012105) was submitted to the Australian Catholic University ethics committee and approval was granted (see Appendix D).

A formal request was made to the Northern Territory Catholic Education Office for this research study to be undertaken with the principals from the schools that had been involved in the PALL Pilot Project. Approval was granted by the NT Catholic Education Office to undertake this research (see Appendix E).

Australian Catholic University was also a research partner in the PALL pilot. The research component and activity of the PALL Pilot project, including the role of the LAA within the research process, were formally communicated to all the principals who participated in the PALL Pilot Project. All principals involved in my study provided informed consent in relation to their involvement in the PALL pilot study. In addition, throughout the PALL Pilot Project, the principal participants from the Northern Territory, were informed and regularly reminded of the research component of the work of the LAA, as a member of the Australian Catholic University research team. The principals were also advised of their

right to withdraw their participation in the research component of the PALL pilot project during their interactions with the LAA.

3.7.2 Informed Consent

Participants were informed about "the purpose, conduct and possible dissemination of the research" (Mutch, 2005, p. 78). The specific nature of what they were being asked to commit to was explained in detail and they were given the opportunity to ask questions. I obtained informed consent from the four principal participants to use information from the PALL Pilot Project relating to my work with them and their schools in my role as LAA. The four principals approached had been involved in the PALL Pilot Project activity in their school sites for a fourteen month to two year period. Participants were given a description of the study and the research procedure. They were informed of the researcher's identity. The principal participants were assured that their participation in this research relevant to the support role of the LAA was voluntary. In all instances the principals were provided with the opportunity to enact an "opt out clause" relating to the inclusion of the data pertaining to the LAAs work with them and their schools. They were informed that they had the option to withdraw at any time. Assurances were given for maintaining confidentiality along with details of the benefits and risks of participating in the study. The information provided in relation to gaining formal, informed consent from the participants for this study is outlined in the document included at Appendix F. Each principal completed an "Informed Consent Form" in relation to their participation in this study (see Appendix G).

3.7.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

Anonymity within research means that "people remain anonymous, or nameless" (Neuman, 2006, p. 139). Strategies are used within the study to mask the identity of the participants involved. Confidentiality in research means that "information may have names attached to it, but the researcher holds it in confidence or keeps it secret from the public" (Neuman, 2006, p. 139). Consequently arrangements were made to ensure that the information reported was presented in such a way that the individual cannot be linked with the response and that data was presented in an aggregated form (Neuman, 2006).

The identity of the principals and school sites has been respected and kept confidential by the researcher at all times in this study. The presentation and discussion of the data and

subsequent findings related to the schools and principals is presented wherever possible in generic terms in order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the school sites and principals involved in the study. Vigilance in using strategies that mask the identity of individual principals and their school contexts has been employed. Where, reference to an individual principal or school site was required for purposes of clarity in the presentation of the findings, the coding process outlined in Figure 3.6 was adopted in order to protect the identity of the principals and school sites. Column one in Figure 3.6 provides the generic name of each site. Column two indicates the code that has been assigned to identify each school site. An "SS" letter prefix, followed by a numerical number tag, has been allocated for instances when reference is required to a specific school site in the discussion of the findings. Column three indicates the code that has been assigned to identify each school principal. The word "Principal", followed by an alphabetical tag, has been allocated for instances when reference is required to an individual school principal.

Figure 3.6

School and Principal Participant Codes

	School Code	Principal Code
School and Principal code for school site one	SS1	Principal A
School and Principal code for school site two	SS2	Principal B
School and Principal code for school site three	SS3	Principal C
School and Principal code for school site four	SS4	Principal D

The abbreviation "LAA" is used in the presentation of the data and findings, when specific reference is required in relation to findings reported on the support role played by the specially designated Northern Territory Literacy Achievement Advisor.

3.8   Data Recording, Security and Disposal

The recording and storage of the data used in this study was managed in accordance with Australian Catholic University ethics approval requirements. In my role as LAA, I established electronic and hard copy files for each school, to store data collected pertaining to my work with each school. These files are securely stored in large storage envelopes in a locked cabinet in my office. They are organised in reverse chronological order under the following headings: school contacts, leadership data, teacher data, literacy data, and general school data.

Data transferred to the Aide Memoir was recorded in accordance with the formal categories established for that database. The electronic copy of this database is stored securely, through password protection, on my LAA external drive. All other electronic data relevant to the schools and participants in this study has been password protected and stored securely on the external drive stored in my office. The data generated from the PALL interviews has been stored securely in my supervisor's office at Australian Catholic University.

At the completion of this study, all data relevant to this study will be securely stored as per the requirements outlined within Australian Catholic University ethics policy and guidelines.

3.9   Limitations and Delimitations of the Research

In this study the challenges involved in undertaking qualitative case study methodology were considered in order to acknowledge and address limitations in the research.

3.9.1   Positioning of the study

The positioning of the study within the context of the broader PALL Pilot project was acknowledged by the researcher as a possible limitation of the study. The potential existed within this study for the reading focus and follow up task requirements of the broader PALL Pilot project to dictate the nature of the interactions and support provided by the LAA.

3.9.2   Participants

The small but unique sample size in this study was a limitation due to the number of primary schools that exist in the Northern Territory Catholic Education system totals six. It is also important to note that only four of those primary schools were involved in the PALL Pilot project for the two year period of this study. In addition the principals included in this study were also participants in the PALL Pilot Project in challenging educational contexts situated with the unique Catholic Education context of the Northern Territory. The principals' participation in that project was determined through an expression of interest process. However, in order to obtain a richness of description of the phenomena within this case study sample size and context, multiple data sources were used throughout the research design to gather comprehensive data.

Principals from government primary schools who were participating in the PALL Pilot project were not included in the study due to aspects that were beyond the control of the researcher. Therefore the opportunity remains for further research to be undertaken on the nature of support that principals require to lead literacy learning in government school contexts that are similar to the Catholic schools studied in this research.

3.9.3 Gender bias

A further limitation in this study was that all the principal participants were female. While it was not possible to address the issue of gender in the makeup of the purposive sample group of principals for this case study this could be an aspect for consideration when establishing further studies in this area.

3.9.4 Research Design and Trustworthiness

The processes described below were employed to address perceived limitations in the use of a qualitative case study research design and to facilitate the gathering of rich descriptive data in the context of this study.

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is important to demonstrate that the findings from the research are valid and reliable. To address the aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative studies the researcher must attempt to ensure that a true picture of the phenomena being investigated is demonstrated (Guba, 1981; Lichtman, 2010; Shenton 2004). This is done by taking certain actions to account for the many factors that bear upon and have the potential to limit the study. Key aspects that contribute to the trustworthiness of qualitative research studies include prolonged engagement in the site, use of persistent observation, peer debriefing, triangulation of data, undertaking member checks, collecting thick descriptive data, leaving audit trails and practicing reflexivity (Shenton, 2004; Guba, 1981). These aspects were paid particular attention in relation to establishing the trustworthiness of this study and to address potential limitations that were identified.

The qualitative case study approach was used to facilitate an in depth analysis of the problem that informed the study. The data analysis processes employed in the methodology resulted in thick descriptions of the phenomena under scrutiny. Detailed descriptions of the participants and links with the context for this study were outlined in the research design. My credibility as the participant observer researcher in this study was established through a detailed outline of my background, qualifications and educational leadership experience in similar contexts. My familiarity with the culture and context of the participants' school sites, along with my established relationship with the principal

participants in this study was declared and detailed. The triangulation of data was facilitated through using a range of data collection and analysis methods.

The bias of the researcher as a participant observer can be perceived as a limitation in qualitative case study methodology. Therefore the researcher must guarantee that the findings reported are the result of the experiences and ideas of the study participants and that they are not influenced by their characteristics or bias of the researcher (Cresswell, 2008; Guba 1981; Neuman 2006; Shenton, 2004). Consequently throughout this study specific measures were undertaken to minimise any perceived bias by the researcher. Researchers use reflexivity to "reflect on their own biases, values and assumptions" (Creswell, 2008, p. 58) and where relevant aspects identified are recorded in the research (Creswell, 2008). In this study my reflections on shifts and changes noted during the data collection and analysis period were recorded in my general journal and were discussed in debrief sessions with my supervisor. My reflective comments were also recorded in the LAA Aide-Memoir reports, school journals and general journal during data collection processes. My developing perceptions were shared in on-going communication and debriefing sessions, by phone, email, or face to face, with my research supervisor, who was also the Australian Catholic University representative on the National Reference Group of the PALL Pilot Project. This was undertaken to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. Furthermore, "member checks" were undertaken with principal participants relating to data synthesised and reported (Guba, 1981, Shenton, 2004) during the PALL Pilot Project to add to the trustworthiness of the study.

I also established an audit trail (Creswell 2008; Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004) to trace the research process in relation to decisions made and procedures described during the data analysis process. My beliefs and assumptions in relation to decisions made and methods adopted were also articulated and shared on a regular basis with my supervisor.

3.9.5 Delimitations

The scope and timing of the research were delimitated in this study. The research was carried out over a two year period and was conducted within the boundaries of the Northern Territory Catholic Education system that is situated with the Diocese of Darwin. The purposive sample of participants was limited to the principals from four urban and rural Catholic primary schools in the Northern Territory. All the principals in this study were also participants in the Northern Territory component of the PALL Pilot project.

As outlined in section 3.4.3 the school sites from which the principals were drawn all displayed factors that are used in categorise Australian schools considered to be operating in disadvantaged educational contexts. These elements included enrolments of students from Aboriginal or Torres Islander backgrounds, language backgrounds other than English and low socio-economic backgrounds. Geographic isolation was also a consideration in relation to the context in which these schools operated. The socio economic status ratings for each of these schools was within the average range for all Australian schools which placed them slightly above the socio-economic average for the Northern Territory.

3.9.6 Generalisations

The issue within qualitative research is the extent to which generalisation of results from one qualitative study to another can occur given the significance of the context (Shenton, 2004). This is a small qualitative case study within a bounded context. While it does provide a rich description of the nature of coaching support that principals required in the context of the study the generalizability of the findings to the general principal population is not possible.

However, information has been detailed relating to the research methodology and design employed in this study. The nature of the data collection processes and the time period over which the data was collected has also been included. Background information has been provided in relation to the school sites and the role of the LAA to establish the context in which this study was undertaken and to provide sufficient description of the phenomenon in question. Details have also been provided in relation to the elements of the

challenging contexts of the school sites and the nature of the participants in order to elicit questions in the mind of the reader as to whether the themes identified for principal support and the forms of coaching provided may be relevant to their context.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented details of the research methodology and design of this study. The epistemology and theoretical perspectives underpinning the research methodology were discussed. The qualitative case study methodology employed to facilitate an in depth exploration of the research problem was explained. A discussion of the approach used to engage principal participants, the context of the study and the position of the researcher was presented. Data gathering methods that were employed, linked to the use of observations, semi structured interviews and document analysis, were outlined. The data analysis methods and process used to undertake the purposeful synthesis method thematic analysis of the data was explained. Ethical considerations relevant to the research methodology were discussed. The limitations and delimitations inherent within the research methodology, and that are embedded in the research design, were also presented.

The application of this research methodology and design to the analysis of the data led to the emergence of a number of common themes and key understandings. These findings are outlined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1   Introduction

The findings from the data generated through the purposeful synthesis thematic analysis methodology outlined in Chapter 3 are reported in this chapter. In qualitative research, a range of reporting methods can be used to display data from thematic data analysis, depending on the nature of the understandings required to inform the research questions. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) assert that rich descriptions of the social world are valued. The aim in qualitative research is to "provide rich description in order to illuminate particular ideas, views and experiences" (Mutch, 2005, p. 180). Qualitative researchers direct attention to the specifics of particular cases when reporting findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The reality and constraints of the context in which the study is situated are considered and embedded in findings.

As previously outlined in chapter one, section 1.4.1 of this dissertation, in the Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) Pilot project the key role of the equivalent of four full time LAAs was to provide mentoring and coaching support for "up to 15 principals" (Dempster et al., 2012, p. 5) in each of the participating states/territory in relation to the assigned follow-up project tasks (see Appendix A) that were linked to five professional development modules that were delivered over a 15 month time period (Dempster et al., 2012). It was also expected that the LAAs would communicate information to the principals relating to the organisation and delivery of the five professional development modules and that they would advise the principals on matters associated with literacy development in their school contexts (see Appendix G). The expected number of interactions with each principal was not delineated in the PALL project. However, the PALL pilot project report indicated that a total of 4363 interactions were recorded in the LAA Aide Memoir database (see Appendix B) in relation to the role of the LAAs during the project (Dempster et al., 2012). As previously outlined in section 1.4.1, the broader PALL project reported findings relating to (i) who initiated what percentage of the contacts between the LAAs and the principals, (ii) the percentage of different forms of interactions that were used (i.e. phone, email or face-to-face) to mentor and coach the principals in each state/territory to undertake the tasks assigned as follow up to the professional development

modules (see Appendix A), and (ii) the main foci of the support provided. The findings articulated in the broader PALL project in relation to the percentage of initiations, forms and foci of the seven LAAs' interactions with the 56 principals in the PALL project are also summarised below in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Percentage of Initiations, Forms and Foci of All LAAs' Interactions in the PALL Project

Aspects reported	Percentage
Percentage of initiation of interactions by LAAs	68%
Percentage of initiation of interactions by principals	32%
Percentage of email interaction	50%
Percentage of phone interactions	37%
Percentage of face-to-face interactions	12%
Percentage of interactions focussed on discussion of purpose, goals and expectations, professional development and coordination and management of the curriculum	28%
Percentage of interactions focussed on discussions of qualitative and quantitative data	44%

In this case study, the data that was analysed to inform the findings pertained to instances where the Northern Territory LAA provided support for principals directly related to their leadership of literacy learning in four Catholic primary school sites during the period of the PALL Pilot Project. Interactions of the LAA with the four principals in relation to general management aspects of the PALL Pilot Project in the Northern Territory context were not included in the data collection and analysis of the findings of this study. The findings from the data analysis that are presented in the following discussion report the form of the interactions of the LAA, over a two year period, in supporting principals to lead literacy learning in four challenging Catholic Primary School sites located in the Northern Territory. Findings in relation to the effectiveness of the forms of support provided and the identification of factors which facilitated or inhibited that support are also presented.

The findings that emerged from the successive approximation and illustrative data analysis methods, in relation to the forms of the support that were provided to Northern Territory Catholic primary school principal participants in the PALL Pilot project, are presented under four themes and several sub-themes that emerged during the data analysis. An

additional fifth theme, which emerged from the negative case method data analysis, is also presented. These findings were identified through the thematic analysis of the following data sources;

- LAA Aide memoir database;
- field notes, observations and reflections recorded in the four school journals,
- general observations and reflections recorded in the LAA journal
- relevant documents.

In addition the findings in relation to the effectiveness of these forms of support are presented. These findings emerged from the thematic analysis of the qualitative data from the principal interviews, the text from email transactions between the LAA and the principals linked to feedback for reporting purposes throughout the PALL Pilot Project, and principal reflections and comments recorded in the LAA journal during the PALL Pilot Project.

Finally the findings that emerged regarding factors that facilitated or inhibited the provision of such support are presented. These findings emerged from the negative case method data analysis of the following data sources;

- LAA Aide memoir database;
- field notes, observations and reflections recorded in the four school journals,
- relevant general observations and reflections recorded in the LAA journal
- text data from the two principal interviews.

Miles and Huberman (1994) posit that, the formats for displaying qualitative data "can be as various as the imagination" (p. 93) of the researcher. Data can be reported in text, tables, graphs and numbers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Matrices made up of "defined rows and columns" and concept maps which have "a series of linked nodes" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 93) can be used to display qualitative data. Textual quotations from participants, interview transcripts, field notes and documentation can also be used (Mutch, 2005). In qualitative research, reports containing statistical information of findings, can also be presented because it is perceived that these types of reports can "carry social meaning" in relation to the context in which they are created (Neuman, 2006). Consequently a range of

methods have been used to display the data and report the findings that are discussed in the following sections.

4.2   Forms of Support Provided

4.2.1   Introduction

The discussion in this section focuses on reporting specific findings relevant to the form of the interactions of the Northern Territory LAA in supporting the four Catholic principals to lead literacy learning in their school contexts during the period of the study. The findings in terms of the effectiveness of the forms of support provided are interwoven in the discussion of the evidence of the nature of the interactions cited.

Consequently, the findings presented in this section will inform the conclusions and recommendations in relation to the first two research sub questions:

> What forms of support were provided to Northern Territory Catholic primary school principal participants in the Principals as Literacy Leaders Pilot project?
>
> How effective were these forms of support?

4.2.2   Initiators, mode of delivery and key focus areas of support

I initially collated and analysed the textual data from three of the sections in the LAA data base to identify any patterns in my LAA interactions in supporting the principals to lead literacy learning in the four school sites discussed in this case study. Three sections of data were accessed from the LAA database for this stage of the data analysis. The sections used related to the data on the initiator of the interactions, the type of contact used for interactions, and the focus areas for interactions that occurred. To extract and synthesise this data, I designed three content analysis matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994) made up of intersecting columns to facilitate the extraction, recording and display of the relevant data from the case study to inform findings in relation to the common forms of support provided by the LAA.

To determine who initiated support interactions, I used the content analysis matrix that is displayed in Table 4.2, to facilitate the counting, recording and synthesis of the textual data that was entered in the "Initiator" section of the LAA database. There were 128 interactions that were recorded in the database for the four school sites. I counted and recorded on the matrix the occurrences of the number of times a principal had initiated the request for support as well as the number of times the support had been initiated by the LAA for each school site. I then collated and recorded the data from each school site to report the findings displayed in Table 4.2.

The data in the first column indicates the school sites. The data in the second column indicates the number of recorded interactions that were evident in the LAA data base for each school site. The data displayed in the third and fourth columns relates to the total number and percentage of time the principal in each school site initiated the contact with the LAA. The fourth and fifth columns display the data that relates to the total number and percentage of time that the LAA initiated the contact in each school site. The last line in the table presents the synthesis of the data for all four school sites. Of the 128 recorded LAA interactions with the principals in the four school sites, 96 interactions, or 75% of the contacts, were initiated by the principals. 32 of the interactions, or 25% of the 128 contacts were initiated by the LAA. Through the data synthesis outlined above it is evident that the main initiation of contact for support provision from the LAA came from the principals of the four school sites.

Table 4.2

Initiator of Support from Northern Territory Literacy Achievement Advisor

School site	Total no. of recorded interactions	Initiator of Support			
		Principal		LAA	
		No. of times support initiated	% of time support initiated	No. of times support initiated	% of time support initiated
SS1	33	28	85%	5	15%
SS2	36	23	64%	13	36%
SS3	26	20	77%	6	23%
SS4	33	25	76%	8	24%
All	128	96	75%	32	25%

To determine the preferred mode of delivery of LAA support, I used a content analysis matrix, to synthesise the counting and recording of the textual data entered in the "Type of Contact" section of the LAA database. I recorded the number of times support was provided by email, phone or face to face for each school in 2009 and 2010.

A summary of the data relating to the mode of support delivery provided at each school site that was synthesised through the use of the type of contact matrix is displayed in Table 4.3. The data in the first column indicates the school sites. The data in the second column indicates the total number of times email was used as the mode of delivery to provide support to the principal in each school site. The data displayed in the third column shows the total number of times the telephone was used as the mode of delivery to provide support to the principal in each school site. The fourth column indicates the total number of times face-to face contact was used as the mode of delivery to provide support to the principal in each school site. The last row in the table summarise the total number of times a particular mode of delivery was used to provide support to the principals of the four school sites.

Table 4.3

Modes of Delivery of Northern Territory Literacy Achievement Advisor Support

School Site	Mode of Support Delivery		
	Email	Phone	Face to Face
SS1	5	4	24
SS2	8	0	28
SS3	3	2	21
SS4	9	1	23
All	25	7	96

I transferred the summarised numerical data from the last row of the content analysis matrix for all four school sites into an excel spread sheet to manipulate the data in order to display the overall findings in relation to the preferred mode of support delivery. The synthesis of the summarised data is represented in the pie graph displayed in Figure 4.1. The graph depicts a summary of the percentage of support that was provided by the LAA across all four school sites for each mode of delivery. Of the 128 LAA interactions recorded in the database at the four school sites, seven, or 5%, of the support contact were provided by telephone. Twenty five, or 20%, of the support contacts were provided via email and 96, or 75%, were provided via face to face contact. It is obvious from the pie graph representation of this data that the most common mode of delivery used by the LAA in this study to support principals to lead literacy learning was face to face support.

Figure 4.1

Percentage for each Mode of Delivery of LAA Support
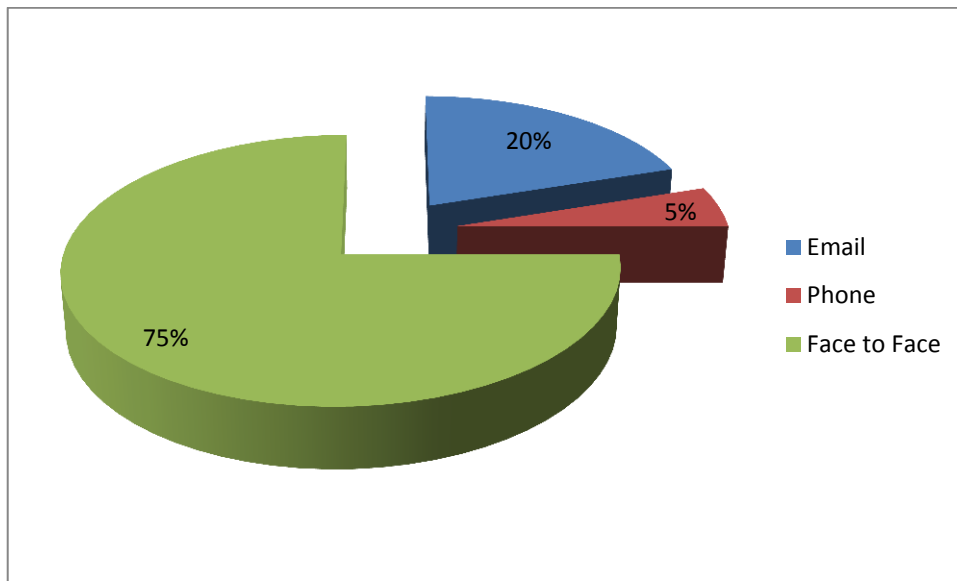
To determine the most common focus areas for support provision across the four school sites, I used a content analysis matrix to count and record the textual data from the "Focus Area" sections of the LAA database against each of the dimensions from the Leadership for Learning Framework (Dempster et al., 2012, p. 7).

The synthesis of the frequency of responses provided in each focus area by the LAA is displayed in Table 4.4. This table displays the collated data by focus area of the 260 instances of the provision of LAA support that were entered in the "focus area" section of the LAA database. I also transferred the tallies for each focus area into a spread sheet to generate the pie graph depicted in Figure 4.4. The pie graph provides an overall visual representation of the frequency of themes for support provision presented in the numerical data that is displayed in Table 4.4.

It is important to note in the interpretation of the data presented in Table 4.4 and Figure 4.2 that there was more than one focus area addressed during most of the LAA contacts at each school site. While the total number of responses recorded in the LAA database was 128, there were a total number of 260 themes of support provision recorded for the nine focus areas. The findings evident in Table 4.4 and Figure 4.2 are outlined below:

- The highest number of instances, 67, occurred in relation to providing principal support in the coordination and management of curriculum, teaching and learning.

- The second highest number of instances, 54, occurred in relation to providing principal support in the facilitation of disciplined dialogue.

- The third highest number of instances, 53, occurred in relation to providing principal support in relation to qualitative literacy evidence.

- The fourth highest number of instances, 30, occurred in relation to providing principal support in relation to quantitative literacy evidence.

- The fifth highest number of instances, 27, occurred in relation to providing principal support in relation to professional development.

The number of instances of support provision evident in relation to the focus areas of shared leadership (11), parent and community connections (9), purpose, goals and expectations (6) and the conditions for learning (3) were significantly less in number.

This initial data synthesis demonstrates that the most prominent focus area for the provision of support is in the area of the coordination and management of teaching, learning and assessment. This is because 67 of the 260 interactions that were recorded in the LAA database were in this focus area.

Table 4.4

Frequency of LAA Responses for Support Provided

Focus Area	Frequency of responses provided
Coordinating and managing curriculum, teaching and learning	67
Facilitated Disciplined Dialogue	54
Literacy Evidence: Qualitative	53
Literacy Evidence: Quantitative	30
Professional Development	27
Shared Leadership	11
Parent and community connections	9
Purpose, goals & expectations	6
Conditions for learning	3

Figure 4.2

Frequency of themes for support provided
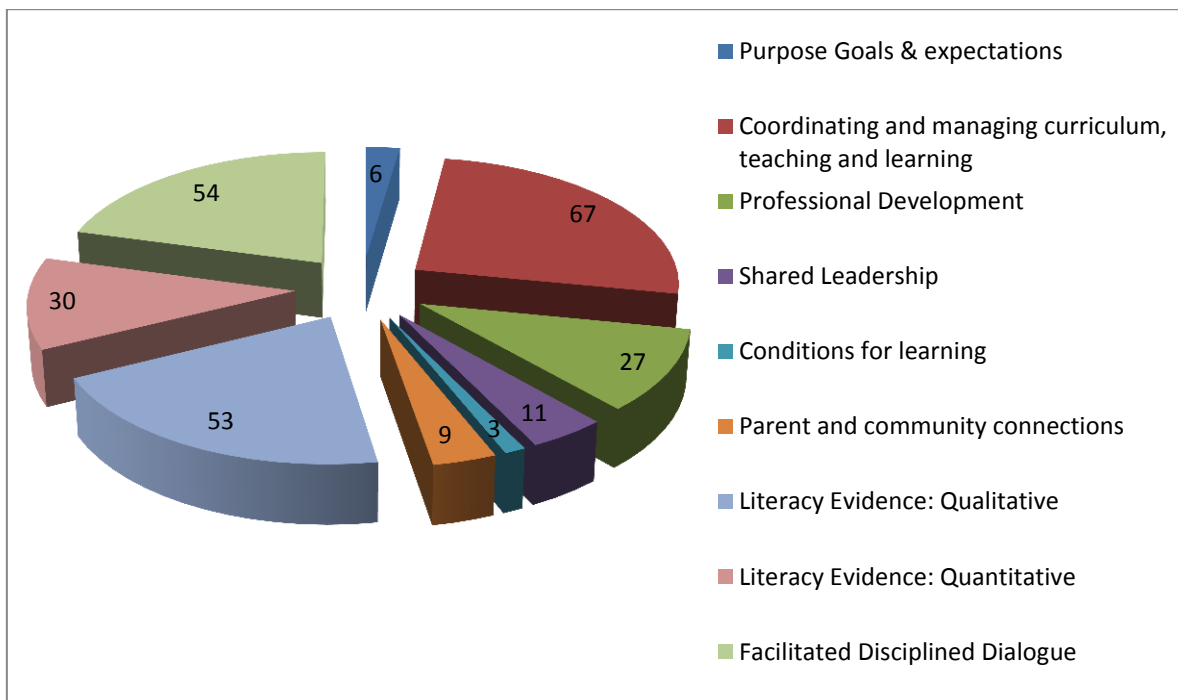
However, the analysis of the data also indicates that if the data pertaining to the provision of support in qualitative literacy evidence (53 instances) is amalgamated with the data on quantitative literacy evidence support (30 instances), then leading the use literacy evidence to inform improvement becomes the most prominent focus area for the provision of support. This is because the amalgamation of the literacy evidence data represents 83 of the 260 themes of support provision recorded in the LAA database. The provision of support in the area of the coordination and management of teaching, learning and assessment then becomes the second most prominent theme for support provision.

The pie graph depicted in Figure 4.3 provides the following visual representation of the amalgamation of this data relating to the percentage of support provided by the LAA in each focus area.

- 32% of the support provided was in relation to the use of literacy evidence (qualitative and quantitative).
- 26% of the support provided was related to the coordination and management of teaching, learning and assessment.
- 21% of support provided was, focused on providing support in relation to facilitating disciplined dialogue.
- 11% of support provided was in relation to leading professional development.
- 4% of the support provided was related to shared leadership.
- 3% of the support provided was in relation to establishing parent and community connections
- 2% of the support provided was in relation to establishing purpose goal and expectations.
- The least amount of support (1%) was provided in relation to the focus area relating to leading the conditions for learning.

Figure 4.3

Amalgamated Percentage of Support Provided by LAA
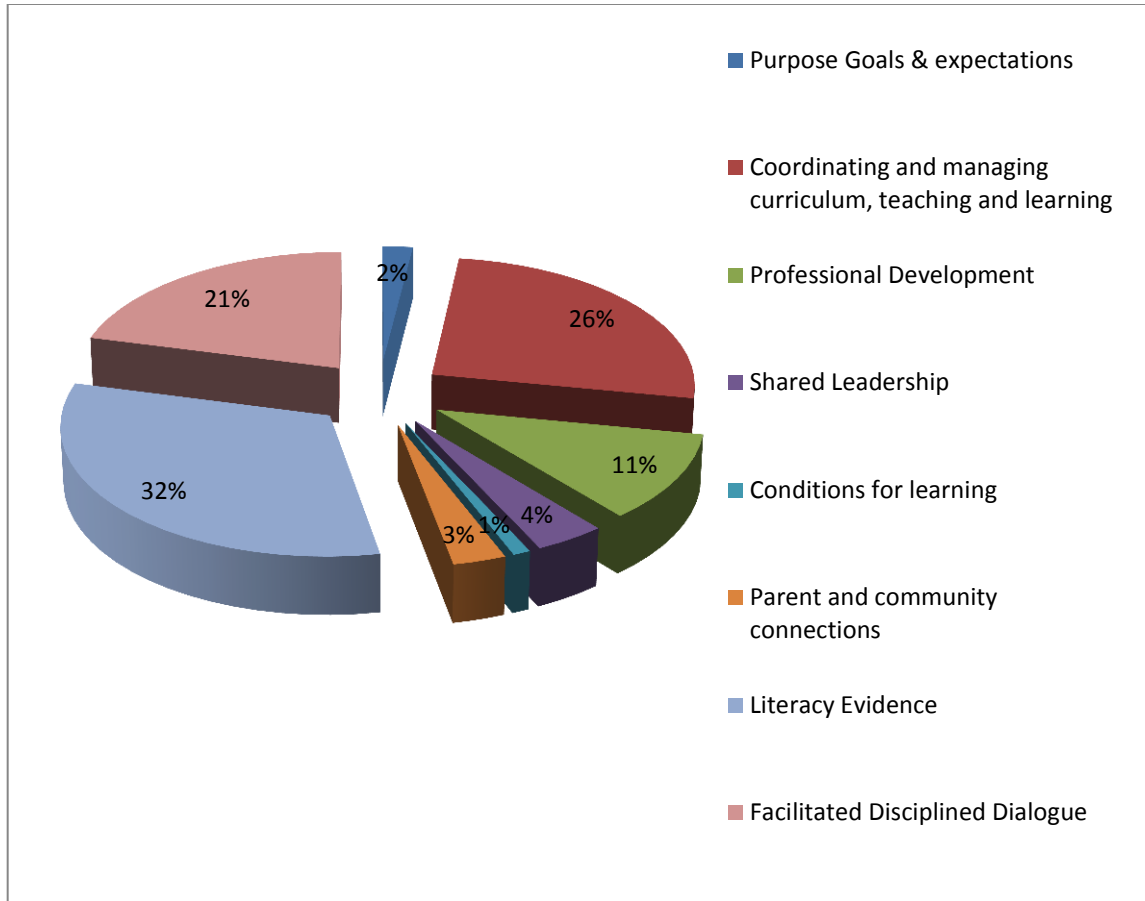
4.2.3   The specific nature of support required - A Conceptual Framework

The findings discussed in this section provide more specific details of the forms of support that the LAA provided for the principals in the four school sites in relation to their leadership of literacy learning. Several of the qualitative data sources identified in Chapter 3 were accessed and synthesised, using the successive approximation and illustrative data analysis methods to inform the findings outlined in this section.

The data sources analysed were

- LAA Database section entitled "Issues or Outcomes from the meeting",
- LAA general journal observations and reflections,
- Observation data, field notes and reflections recorded in the four school site journals throughout the LAA interactions with the principals.
- Email transactions between LAA and the principals of each school site.
- Qualitative textual data from the semi-structured principal interviews undertaken by the LAA and the independent Australian Catholic University researcher.
- Relevant documents that were used in the provision of LAA support.

I used successive approximation analysis to move backwards and forwards between the qualitative data in these sources to identify recurring themes linked to the specific type and nature of support principals require to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. Initially I printed the text reports for the LAA interactions in each school site from the "issues or outcomes from the meeting" section in the NT Aide Memoir. Throughout my reading of this textual data, I undertook a hand analysis using a set of codes that emerged from the reading of the data. I linked these codes to a set of coloured pens to facilitate the labelling, annotation, synthesis and identification of the evidence linked to the themes that emerged during this data analysis.

Once I had identified the themes evident in the Aide Memoir, I then applied a similar process to identify and analyse any additional information from data in the observations, field notes and reflections in the school journals that had not been transferred to the Aide Memoir entries. I scanned and printed the relevant sections from the school journals and the LAA general journal. I applied the colour coded label codes previously used as I read each of these data sources to identify and annotate the evidence relevant to the themes that had emerged.

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 4.4 emerged during the recursive and illustrative data analysis processes which were focused on identifying the fundamental nature of support required by principals to lead literacy learning. The conceptual framework depicts the interplay between the fundamental coaching support principals require to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts and the four themes that

emerged in relation to the key focus areas for that coaching support. The five dimensions identified for the provision of coaching support have implications for the role of personnel who are charged with supporting principals to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

Coaching support was identified as the fundamental form of support required to build principal capabilities to lead literacy learning. Five dimensions emerged from the recursive synthesis of the data that collectively defined the nature of the coaching support role of the LAA. The five dimensions of coaching support identified are: explicit instruction, literacy advice, school leadership advice, facilitating learning conversations and modelling of practice. Coaching support and the five related dimensions for the nature of this coaching are depicted in the box in the lower half of the conceptual framework. An arrow is used in the conceptual framework to link the coaching support to the role of the LAA. The five dimensions inform the nature of the coaching role of the LAA in supporting principals to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. A further set of arrows is used to link the role of the LAA to the key focus areas for coaching support. These arrows represent the influence the five dimensions have on the form of coaching support delivery provided for principals relevant to each key focus area.

Four themes emerged from the analysis of the data to describe the key focus areas for the coaching support required by principals to lead literacy learning. The four key focus areas are depicted in the boxes on the right hand side of the diagram. They are: data literacy; professional learning; teaching, learning and assessment; and literacy improvement planning. Each focus area is colour coded to link with the data analysis coding system used throughout the analysis of the data in this study.

Figure 4.4

Conceptual Framework – Supporting Principals to lead literacy learning
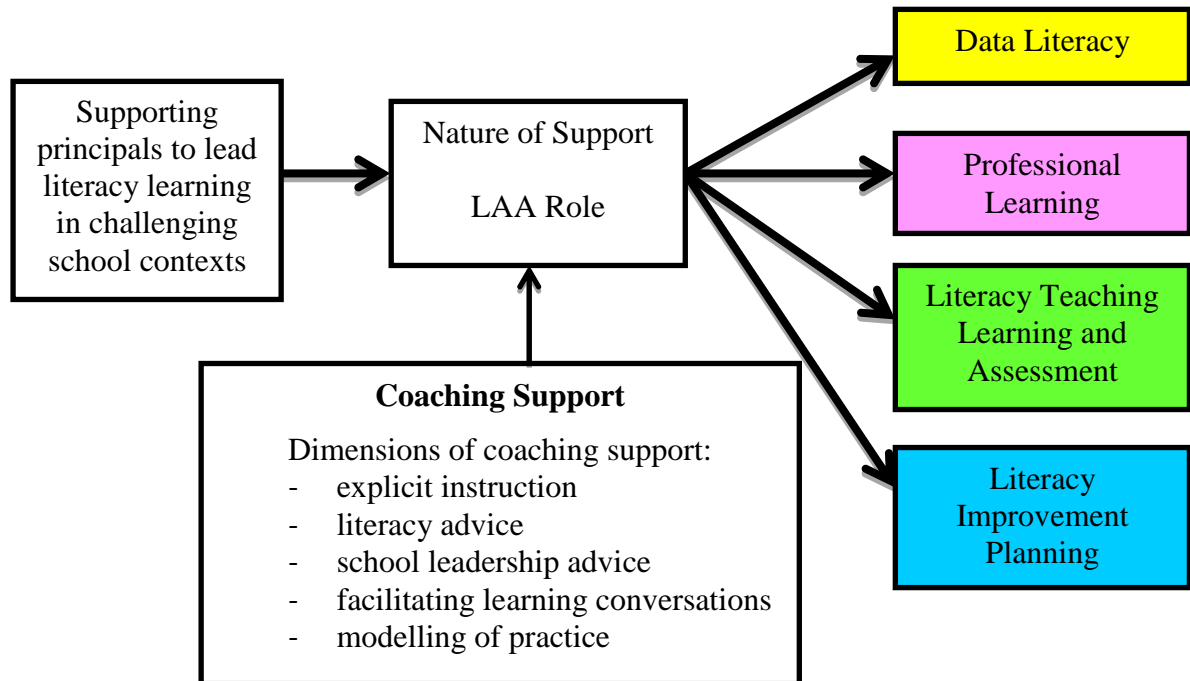
I then employed the illustrative method of data analysis to determine the specific nature of the coaching support that was provided under each theme. I made copies of the coded data from the successive approximation data analysis stage. Initially, I analyzed, labeled and annotated the data sources from one school site to identify key sub-themes that emerged under each of the key theme areas. I then transferred the identified sub-themes onto sticky note labels. I set up large sheets of paper to establish a content analysis matrix for each key theme area. I placed sticky note labels representing the dimension of support from the conceptual framework across the top of each sheet and placed the sticky note labels representing each subtheme down the side. I then made colored copies of the coded and labeled text data sources and extracted the evidence pertaining to each sub-theme. I cut the evidence relevant to each sub-theme into strips and then placed these in piles in the relevant section of the large matrix sheets of paper for each of the key theme areas.

Once I had sorted all the text data I then read through each pile of strips to identify and synthesize the specific types of support provided related to each sub-theme. By employing

this data analysis process I was able to identify the specific details of the sub-themes for the four overarching themes and their links to the five dimensions of coaching support that principals require to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

The specific details of the five dimensions of coaching support and how they link with, and are informed by, the four themes pertaining to the nature of support principals require, are discussed in detail in the following sections of this chapter. Initially, the general findings in regard to the five dimensions of coaching support: explicit instruction, provision of literacy advice, provision of school leadership advice, facilitating learning conversations and modelling practice, linked to the sub-themes that emerged, are presented. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the themes and sub-themes pertaining to the specific nature of the coaching support that principals require to lead literacy learning. The findings from this part of the analysis of the data are reported under the four overarching themes that emerged from the data analysis: data literacy, professional learning, teaching, learning and assessment and literacy improvement planning.

It is important to point out at this juncture in the discussion of the findings, that the analysis of the data highlighted that, in the majority of the interactions that the LAA had with the principals in the four school sites, more than one dimension of coaching support provision was evident across the focus areas of support defined by the overarching themes and sub-themes. Consideration of this aspect is important when interpreting the findings in relation to determining the nature of coaching support principals require to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning in the challenging school contexts that are the focus for this study.

4.2.4   Fundamental Form of Support

Recurring evidence of the application of the fundamental form of coaching support and the five dimensions of that support, were identified in the analysis of the LAA interactions with the principals in the four school sites. All principals in the study received one on one coaching support from the LAA. The analysis of the qualitative data for all interactions recorded in the Aide Memoire involved one or more of the dimensions of coaching support. The focus of the coaching support provided was based on addressing the

individual developmental needs of each principal. In the coaching interactions the LAA facilitated learning conversations with each principal. In some instances the focused learning conversations also involved other members of each school leadership team. When facilitating learning conversations, the LAA professionally challenged each principal's thinking and practice in relation to their leadership of literacy learning. The LAA coached each principal to build their literacy leadership capabilities in the areas that informed the focus of each interaction. Coaching interactions focused on providing explicit instruction in developing the skills required to lead literacy learning relevant to each principal's needs and the context of the school. The focus was on building the individual principals' capabilities to lead key aspects of literacy learning and literacy improvement planning within each school context.

Coaching support was provided in a number of areas. For example, the data analysis identified no less that 87 instances where the coaching support provided focused on building the principals capabilities to lead Wave 1 and Wave 2 literacy practices in their school contexts. Specific emphasis for the provision of coaching support was placed on the literacy leadership aspects required to improve reading and writing. The findings indicate that the LAA also provided coaching support to develop the principals' understandings and skills to enable them to apply the literacy leadership aspects emphasised in the PALL Pilot Project to their school contexts. Explicit instruction, literacy advice and the facilitation of learning conversations relating to meeting the needs of EAL/D and Indigenous learners in the acquisition of SAE literacy skills was also provided. This focus was an important consideration in the leadership of literacy learning in the context of the schools in this study. However, this aspect had not been addressed in the PALL training modules. The coaching dimensions of school leadership advice, facilitation of learning conversations and modelling of practice were also applied to build the capabilities of the principals in planning, leading and facilitating key components of literacy school improvement practice.

The following comments, made by the principals in the semi-structured interviews with the researcher, illustrate the nature and effectiveness of the coaching support that was provided for the principals in this case study.

"The support of the LAA in being able to facilitate disciplined dialogue and keeping me on track with tasks that need to be done has built my capacity to lead literacy learning in my school. The individual coaching from the LAA was the most challenging but the most effective element of the project." (Principal A)

"LAA role has had a big impact as a professional sounding board. She has been a mentor for the context in the school. This has assisted in developing my leadership relevant to the school context." (Principal B)

I also applied a negative case analysis to the principals' responses to the questions in the data from the principal interviews that I undertook as the researcher in the case study. The analysis of the principal responses to the question posed in the semi structured interview; *What further support do you require/would you like in order for you to effectively lead literacy learning/improvement in the future*?, highlighted the value that the four principals placed on having access to on-going, one-on-one coaching support to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. In their responses to this question all four principals expressed a desire for on-going coaching support similar to that provided by the LAA in this case study. The comments below, which were articulated by three of the principals in the study, indicated their desire to have on-going access to a literacy coach, who they could consult regularly and who could provide one on one support when needed with aspects relating to planning for literacy improvement.

"I would like the LAA role to continue. To have a person as a resource I can phone and consult. The LAA role has been an invaluable support for principals leading literacy in the way we have in our schools. It is almost like having access to a coach - a 'literacy coach'." (Principal D)

"A coach and mentor to help you do critical planning for literacy. Someone who visits you once per term to keep you on track."
(Principal C)

"I would love a literacy coach who I could regularly access and work with rigorously. This element should not be optional for principals. It should be directive in nature." (Principal A)

"Have a regular mentor for literacy and data analysis" (Principal B)

The findings on the application of the five dimensions of coaching support to the key focus areas for support are discussed in detail in the following sections. The discussion is presented under the overarching themes and relevant sub-themes that were identified in the analysis of the data. The four overarching themes are used in the heading for each section to provide focal points for the nature of coaching support required by principals to build the capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

Additional headings have been used in each section to identify the sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the data that link to each overarching theme. The sub-themes report the specific forms of support that were provided through the five dimensions of coaching. Evidence from the analysis of the qualitative data is included in the discussion to provide further clarity around the findings in relation to the forms of coaching support provided. Qualitative evidence is also included in each section to enable conclusions to be drawn regarding the effectiveness of the coaching support discussed in this case study.

4.2.5 Theme 1: Leading data literacy support

4.2.5.1 Overview of support provided

A range of coaching support was provided by the LAA to build the principals' capabilities to lead data literacy to inform literacy improvement in their school contexts. Coaching support was required in 99 of the interactions to develop the principals' capabilities to lead the collection, collation analysis and use of data to inform literacy improvement.

The dimensions of coaching support required and their link to the sub-themes are depicted in Figure 4.5. The type of coaching support provided included: explicit instruction; literacy advice; school leadership advice; facilitating learning conversations and modelling of practice. These five dimensions of coaching support are depicted in the box in the bottom

of the diagram. Their link to the nature of coaching support that was required is indicated by the arrow. The box in the middle of the diagram in Figure 4.5 outlines the four sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the data in relation to the specific nature of the coaching support that principals in the study required to build their capacity to lead data literacy to inform literacy improvement. Coaching support was required in the:

- development of data literacy leadership skills and understandings,

- interpretation and analysis of NAPLAN data,

- interpretation and analysis of curriculum related student achievement data, and

- interpretation of school level data to inform literacy improvement support.

Figure 4.5

Theme 1 – Overview of Support Provided

**Principal leadership of
data literacy to improve literacy**

Nature of Support

- Development of data literacy leadership skills and understandings support
  Interpretation and analysis of NAPLAN data support
- Interpretation and analysis of NTCF student achievement data support
- Interpretation and analysis of school level data to inform literacy support

Coaching Support

Dimensions of coaching support:
- explicit instruction
- literacy advice
- school leadership advice
- facilitating learning conversations
- modelling of practice

4.2.5.2 Development of data literacy leadership skills and understandings support

All the principals in the study required coaching support in developing their skills and understandings as data literate leaders. The Principals required coaching support to develop their skills in the collection, collation, analysis and use of both qualitative and quantitative data. Coaching was provided in the use of strategies to lead the disaggregation of data. The principals were coached in using strategies, such as a stop light analogy color coding system, to disaggregate and make sense of data to inform whole school and literacy intervention improvement planning. Literacy advice, explicit instruction and modelling of practice was provided for all the principals to develop their knowledge, understanding and application of using achievement standards and expected levels of achievement in the disaggregation and analysis of data. In addition, literacy advice and explicit instruction were provided to develop the principals' awareness of the availability and use of system resources to support the disaggregation of data sources.

The following LAA school journal observation illustrates the nature of the coaching support provided:

> "LAA raised principal's awareness of the support documents available for reading and writing to assist in the disaggregation of NAPLAN data linked to NTCF achievement standards to inform whole school improvement planning, targeted intervention and teaching and learning foci." (SS1)

In 12 interactions coaching support was provided to build principal capabilities in using data to inform literacy improvement planning. The principals required coaching support in analyzing and linking data sources to inform planning for literacy improvement. In these instances explicit instruction and modelling of practice coupled with literacy advice and facilitation of learning conversations were provided for the principals to build their capabilities in identifying, analyzing and using data to inform Wave 1 whole school literacy improvement planning. Coaching support was also provided in analyzing and using data to inform Wave 2 planning for intervention.

The following extracts from LAA discussions with two of the principals that were recorded in the school journals reflect the need for the provision of coaching support in this area.

> "The principal believes there is a lot to do in relation to the aspects of
> using data to inform teaching and learning and school improvement."
> (SS2)

> "There is a need to transform data to inform teaching practice rather than just
> having data for data sake. We need to improve active participation in decision
> making linked to data use." (SS4)

Explicit instructions were provided in at least 4 instances to raise the principals' awareness of the need to use both qualitative and quantitative data to inform improvement. Explicit instructions, school leadership advice, modelling of practice and the facilitation of learning conversations occurred to develop the principals' skills in triangulating data sources to inform literacy improvement.   The following example taken from a LAA email transaction with the principals' illustrates the nature of some of the coaching support that was provided. In this example coaching is provided in relation to the collection and recording of qualitative data to facilitate future triangulation of this information with formal NAPLAN data to inform literacy improvement planning.

> "It may be beneficial to your schools' future analysis of your NAPLAN data to
> gather any anecdotal comments and observations from staff in your school who
> have administered the tests while this is fresh in their memory. This qualitative data
> may provide some valuable information that will help to inform future analysis of
> your NAPLAN results at school, cohort and individual student levels."

Evidence was identified in at least 5 interactions where coaching support was provided to build the principals' capabilities in using available resources to support data analysis. This included explicit instructions and modelling of practice in using computerized electronic databases and associated computer software to facilitate the collection, collation and analysis of data. Specific coaching support was provided in developing the principals'

skills in using the NT electronic Reporting and Analysis Data (RAAD) NAPLAN database tool and Maze data base reports to inform literacy improvement. The RAAD tool can be used to manipulate and report NAPLAN data to inform foci for improvement. Maze is the commercial name of a fully customizable, modular, integrated computerized School Management System that has the capacity to assist with the efficient management of academic reporting, enrolment and student management data. The following quote taken from an email transaction between one principal and the LAA illustrates the nature of some of the coaching support provided for principals in this area.

> *Principal query*: 'I am exporting the files from RAAD into a folder for teacher access to look at our data. I can do the export and then save as an excel file. The only thing is when I open up the doc in the excel file, the students results are in a mixed order. Is there something I am not doing correctly? I know this is a technical question but can you provide the missing link for me, please? (Principal D)

> *LAA coaching support*: Advised principal that this is an issue within the RAAD tool when converting data files to excel. Suggested that a better option at this stage was to copy to clipboard and paste in word document. Reminded principal of the need to sort and label data files before transferring to documents via this function."

Two specific instances were identified where the LAA provided literacy advice and school leadership advice in facilitating staff professional development to increase whole staff data literacy skills in the use of curriculum achievement data and NAPLAN data to inform literacy improvement in reading and writing. The following extract from an email transaction from the LAA to one of the principals illustrates the negotiated focus of professional development provided in one school site:

> "I will clarify the 'expected levels of achievement' in relation to the new NTCF bands and what this means for the school and teachers in terms of making on balance judgments about student achievement to inform reporting. During the session I will also present the data from Semester 1 reporting to assist the teachers to make connections to their teaching and learning programs." (SS1)

4.2.5.3   Interpretation and analysis of NAPLAN data support

Coaching support was provided in at least 16 interactions in relation to the collation, analysis and use of NAPLAN reading data. Coaching support provided during these interactions included explicit instruction, literacy advice, modelling of practices, and facilitation of learning conversations to disaggregate the data against achievement standards so that the information made sense for teachers. Coaching in the extraction of useful data to inform the teaching and learning of reading from NAPLAN RAAD reports was also modelled.

Explicit instruction, literacy advice, modelling of practices, and the facilitation of learning conversations was provided in another 3 interactions in relation to the collation, analysis and use of NAPLAN writing data. The coaching support provided during these interactions included modelling how to access and analyze NAPLAN writing data. Disaggregation of the NAPLAN writing data against NTCF achievement standards and ESL Levels was modelled in order to make sense of the data to inform teaching and learning.

The following LAA reflective comment recorded in one school journal reflects the nature of the principal professional learning that occurred as a result of the coaching support provided.

> "The principal's analysis of new NAPALN data sets is evidence of her
> professional learning in data literacy. She made the links between NTCF
> achievement standards and where this linked to current RAAD assessment
> data to identify Wave 2 students and aspects for improvement. She also
> applied information previously modelled by LAA to do question analysis of
> NAPLAN reading data." (SS4)

Further evidence of the effectiveness of the type of coaching support that was provided for principals in this case study is illustrated in the following LAA observation that was recorded in another school journal following the provision of on-going coaching support

for the principal to build her capabilities to lead the interpretation and analysis of NAPLAN data:

> "The principal is using and applying aspects of data literacy developed through LAA support. On the school development day at the commencement of this school year the principal went through the analysis of NAPLAN Reading and Writing data with the staff to inform teaching and learning programs." (SS1)

4.2.5.4 Interpretation and analysis of NTCF student achievement data support

The provision of coaching support was evident in 17 interactions in relation to the collation, analysis and use of NTCF reading and writing data. The coaching support provided during these interactions included modelling of the collation and disaggregation of NTCF report data against the achievement standards for reading and writing to inform teaching and learning. The following extracts from the LAA observations, field notes and reflections recorded in the school journals provide details of the coaching support provided in this area.

> "Provided and explained overview of NTCF Semester 1 Reading data for principal against NTCF expectations and achievement standards" (SS2)

> "Modelled the collation of Maze semester one data to identify students at or below NTCF expected level to target improvement in reading and writing." (SS3)

> "Modelled key questions for the principal to use in disciplined dialogue with staff regarding linking NTCF data to teaching, learning and assessment practice. Coached the principal in using these questions to lead discussion of NTCF data with the staff." (SS4)

Literacy advice and facilitation of learning conversations were also provided to raise awareness of the need to address inconsistencies in teacher judgments in relation to achievement standards. The following LAA observations and reflections from the school journals provide examples of the nature of coaching support provided:

> "Discussed NTCF data analysis with the principal. Some sections of data analysis will need to be revisited as data set is not complete. I raised concerns regarding the inconsistency of teacher judgments throughout the discussion with the principal." (SS3)

> Facilitated learning conversation with principal to raise awareness that "it is not possible to use the NTCF data for the majority of the schools' current Year 3 and 4 students to identify where these students are currently at and what needs to be the focus for their teaching program due to inconsistencies in teacher judgments' in reporting data and limited data in some reading strands." (SS2)

The effectiveness of the coaching support that was provided in this area is demonstrated in the following principal comment that was recorded in one school journal:

> "NTCF judgements from Semester One are more accurate as a result of the workshops you (LAA) ran last year." (Principal A)

4.2.5.5 Interpretation and analysis of school level data to inform literacy improvement support

Coaching support in the analysis and use of school level reading and writing data to inform literacy improvement and teaching, learning and assessment practice was provided by the LAA. There was evidence of at least 4 interactions where the LAA provided coaching and literacy advice in relation to using school level data to inform teaching and learning. The nature of coaching support provided is reflected in the following LAA observations and reflections from the school journals:

"Follow up support is needed in relation to collating and analyzing current school generated data for reading and writing to inform Wave 1 & 2 literacy improvement planning." (SS3)

"Currently benchmark reading data is only recorded in levels and therefore does not assist in diagnosing needs for reading improvement. I raised principals' awareness, facilitated learning discussions and modelled how to collate and use PM Benchmark data to inform teaching and learning." (SS4)

The following comments, made by two of the principals in meetings with the LAA, and noted in the school journals, indicate changes that occurred in their school contexts due to the principal's increased focus on leading and using data to inform literacy improvement.

"The conversations I am having with parents have changed. I can now discuss their kids learning, where they are at and what we need to do every day based on the evidence." (Principal A)

"There is a significant change across the board in the conversations teachers are having based on the data. There is a real focus on students, where they are at and the implications for teaching." (Principal A)

"Different conversations are happening with parents/caregivers because of the data. We are now able to provide specific information to parents on what students need to improve. We now have more understanding about students' specific needs." (Principal D)

4.2.6   Theme 2 – Leading professional learning support

4.2.6.1   Overview of support provided

The synthesis of the data indicated that all the principals required coaching support to lead professional learning in their school contexts. There were 36 interactions where the principals required coaching support to build their capabilities in establishing and leading professional learning communities in their school contexts that were focused on literacy improvement.   The principals also required coaching support to apply the literacy leadership professional development undertaken in the PALL modules to their practice in their school contexts.

Three sub-themes emerged from the analysis of the data in relation to the specific nature of coaching support principals require to lead professional learning focused on literacy improvement. The specific dimensions of coaching support provided along with the sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the data for coaching support in this area are depicted in Figure 4.6. The five dimensions of coaching support are depicted in the box in the bottom of the diagram. Their link to the nature of coaching support that was required is indicated by the arrow. The box in the middle of the diagram in figure 4.6 outlines the three sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the data in relation to the specific nature of the coaching support that was provided to build the principals' capabilities to lead professional learning in their challenging school contexts. The sub-themes identified in the findings are:
- the provision of principal and leadership team professional development
- the provision of staff professional development, and
- the establishment of networking opportunities.

Figure 4.6

Theme 2 - Overview of Support Provided

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                           │
│         Principal leadership of           │
│          Professional learning            │
│                                           │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                    ▲
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│           Nature of Support               │
│                                           │
│  ▪ Principal and leadership professional  │
│    development                            │
│  ▪ Staff professional development         │
│  ▪ Establishment of Networking opportunities │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                    ▲
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│            Coaching Support               │
│                                           │
│   Dimensions of coaching support:         │
│     -  explicit instruction               │
│     -  literacy advice                    │
│     -  school leadership advice           │
│     -  facilitating learning              │
│        conversations                      │
│     -  modelling of practice              │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
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4.2.6.2   Principal and Leadership Professional Development

The analysis of the data indicated that all principals in the study required coaching support to embed their professional learning from the PALL Pilot Project modules into practice. The findings indicated that the LAA also facilitated further professional development for the principals and other members of the school leadership teams. The data analysis indicated that the focus of this professional development was threefold. Firstly it was intended to build the principals' literacy knowledge. Secondly the intention was to develop the principals' understandings and skills in leading whole school literacy practices. Thirdly, the aim was to develop the principals' confidence in facilitating learning

conversations with staff to promote and embed effective literacy practices in their challenging school contexts.

The LAA provided ongoing coaching to support the principals' application of their learning from the PALL modules to their leadership of literacy improvement in their school contexts. The need for this type of coaching support is evident in the following interview comments made by the principals:

> "Any PD I do, I feel enthusiastic. I get back to school with good intentions but get caught up in the business of school and don't fully implement what I have learnt. (Principal B)

> "The LAA provided ongoing PD in assisting me to access and use the literature from the modules." (Principal C)

> "I (principal) am having more conversations about literacy which is generating more conversations with others (staff and parents) around literacy. Keeping it (literacy) on the agenda. Have to be a "terrier" and not let go. Have to have the 'courage' to keep going and revisiting. Principals have to be like 'steel' in terms of literacy leadership." (Principal A)

Regular coaching support was provided to facilitate and enhance the principals' literacy professional development. The LAA engaged principals in learning conversations to develop their knowledge and skills in using a range of resources to inform literacy improvement relevant to their school contexts. This coaching support also included instances of the LAA synthesizing professional literature on current "best practice" in literacy teaching and communicating key points to the principals to inform practice in their school contexts.

The following interview comments made by two principals reflect the nature of coaching support provided by the LAA in these instances.

> The LAA provided, "professional development basics in literacy as Principals can be out of touch in accessing and understanding recent resources." (Principal C)

"As a principal, I now have the strength around the research base to say 'this is what needs to happen' in the classroom." (Principal D)

Individual coaching support was provided for three principals to enable them to run professional development in literacy with their staff. In these instances the LAA engaged the principals in coaching conversations to develop their knowledge and skill in using specific literacy resources to inform the professional development sessions they needed to facilitate with staff. An example of this type of coaching support was highlighted in a LAA school journal entry for one school.

In this journal entry the LAA recorded that she had "explained and modelled for the principal linking the *First Steps* reading resources, that the school was using as part of their whole school literacy approach, with the 'reading big six' aspects that had been highlighted in the PALL Pilot Project module." The principal had then used this information to facilitate a discussion at the staff meeting to promote staff reflection on current literacy practice. The following comment, which was recorded in the school journal, indicates the effectiveness of this type of coaching for principals.

"I am now confident to run this literacy session with staff" (Principal A)

Another comment from a principal that was recorded by the LAA in the school journal indicated the effectiveness that this type of coaching support had in the school:

"Discussions at staff meetings have changed. Professional learning has now moved to happen first on the agenda. There is a change to a professional learning focus in staff meetings" (Principal D)

The following comment made by one principal that was recorded by the LAA in the school journal is a further indication of the effectiveness of how the regular coaching support has built principals' capabilities to lead professional development in literacy. In this instance it is evident that the principal is taking a more proactive role in literacy professional development for staff. She is focussing on ensuring that whole school Wave 1 literacy practice is embedded across the school.

'I (principal) have developed an induction power point for new teachers outlining what literacy looks like in our school to embed our whole school approach in practice. I have also organised for the CEO curriculum adviser to model the literacy block teaching and learning focus at the start of next year to embed the practices of the literacy block." (Principal A)

A further example of the effectiveness of this type of coaching support in building principal capabilities to lead professional learning is evident in the following extract from one school journal:

"The principal is taking a much more hands on leadership role in leading reading professional development. She is now leading staff in the discussion of data to inform teaching and learning" (LAA reflection – SS1 school journal).

The analysis of the data indicated that ongoing coaching support was provided for all the principals to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning improvement in their school contexts to address the needs of EAL/D students. The LAA also developed and facilitated a context specific professional development program for the principals to increase their knowledge and skills in leading literacy improvement to cater for the needs of EAL/D students. This professional development covered aspects that principals and teachers needed to consider when addressing literacy improvement in NT school contexts. The need for and effectiveness of this type of professional development in supporting principals to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts like the NT is evidenced in the following comments extracted from the written evaluations for the principal professional development session run by LAA:

"The best professional development I have received in understanding the implications of language teaching for Indigenous students. The professional development has provided me with a range of current, significant research to inform decision making in regard to literacy action within our school program." (Principal A)

"The session was very enlightening and I have spoken with the LAA about the need for such a session for all new teachers to the Territory" (Principal D)

"Good to see that ESL and Indigenous education has finally made it to the table as that is what is relevant to all our schools." (Principal C)

The data analysis indicated that in four instances, the LAA facilitated principal induction and provided handover mentoring sessions, when changes in principal leadership occurred during the period of the study. The LAA provided literacy advice and school improvement leadership advice in these instances to ensure continuity in school literacy improvement efforts.

Several instances were also evident in the analysis of the observations and reflections entered in the Aide Memoir and school journals of the LAA providing school leadership advice to support principals in a range of aspects linked to general school leadership and management. When undertaking school visits the principals confided in the LAA as a colleague to debrief school management leadership aspects prior to being in a 'mind space' to commence their interactions related to leading literacy learning. Examples of aspects principals debriefed with or sort school leadership advice about from the LAA included issues relating to building projects, administration demands, audits, staff management issues, behavior management issues and human resources management issues.

4.2.6.3 Staff Professional Development

The provision of coaching support for principals in relation to the facilitation of whole staff professional development was identified in 13 instances. In these instances professional development was facilitated and modelled by the LAA to develop staff understanding and skills in relation to improving Reading and Writing.

Examples of the types of staff professional development that were provided by the LAA include:

i. Literacy assessment and data gathering professional development linked to the achievement standards for reading.

ii. Sessions on the teaching, learning and assessment of reading and writing. In these sessions the relevance and use of different resources were highlighted to support the teaching of the reading Big 6. Explicit links were made to First Steps resources.

iii. Explaining the links between the school's Wave 1 whole school literacy focus and the application of the six reading elements emphasized in the PALL module.

iv. Developing staff knowledge, skills, understanding and use of NTCF student achievement report data to inform teaching and learning.

v. Raising staff knowledge and skills in meeting the needs of EAL/D students in mainstream classes. The focus in these sessions was on highlighting the implications for Wave 1 and Wave 2 teaching, learning and assessment.

The effectiveness of this professional development is illustrated in the following interview comment made by one of the principals:

> "The LAA provided specific instructional PD. As a result staff also realized the gaps in their knowledge and strengths in relation to the Reading Big 6". (Principal A)

There was also evidence of coaching support being provided by the LAA in modelling the facilitation of professional learning conversations with staff for principals. The effectiveness of this type of coaching in supporting principals to embed changes in literacy practice in their schools is illustrated by the following emailed comment for formal reporting documentation:

> "Staff have been very involved and not stressed when challenged by the LAA." (Principal D)

The analysis of the data also indicated how professional developments sessions developed and facilitated by the LAA supported principals in building their capabilities to lead

literacy learning in their school contexts. The following principal comment written in the formal evaluation from a professional development session the LAA ran with staff shows how this type of professional development support can assist principals in their leadership of literacy improvement.

> "As a principal, I am going to set up a folder for each teacher to use during our workshops. It will include professional readings, checklist, resources etc to support literacy teaching and assessment." (Principal B)

4.2.6.4   Establishing Networking Opportunities

The LAA organized coordinated and facilitated cross-sectorial networking meetings at least once per term. During these meetings the LAA facilitated learning conversations and discussion sessions to provide the opportunity for principals to share what was working in relation to their leadership of literacy in their school contexts.

The following Principal interview comments highlight the value and effectiveness of these networking opportunities being organized and facilitated by support personnel within the NT context to build principal capabilities to lead literacy learning:

> "The network that was formed helped us to talk about ideas and approaches taken. There was frank discussion. Good and bad aspects were discussed." (Principal C)

> "The networking opportunities with other principals that focused specifically on what we are doing in literacy curriculum, programs etc have been really valuable." (Principal B)

> Establishing the network with other principals to share what we are doing in our schools was good. It was very affirming and supportive. There were resonating themes. (Principal A)

The following comment included in an email response from one principal to the LAA indicates further findings on the forms of coaching support principals consider would assist them to build their leadership of literacy:

> "Establishing the network with other principals to share what we are doing in our schools was effective. From the literacy point of view the collegiality, sharing of ideas, strengths and challenges plus understanding what works/does not work in the NT has been sensational." (Principal D)

The response from Principal C to the question posed in the semi structured interviews undertaken for this study; *What further support do you require/would you like in order for you to effectively lead literacy learning/improvement in the future*?, indicates that principals would like "network meetings to occur, that are linked with visits from a coach, to keep principals on track and provide the opportunity to talk about what principals are doing and where they are up to in their leadership of literacy improvement."

4.2.7   Theme 3: Leading literacy teaching learning and assessment support

4.2.7.1   Dimensions of support provided

The analysis of the data identified that Principals require coaching support to develop their capabilities in leading literacy teaching, learning and assessment. The findings indicate that there were at least 39 interactions in which the principals accessed coaching support in relation to their leadership of literacy teaching, learning and assessment. The dimensions and nature of coaching support that were provided are depicted in Figure 4.7. The specific dimensions of coaching support that were provided are outlined in the box at the bottom of the diagram.

Literacy advice was provided by the LAA to further develop the principals' knowledge, skills and understanding in relation to "best practice" literacy teaching, learning and assessment relevant to the contexts of their schools. Coaching support was provided to build the principals' capabilities to lead learning conversations with staff to encourage reflection on current teaching, learning and assessment practice. School leadership

improvement advice and modelling of practices were provided to develop the principals''
capabilities to lead processes with the staff to review, implement and embed effective
literacy teaching, learning and assessment practices in their school contexts for reading and
writing.

The box in the middle of the diagram in figure 4.7 outlines the four sub-themes that
emerged from the analysis of the data in relation to the specific nature of the coaching
support that was provided to build the principals' capabilities to lead literacy teaching,
learning and assessment in their challenging school context. Coaching support was
provided linked to

- The leadership of Wave 1 whole school literacy practices.
- Leading Wave 2 intervention practice.
- Leading effective Wave 1 a Wave 2 literacy assessment practice.
- The development and use of resources to support literacy teaching, learning
  and assessment.

Figure 4.7

Theme 3 - Overview of Support Provided

**Principal leadership of
literacy teaching, learning and
assessment**

Nature of Support
- Leading Wave 1 whole school literacy support
- Leading Wave 2 intervention support
- Leading Wave 1 & 2 Assessment support
- Resource development and use support

Coaching Support
Dimensions of coaching support:
- explicit instruction
- literacy advice
- school leadership advice
- facilitating learning conversations
- modelling of practice

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Following is a discussion of the specific nature of the coaching support provided in the four schools relevant to each of the sub-themes outlined above.

4.2.7.2 Leading Wave 1 Whole School Literacy Support

The LAA provided literacy advice to build the principals' capabilities to lead Wave 1 whole school literacy practices that targeted the needs of the students in their school contexts. Learning conversations were facilitated with the principals to make links between aspects of their Wave 1 whole school literacy focus and the elements of reading that had been promoted in the PALL Pilot Project. In all four schools, the LAA clarified the links that could be made between reading teaching and assessment practices that are informed by the *First Steps* (Department of Education and Training, 2009) resources and the information linked to the six elements for reading teaching and assessment (Konza, 2006) highlighted during the PALL Pilot Project professional learning modules.

Coaching support was provided so principals could lead discussions with staff in relation to reviewing current practice in reading and writing to clarify or identify the focus for effective everyone, everyday Wave 1 literacy teaching, learning and assessment practice across the school. The LAA provided literacy advice and facilitated learning conversations to increase the principals' knowledge and skills to lead the embedding of whole school effective literacy teaching, learning and assessment in their school contexts. The focus of these learning conversations was on sustained improvement in reading and writing teaching, learning and assessment. The intention of the coaching support was to raise the principals', and in some instances, school leadership team members' knowledge and skills so they could lead similar learning conversations with staff. The need for coaching support in this area is evidenced in the LAA reflection shared with the Australian Catholic University PALL Pilot Project leader:

> "I am finding that during my conversations with the Principals, and in some instances leadership/literacy teams (depending on their experience and skill levels in literacy), the comments that are made or the questions that are asked are requiring me to provide advice and coaching for

them to develop the depth of their literacy knowledge and understandings. These are aspects that I took as given (or in fact for granted) as a principal and which not all principals may have".

The following observation, recorded by the LAA in one school journal, also highlights the nature of coaching support principals require to develop their skills in leading whole school Wave 1 literacy improvement is further evidenced in:

> "First Steps does not seem to be embedded in practice at whole school level based on today's discussion with the principal. The whole school literacy focus on First Steps would benefit from a disciplined discussion in relation to the areas in the First Steps checklist. However, this will not happen at this stage given where the Principal and Curriculum Coordinator are at in their understanding of the application in practice of *First Steps* Reading and Writing strategies." (SS3)

The findings from the analysis of the data indicate that coaching conversations were used to challenge the principals to reflect on current teaching, learning and assessment practice as is evidence in the following reflection recorded in LAA journal:

> "The quality of evidence to inform teaching and learning practice depends on quality of assessment tasks/activities/records used to gather evidence. The challenge to current thinking/practice in NT school contexts is whether assessment tasks provide this data? The LAA broached this question and challenged thinking with the principals to get them to reflect on and embed effective, ongoing assessment practice in everyday quality teaching and learning – part of not separate to!"

The following comment from one principal, which was recorded in the school journal by the LAA, indicates the effectiveness of the provision of regular, ongoing focused learning conversations, literacy advice and modelling of practices in building principals' capabilities to lead literacy teaching and learning.

> "I can now see how I am going to work with teachers. I now see how, as a principal, I can work with teachers to improve their teaching practice." (Principal A)

The need for individual coaching support for principals to build their skills in leading improvements in literacy teaching and learning was illustrated in the following principal comment, recorded in the school journal. This comment was made by one principal during the provision of coaching support from the LAA:

> "I am not confident in curriculum leadership aspects but having support from the LAA is really beneficial and effective in this area. It is building my skills and understanding." (Principal C)

4.2.7.3   Leading Wave 2 Intervention support

Literacy advice was provided on choosing and using effective Wave 2 interventions to meet the identified needs of students. Learning conversations were facilitated by the LAA on the specific focus of Wave 2 interventions to increase principals' and curriculum coordinators' understandings in relation to the focus of their use linked to:

- the six components for reading (Konza, 2006) and the ten criteria identified in the analytical criterion referenced marking guide that inform NAPLAN assessment of writing (ACARA, 2011d).
- how to use assessment to inform the choice of intervention programs, and
- how to interpret diagnostic data to inform the focus and choice of approach for interventions.

The analysis of the data indicated that literacy advice was provided to develop the principals' understanding of the nature of the interventions that they were currently using in their schools. Learning discussions were facilitated to raise the principals' awareness of the extent to which interventions were meeting students' identified needs. The LAA

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developed a resource to support principals in leading decision making regarding the selection and implementation of reading intervention strategies. The resource developed outlined details of the common reading intervention programs and strategies that were being used in the schools involved in the PALL Pilot Project. The LAA provided literacy advice in using this resource. Learning conversations were facilitated around the content to build the knowledge the principals needed to lead similar conversations with staff to critically reflect on their Wave 2 literacy intervention practice.

The LAA coached the Principals and school leadership team members to raise their awareness of the importance and need to use appropriate data to inform Wave 2 intervention. Literacy advice was provided to develop the principals' capabilities in making sense of school assessment data to inform the focus for Wave 2 intervention planning and target setting for improvement. The coaching support provided included the facilitation and modelling of learning conversations to review current intervention assessment practices. Literacy advice and modelling of practice, in the use of diagnostic assessment data, to critically review practice and to inform teaching and learning needs was provided.

The following principal comments, recorded in two of the school journals, indicate that the coaching support that was provided was effective in building the principals' capabilities to lead Wave 2 intervention practices in their school contexts:

> "I now have the capability to look at intervention across the school to lead holistic and sustainable practice." (Principal A)

> "I now see the need to build rigour into Transition and Year 1 to ensure that we have strong foundations in literacy." (Principal C)

4.2.7.4   Leading Wave 1 and Wave 2 Assessment support

The findings from the analysis of the data indicate that coaching support was provided in contextualizing and providing specific information to principals on the purpose and use of assessment tools. Literacy advice on how assessment tools could be used effectively by staff to inform Wave 1 and Wave 2 planning for literacy improvement was provided.

For example, the LAA adapted the "Expressive and Receptive Language Checklists" from the PALL professional development into a more useable assessment tool that was relevant to the context of the four schools. The LAA then coached the principals by providing explicit instruction in the use of the modified tools as is evidenced in the following quote from an email sent to the principals:

> "One checklist is designed to be used to record information for a whole class to assist in identifying students who may be at risk of language difficulties. The other is designed to assess and monitor an individual child. I have included a section in both checklists to indicate if a child comes from a language background other than SAE as this is important information when using the checklists to identify a student's needs and appropriate follow up action." (LAA email to principals May 2010)

The effectiveness of the coaching in relation to the use of the checklists is evident in the LAA reflections shared in an email exchange with a PALL program colleague:

> "I am getting good feedback from schools regarding the practical use of these modified checklists. Principals have indicated that they have really helped to focus teacher understandings and observations – particularly in the early years." (May 2010)

The effectiveness of the coaching support that was provided for principals in building their capabilities in leading effective Wave 1 and Wave 2 literacy assessment practices in their school contexts is evidenced in the following comment from a principal that was recorded in the school journal:

"I am being more prescriptive about assessment and will be establishing with the teachers at the start of the school year what they need to assess and collect. We need to focus on what we are doing in assessment." (Principal B)

4.2.7.5 Resource development and use to support Literacy improvement

The findings indicate that ongoing coaching support was provided in identifying and explaining the use of appropriate resources to support Wave 1 and Wave 2 literacy teaching, learning and assessment practice. Coaching support was provided to raise principal awareness of how to use available literacy resources in their contexts.

The nature of the coaching support provided is evident in the following LAA school journal reflection on the nature of support that was provided during a school visit.

"I facilitated discussion with the principal and literacy coordinator to coach them in the identification of literacy resources already available within the school that could be used to focus teachers in their assessment of students' reading skills in order to inform teaching and learning based on students' needs. I also identified specific teaching resources that could be used to inform the professional learning session on Reading Assessment planned for next Tuesday." (SS2)

The LAA developed and modified resources to suit the contextual needs of the schools. She updated and made further modifications to the resources based on feedback from the use of these resources in the four schools. This enhanced the effectiveness and appropriateness of these resources. Literacy advice was also provided on how to more effectively use the cross-sector literacy resources that were available at school and system levels to inform literacy teaching, learning and assessment. For example, the LAA developed a resource that principals could use to facilitate teacher reflections on the use of *First Steps* literacy teaching practice. She then coached and modelled practice in the use of these resources to facilitate reflective discussions and to inform improvement in literacy practice.

The following extract, from a discussion between one principal and the LAA that was recorded in the school journal, demonstrates the effectiveness of this coaching support:

"I used the *First Steps* checklist in my discussion with staff in the program meetings I conducted last week to get an idea of where we are at with embedding the strategies in practice. There is not a lot of evidence of *First Steps* practice or links in teacher programs." (Principal D)

The following comments from the principal interviews provide further details of the nature and effectiveness of the coaching support that was provided for principals in the development, adaptation and application of available literacy and leadership resources. The coaching support that was provided to build the principals' expertise in using these resources is evident in these principal comments.

"The support provided by the LAA in accessing and understanding recent resources has been effective in developing my capacity to lead literacy learning in my school context." (Principal C)

"The access to current resources and modelling of practice in using the resources provided by LAA has been effective as we do not have time ourselves to search for these types of resources." (Principal D)

"The tools provided by the LAA have helped in developing teacher knowledge." (Principal D)

Literacy advice was provided and learning conversations were facilitated in relation to profiling EAL/D students' needs in reading and writing. The example below, from an email sent by the LAA to one principal, depicts the nature of coaching support that principals require to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning that meets the needs of all students in their school contexts. The principal had asked for feedback on a document she had developed following discussions with the LAA. The intended use of the document was to focus the teachers on effectively monitoring and identifying the needs of students in order to inform the focus for teaching at Wave 1 and Wave 2.

"I have reviewed the Student Profile document, as per your request, and have added a section to record the monitoring period that is covered by this document. I have also added a column to record the focus of the intervention (e.g. which aspect of the Big 6 has been identified to be targeted in reading for each child?). This is important in order to get the teachers to focus on what the assessment data is identifying that needs improvement for the students highlighted and what they are going to focus on in the intervention. It will assist in getting teachers to ask the questions: What is my assessment data telling me that this child needs to improve? Why is it so? What type of intervention will really make a difference in this area for this child? The other aspect that may be relevant information to include to focus teachers' thinking is to include an indication if the child is from an EAL/D background or not. Thus, I have attached two options for you to consider: one with EAL/D info and one without." (SS1)

4.2.8   Theme 4: Leading literacy improvement planning support

4.2.8.1   Overview of support provided

The findings from the analysis of the data indicate principals require coaching support in leading literacy improvement planning. The provision of coaching support to build principals' capabilities to undertake Wave 1 and Wave 2 literacy improvement was identified in 29 interactions during the analysis of the data. The dimensions and nature of the coaching support that was provided are depicted in Figure 4.8. The specific dimensions of coaching support are outlined in the box at the bottom of the diagram. The findings in relation to the specific nature of coaching support that is required to build principals' capabilities to leading literacy improvement planning are presented under three sub-themes which are depicted in the middle box in Figure 4.8. The sub-themes are: general school improvement processes coaching support, coaching support in leading Wave 1 literacy improvement planning and coaching support in leading Wave 2 literacy intervention. The following discussion outlines the details of the findings in relation to each of these sub-themes.

Figure 4.8

Theme 4 - Overview of Support Provided

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│                                     │
│   Principal leadership of literacy  │
│        improvement planning         │
│                                     │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ⇑
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│          Nature of Support          │
│                                     │
│  ▪ General school improvement aspects│
│                                     │
│  ▪ Support provided to lead Wave 1   │
│    literacy improvement planning     │
│                                     │
│  ▪ Support provided to lead Wave 2   │
│    literacy intervention planning    │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ⇑
       ┌──────────────────────────┐
       │     Coaching Support     │
       │ Dimensions of coaching   │
       │ support:                 │
       │   - explicit instruction │
       │   - literacy advice      │
       │   - school leadership    │
       │     advice               │
       │   - facilitating learning│
       │     conversations        │
       │   - modelling of practice│
       └──────────────────────────┘
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4.2.8.2   General school improvement aspects

Principals are expected to be proactive in orchestrating and leading literacy school improvement processes. However, the following observation was noted in the LAA journal reflection based on her interactions with the principals in their current leadership of literacy improvement planning:

"Principals need to be supported to enable them to move beyond their present reactive, management mode".

The findings identified 17 interactions in which explicit instructions, school leadership advice and modelling of practice were provided by the LAA for the principals to support them in developing their skills to identify, articulate and facilitate key components of the literacy improvement planning cycle. The data analysis indicated that coaching support was provided for the four principals in this study to build their capabilities in the facilitation of school improvement planning processes. The principals also required explicit instruction, school leadership advice and modelling of practices, to further develop their ability to identify and use strategies to facilitate learning conversations to get 'buy in' from staff during the planning process. Coaching, in setting timeframes and actions within school improvement cycle requirements in relation to what needed to be done, when it needed to occur, who needed to be involved and how the action was going to be undertaken, was provided.

Literacy and school leadership advice was also provided to enable the principals to make links between system annual planning and reporting requirements and the focus and intention of Wave 1 and 2 literacy improvement planning. Provision of planning templates was requested by the principals and explicit instruction and modelling of practice was provided in the use of these documents. Explicit instruction and modelling of practice in accessing data, inputting information and editing table format school improvement planning documents was provided. Principals also require coaching in managing the clerical aspects of literacy improvement planning as reflected in following LAA reflective journal entry:

"The principal requested that the LAA check and fix formatting aspects in draft literacy improvement plan and then email to principal to add details and complete where necessary." (SS1)

The findings from the data analysis indicated that principals require coaching support to clarify targets for improvement at Waves 1 & 2. They require coaching in articulating these improvement targets in a meaningful way in their improvement plans. Coaching

support was provided for the principals in determining and articulating the information that needed to be put in the plan so that the literacy plan document was effective in informing and guiding teacher practice. The principals also sort ongoing critical feedback from the LAA in terms of literacy advice and school leadership advice on their draft literacy improvement planning. The following LAA reflection, recorded in one school journal, provides an example of the type of critical feedback that was shared with the principals.

> "The draft plan indicates some information of intended improvement action at Wave 1. However, there is no other detail to inform Wave 2 intervention or monitoring at this stage. The information that is included is mainly linked to Wave 1 aspects for getting good, effective whole school practices in place." (SS4)

The following principal comment, that was extracted from one school journal, in conjunction with the LAA's reflective comment that follows, which was taken from another school journal, reinforce the findings from the data analysis that principals require coaching support to ensure literacy improvement planning is effective and informs practice.

> "Doing this planning wasn't that easy when really focusing on meeting student needs for Wave 1 and Wave 2 improvement. I realize it (planning) needs a lot of work in order to focus what they (teachers) need to do." (Principal A)

> "LAA refocused principal on the specific nature of Wave 1 and Wave 2 planning for literacy improvement. Critical questions were asked to focus principal on plan elements to ensure clarity was provided in terms of what principal had discussed and negotiated with staff to date for focus of literacy improvement planning." (SS3)

The following comments made by two principals during their discussions with the LAA, that were recorded in the relevant school journal, provide further clarification in relation to the nature of coaching support principals require to build their skills in leading literacy improvement planning.

"Principals aren't good at this planning. We need help like that provided by the LAA to do this." (Principal D)

"Doing literacy improvement planning hasn't been a priority due to other demands. I can see the sense of urgency now to get this planning done!" (Principal C)

The effectiveness of the coaching and explicit modelling of literacy improvement planning processes and strategies provided to support principals during this study is demonstrated in the following interview comment made by one principal:

If wasn't for PALL, and particularly the LAA, we would not have got as far in the literacy planning process in one year. We have had support and direction for our Wave 1 and Wave 2 literacy planning. This has confirmed that we are strategically going in the right direction and has supported our annual plan. (Principal D)

4.2.8.3   Support provided to lead Wave 1 literacy improvement planning

The analysis of the data identified that coaching support was provided to build the capability of principals to lead Wave 1 literacy improvement planning. Coaching was provided in building principal capabilities to lead and facilitate evidence informed planning, and to implement monitoring, evaluation and review practices and processes to inform literacy improvement planning.

There were 7 specific interactions identified where coaching support was provided for principals to undertake aspects of Wave 1 literacy improvement planning. The following reflections extracted from the LAA journal reflect the need for this type of coaching support for principals:

"There is a lot that the schools need to embed in practice at Wave 1 in order for them to be able to make informed decisions for Wave 2 students. In

particular they need to ensure they have more comprehensive, planned

process in place at Wave 1 in order to determine "where a student is at".

Literacy advice, school leadership advice and explicit instructions were provided in at least three instances to support principals to identify monitoring processes to inform planning decisions in relation to Wave 1 intentions. Further analysis of the data in the four school journals and the Aide memoir identified that learning conversations were facilitated and modelled with the principals to coach them in leading similar discussions with staff to consider elements relating to the extent to which literacy improvement actions were achieving their purpose linked to targeted intentions. On-going literacy advice and explicit instruction was provided to build principals knowledge and confidence in literacy to enable them to engage in conversations with teachers regarding the focus of literacy programs and resources that were being considered to support Wave 1 whole school literacy practice. Significant support was provided in coaching principals to build their skills and capabilities to lead effective reflective discussions with staff around evaluating the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment at Wave 1.

4.2.8.4   Support provided to lead Wave 2 literacy intervention planning

The findings in the data identified that coaching support was provided to support principals in leading evidence informed decision making to focus literacy intervention planning at Wave 2. In at least five interactions explicit instruction and modelling in the use of diagnostic tools and data to inform Wave 2 literacy improvement planning interventions was provided. The following LAA reflective comments extracted from school journals reflect the coaching support required:

> "While disaggregation of their NAPLAN data and teacher judgments in NTCF data
> is providing some information, they need more comprehensive data and detailed
> analysis in order to identify the focus for what intervention/s are needed for what
> students in relation to what aspects of literacy at Wave 2." (SS2)

"We were not able to do Wave 2 detailed planning because the school is yet to provide benchmark data to inform target group of students and focus for intervention." (SS3)

The following LAA reflection also indicates that principals require coaching support in developing their capabilities to lead literacy improvement at Wave 2:

"I question the degree to which the principal is making the links between Wave 2 intervention and Wave 1 on-going literacy improvement planning. I am thinking that there is still work to do in developing understanding of the links between the two." (SS4)

Coaching was provided to use and apply what was learnt in data literacy discussions to determine and articulate improvement targets and to inform literacy intervention teaching. The effectiveness of the coaching support provided during this case study, in building principals' capabilities to facilitate data literacy processes to inform Wave 2 planning for intervention, is indicated in the following principal comments and LAA reflection from the school journals:

"The Principal indicated she will work with the Curriculum Coordinator to pull together Wave 1, Wave 2 and Wave 3 students. She will conduct disciplined dialogue with the teachers to determine where the students are at in relation to the Big 6 for reading. She will work with the teachers to set targets for Wave 2 students." (Principal C)

"At this point I am unable to get any clarity around the focus for Wave 2 intervention because I need to pull our Wave 1 processes together first." (Principal B)

"I now see the plan that I have done as "longer term" literacy planning and will concentrate the intervention planning on only three aspects and will report on those" (Principal A)

"The principal stated that she now sees intervention at Wave 1 and Wave 2 as doing specific stuff to address needs." (LAA reflection in school journal)

4.2.9   Theme 5: System Mediation support

As discussed in Chapter 3, I employed a negative case data analysis method to determine if there were any other aspects pertaining to the coaching support provided to principals by the LAA that were not explicit in the initial analysis of the data. Through the application of the negative case data analysis process 10 instances of system mediation and coaching support emerged. This system mediation focus for coaching support has also been added to the conceptual framework presented in Figure 4.4. The conceptual framework outlined in Figure 4.9 now depicts the "full picture" of forms of coaching support that principals require to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning. The system mediation focus for coaching support is represented in the last box on the right hand side of the diagram. It is represented in an orange colour to link with the colour coded data analysis system that was used throughout the case study. An arrow emerging from the centre box connects the system mediation form of coaching support to the overall coaching role of the LAA.

The findings on the nature of the mediation support undertaken by the LAA with the Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDET), in relation to cross sectorial literacy related matters, along with the findings on the mediation and coaching support undertaken with the NT Catholic Education Office (CEO), regarding issues pertaining to the collation and reporting of literacy data, are outlined in the discussion that follows.

Figure 4.9

Conceptual Framework: Forms of Support Principals Require to Lead literacy Learning
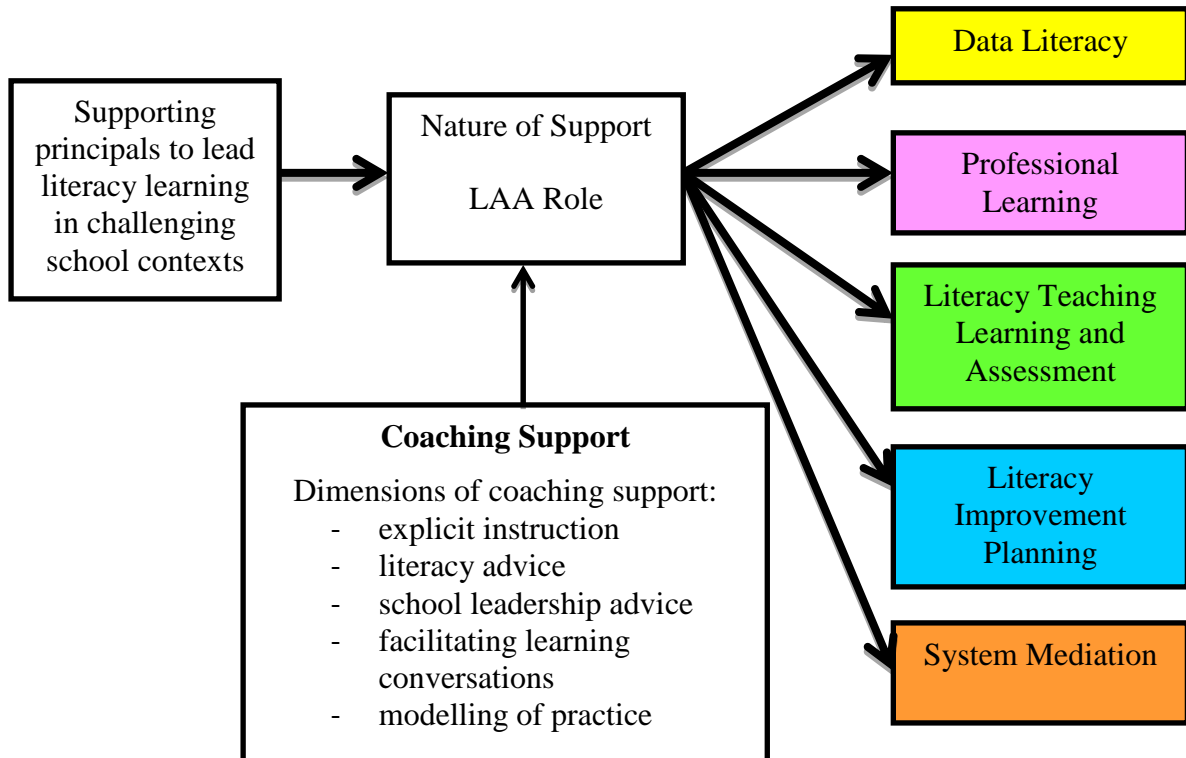
Firstly, the findings indicated that the LAA supported the principals by undertaking cross sectorial mediation with relevant staff at the Northern Territory Department of Education. The LAA negotiated with relevant personnel from the Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDET) to clarify several issues on behalf of the principals. One negotiation was in relation to the availability and processes for accessing and using the NAPLAN RAAD databases that are generated for all schools in the Northern Territory through this Government Department. The LAA also followed up with NTDET personnel on issues pertaining to the use of the data contained in each school's RAAD database. The following extract from a LAA email transaction with one of the principals is an indication of the type of system mediation support provided in relation to the aspects outlined above.

"Contacted NT DET and checked your NAPLAN data. It was downloaded to the dedicated NTSchools computer that you have in your school last week. However there are some issues with the RAAD data that have affected some of the reports and an updated version will be sent this week. I have requested that xxxx sends the new NAPLAN file for your school and directions on how to download the corrected RAAD tool to you via our email. You can then download the reports to your own computer or your school server so staff can access as you decide." (SS2)

Another aspect of cross sectorial mediation negotiated by the LAA was to do with the Catholic schools having access to professional learning opportunities linked to their use of *First Steps* Reading and Writing resources within their whole school literacy approach. The nature of mediation support provided and the outcomes achieved to support principals' in their leadership of literacy learning in their school contexts is evident in the following LAA email exchange with the four principals involved in this case study:

"You asked me to clarify the possibility of accessing *First Steps* writing PD for your staff. I have had discussions with xxxx at NTDET and she has advised that they are trying to organise a *First Steps* facilitator course for either late term 3 or term 4 this year. XXXX has asked me to advise if any of your schools are interested in a member of your staff being trained as a facilitator so that they can present PD for your staff and do the relevant follow up/coaching support/embedding of practice at school level." Details of funding arrangements and how to register a staff member to attend were also provided.

The LAA also provided mediation support through working with NTDET personnel to clarify issues for the Principals related to the use and reporting requirements for cross sectorial commonwealth funding that was targeted for literacy improvement. Subsequently the LAA provided coaching support for the principals so they could make the links to this funding in their literacy improvement planning.

Secondly, the LAA provided mediation support in negotiations with the Northern Territory Catholic Education Office (NTCEO) regarding issues linked to the reporting of literacy data. The principals requested that the LAA negotiate with relevant NTCEO personnel to clarify issues that arose due to limited system level support and processes for accessing NTCF student achievement reporting data that was collected through the Maze database system. The Maze system is a computerised management system used by each school to record and collate a range of data. In the Northern Territory it is used by Catholic Primary Schools to record and report student achievement data. The principals' work with the LAA, along with their participation in the cross sectorial network meetings, had raised their awareness of the fact that their principal colleagues in government schools had access to system collated and generated NTCF student achievement data reports that supported the principals' leadership of data analysis to inform improvements in literacy learning. These issues were noted in the following LAA reflective journal entry:

> "Limited system data is available for the Catholic schools to inform
> literacy school improvement. This is due to resourcing issues at NTCEO.
> "

As a result, the four Catholic school principals requested that the LAA negotiate with relevant NTCEO personnel to ascertain if similar reports could be established and generated to support their collation and use of the student achievement data recorded in their Maze database systems.

Thirdly, issues had been highlighted, during the LAA's coaching and learning conversations with the principals, regarding the inconsistency of on-balance teacher judgements in the application of the NTCF achievement standards in reporting student progress in reading and writing. The coaching support provided by the LAA had raised the principals' awareness of the inconsistencies evident in the judgements that were being made within each school and across the four Catholic schools. The LAA had also highlighted the significant differences that were evident with the application of the NTCF achievement standards that informed teacher judgements in the Catholic schools compared to those of their Government school colleagues.

Government school teachers made their on-balance student achievement reporting judgements based on the established NTCF achievement standards articulated in the curriculum framework. However, the Catholic schools had the freedom to determine how they used and applied the achievement standards to report student progress in their individual school contexts. These issues were noted in the following LAA reflective journal entry:

> "The Catholic school principals have indicated that 'schools have the freedom to do their own thing' in applying the NTCF achievement standards to reporting of student progress."

The LAA coaching support provided for the four principals and other members of the leadership team, linked to the leadership of data literacy and teaching, learning and assessment practices, highlighted the implications of the inconsistencies in this practice. Through coaching and in learning conversations, the LAA raised the principals' awareness of the implications related to the disaggregation and triangulation of data sources to inform literacy improvement at Wave 1 and 2. She also highlighted the implications the inconsistencies that were evident in the on balance teacher judgements in the reporting of student achievement in reading and writing had for making decisions about addressing the literacy needs of transient students who regularly moved between Catholic schools or who drifted to and from government schools. The implications of these inconsistencies in the application of the achievement standards in relation to addressing the literacy needs of students moving to and from other states was also highlighted.

The implications of the inconsistency in the application of the NTCF achievement standards across the Catholic schools were noted in the following LAA reflective journal entry:

> "This has implications for determining student needs in literacy. It also has system implications if trying to provide support in collating data because schools are using different systems to report achievement standards."

The implications that the practice of schools individually determining how they would apply the NTCF achievement standards to their reporting of student progress had for the negotiations with NTCEO regarding the establishment of system support for the collation of Maze NTCF achievement data were also raised and recorded in the LAA reflective journal:

> "There are implications if we want to pull the NTCF data at system level to support collation and analysis of data sets."

As a result, the principals requested that the LAA raise the implications of this practice with the relevant personnel at NTCEO to ascertain if a policy directive could be made that would change the practice of each schools deciding how the NTCF achievement standards were applied to their reporting of student progress. The four principals also shared and discussed the implications of this practice with NTCEO personnel and principal colleagues at NTCEO Principal meetings.

As a result of this mediation, the LAA was also requested to facilitate a professional learning session with the curriculum coordinators from all the NT Catholic schools to raise their awareness of the issues arising from the inconsistencies evident in this practice. NTCEO Curriculum and EAL/D support staff also negotiated with the LAA for her to work with them to clarify their understandings of the application of the NTCF achievement standards, particularly in relation to meeting the needs of EAL/D students. The intended outcome of the provision of this coaching support was to ensure the NTCEO staff were "on the same page" when working with the teachers in the schools. The LAA also raised NTCEO support staff awareness of the need for ongoing support for EAL/D and *First Steps* resource development to ensure consistency in application in the school contexts. The need for the provision of further professional development to support principals to embed these aspects in teacher practice was also discussed.

The effectiveness of this mediation at system level, in supporting principal leadership of literacy improvement changes in their school contexts, is evident in the following school journal entry from a meeting the LAA had with a principal and members of a school leadership team:

> "The curriculum coordinator discussed that she has been using the information and understandings developed in the NTCEO workshop that the LAA ran with the curriculum coordinators in her learning conversations with teachers at class level." (SS1)

However, the findings from this study indicate that there were ongoing systemic issues with regard to the consistency of the reporting of on balance judgments of student achievement for reading and writing when linked to NTCF achievement standards because this matter had not been addressed at the NT CEO system level. This was evidenced in the comments shared by two principals in their interviews:

> "CEO is still reluctant to address this issue at system level despite principals raising concerns they have discussed with LAA."
> (Principals A & C)

4.2.10 Principal requests for further support

Further findings were highlighted, to inform the conclusions and recommendations from this study, in relation to the forms of coaching support that principals require to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts, as a result of the negative case analysis that I applied to data from the principals' responses to the semi-structured interview question; *What further support do you require/would you like in order for you to effectively lead literacy learning/improvement in the future*?, One principal suggested that to "build team leadership" and ensure more effective leadership of literacy improvement "all school executive staff or teacher leaders should attend curriculum and leadership professional development" (Principal B). A further suggestion put forward by this principal was "to provide more focused professional development for all Catholic schools on literacy" so that all schools "are on the same page" (Principal B). Another principal highlighted that "a

regular mentor for newly appointed principals that had a focus on school leadership"
(Principal B) would be beneficial.

4.3 Effectiveness of the support provided

4.3.1 Introduction

The following discussion reports the effectiveness of the coaching support that was provided to build the capabilities of the four principals to lead literacy learning in their challenging school contexts.

The findings discussed in this section are presented, in addition to, the discussion in earlier sections of this chapter on the effectiveness of the coaching support that was provided by the LAA in her interactions with the four principals in relation to the four themes:

- leading data literacy coaching support,
- leading professional learning coaching support,
- leading teaching, learning and assessment coaching support, and
- leading literacy improvement planning coaching support.

The discussion that follows highlights additional findings that emerged from the analysis data related to the effectiveness of the coaching support that was provided in this case study. These findings will add to the information that will inform the conclusions and recommendations in relation to the second research sub question:

> How effective were these forms of support?

The findings reported in the following section of this chapter are drawn from the analysis of the qualitative data that was generated from the principals' responses to relevant questions in the interviews that were conducted for this study. The findings discussed below are informed by the principal responses, from the semi-structured interview conducted by myself, as the researcher, to the question: *What support has been effective in developing/building your capacity to lead literacy learning/improvement in your school?*

The principals' responses to the following two questions from the interviews conducted by the Australian Catholic University independent researcher, also inform the findings discussed below:

What has been the single most useful aspect of the role of the LAA?
What aspect of the role of the LAA could be improved?

Relevant qualitative data from other data sources used in this study have also provided addition information to inform the findings reported in the following section.

4.3.2   Effectiveness of coaching support provided

The role of the LAA, in this case study, was to assist principals to improve literacy achievement in their schools. This was achieved through the provision of on-going, one-on-one, individual coaching support in a range of aspects pertaining to building the principal's capacity to lead data literacy, professional learning, teaching, learning and assessment practices and school improvement in literacy. In addition the LAA provided system mediation support for the principals in aspects that impacted on their leadership of literacy improvement in the four challenging school contexts.

The following principal comments indicate the effectiveness of coaching support provided by the LAA in building their capabilities to leading literacy learning.

"Support of LAA has been invaluable" (Principal D)

"Having someone like the LAA that you can call on to remind you and help you, to take next steps has been big difference to any other PD I have done." (Principal C)

In this study, the findings from the analysis of the data indicate that four aspects contributed to the effectiveness of the coaching support role of the LAA. These aspects were experience as a primary school principal in similar school contexts, expertise in school leadership, a commitment to literacy learning, and a

demonstrated capacity to coach others. Aspects that contributed to the effectiveness of the coaching support role of the LAA can be gleaned from the following sources that are depicted below: a principal interview response, the amalgamated list of phrases describing characteristics displayed by the LAA that were drawn from the synthesis of the NT principal interviews undertaken by the Australian Catholic Univeristy independent researcher: and evidence from formal feedback on the role of the LAA.

"The input from the LAA has been professionally changing for me. She has continued to challenge but also support." (Principal D – interview comment)

"Brilliant support, exceptional at data, always available, always followed up, valued everyone, required us to think, able to talk through issues, kept focus, provided outside links, knowledgeable in literacy, pulled things together, supportive, credible and energizing." (Amalgamated descriptions synthesized from NT principal interview data)

"Having a LAA has been good because principals need someone to touch base with to ensure follow through, to reflect on leadership and on school data. The objective eyes of the LAA have been of benefit." (Principal C - formal report feedback on the role of the LAA)

"The support I have had personally has been terrific. The expertise is also amazing and becomes, in effect, good modelling for me when I take on more of a role in the school plan." (Principal B – formal report feedback on the role of the LAA)

The findings from the analysis of the data also indicate that the ability of the LAA to apply knowledge and expertise in literacy and school leadership to coach principals in their professional learning is an aspect that contributed to the effectiveness of the coaching support role in this study. This aspect is demonstrated in the interview and formal reporting comments that follow:

"The Model of LAA in PALL Program has shown me that when we do PD in school I need to be the one following up to get good results in the school. In this way it has been a really good learning curve for me." (Principal C)

"The expertise of the LAA is amazing and becomes, in effect, good modelling for me when I take on more of a role in school planning." (Principal C - emailed reporting comment for formal reporting documentation)

"Teachers are finding the information provided by the LAA that links the PM Benchmarks to the NTCF achievement standards really useful in informing their teaching and learning programs." (Principal D – comment recorded in school journal)

"Having support from the LAA is really beneficial and effective in helping to build my skills and understandings in literacy curriculum leadership" (Principal B – comment recorded in school journal)

In addition, the role of the LAA in modelling and facilitating learning conversations with staff to challenge current thinking to inform changes in practice, were effective in coaching principals in their leadership of literacy learning in the school contexts of this study. The effectiveness of the coaching support provided in this area is evidenced in the following principal comments:

"The role of the principal is multi-faceted: as a Principal, maintaining rigor and practice in relation to literacy requires perseverance, courage and knowledge. I am supported in all as of these aspects through the relationship with the LAA. Working with the LAA allows me the opportunity to engage in purposeful conversations about literacy within the school and reflect critically on practice and performance. This allows me then to refine and inform professional development and communication with staff to ensure that our programs are effective for

all student cohorts." (Principal A – emailed comment provided for formal reporting purposes)

"Discussion at staff meetings has changed. Professional learning has now moved to happen first. There is a change to a professional learning focus of staff meetings." (Comment from principal B - recorded in school journal)

The preceding discussion highlights the effectiveness, of the role of the LAA in coaching principals to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts that has emerged from the findings of this case study. However, a number of other aspects that facilitated and hindered the capabilities of principals to lead literacy learning also emerged from the application of the negative case data analysis method that was applied in this study. These aspects require consideration in the discussion of the findings from this case study because they have implications for the nature of coaching support that is provided to build principal capabilities in leading literacy learning in challenging school contexts. The factors identified, that facilitated and hindered the provision of coaching support, are outlined in the discussion that follows.

4.4   Factors that facilitated or inhibited the provision the support provided

4.4.1   Introduction

The discussion in this section highlights the findings relevant to the factors that facilitated or inhibited the provision of coaching support that emerged from the data analysis from this case study. The analysis of the qualitative data contained in the school journals, LAA reflective journal, and the two semi structured principal interviews identified the aspects outlined below that facilitated or hindered the nature of coaching support provided.

Consideration of the findings presented in this section will inform the conclusions and recommendations in relation to the second research sub question:

> What factors facilitated, and what factors inhibited the provision of such support?

4.4.2   Facilitating Factors

In this study, the ability of the LAA to contextualize the professional learning from the PALL modules, along with her ability to access and customize the use of available data and system literacy resources to address needs of each principal and school context, facilitated the provision of the coaching support provided.

> "The support I have had personally has been terrific. The LAA's work behind the scenes is immense. Therefore, when work is presented to me, it comes with a lot of thought and contextualization for our school. (Principal C – emailed reporting comment for formal reporting documentation)

This finding was reinforced in Principal D's response to the interview question "*What support has been effective in developing/building your capacity to lead literacy learning/improvement in your school context*?

> "Access to current resources and practice provided by the LAA, as we do not have time ourselves to search for these."

The nature of coaching support provided was facilitated by the credibility and ability of the LAA to "walk the talk" when coaching the principals. She was able to explain and model the application of leadership of literacy improvement processes and action to meet identified student needs relevant to the school contexts of this study. This is highlighted in the following principal comments:

"Modelling by LAA has shown me that when we do professional development in the school, I need to be the one following up to get good results in the school. In this way this has been a really good learning curve for me." (Principal C – interview comment)

"LAA is fantastic support and extremely knowledgeable"
"I really value the way you actively support people and are prepared to go the extra mile to ensure we feel comfortable and supported." (Comments made by two of the principals extracted from formal evaluations from May 2010 professional development session organized and facilitated by LAA to meet NT context needs)

The ability of the LAA to initiate and lead ongoing learning conversations with the principals, members of school leadership teams and with staff has facilitated the provision of the coaching support provided. This is evidenced in one of the principal's responses to the interview question "*What support has been effective in developing/building your capacity to lead literacy learning/improvement in your school context*?

"The LAA being able to facilitate disciplined dialogue" (Principal C - interview comment)

The principals' responses to two questions, in the interview undertaken by the independent Australian Catholic University researcher indicate that the manner in which the LAA performed her role, in the context for this study, facilitated the provision of coaching support. Principal responses indicated that "excellent background knowledge and being good with data" coupled with "a balance of push and encouragement" facilitated the support provision". Principal responses to the question "*What has been the single most useful aspect of the role of the LAA*?" included:

"LAA role critical to keeping things going. Coaching role. Regular contact." (Principal C)

"Support person available to give advice. Provided different angle. Able to see the significance of changes needed and not just focus on worst elements." (Principal D)

The responses to the question "*What aspect of the role of the LAA could be improved*?" also reinforced that the manner in which a designated support person performs the coaching role can facilitate or inhibit the effectiveness of the support provided. In the context for this study, the responses from all the principals, to the above question, indicated that the manner in which the LAA performed the coaching role, which has been described in detail throughout the discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, facilitated the effectiveness of the provision of support. This aspect is indicated in the following interview responses from the four principals: "hard one – what more can she do?"; nothing, it was all great"; "not a lot" and "nothing can be thought of to improve."

4.4.3   Inhibiting Factors

The competing demands on principal time was the most common, recurring theme that emerged in the data analysis that inhibited the provision of coaching support to build principals' capabilities to lead literacy learning. There were 38 instances recorded in the school journals where the provision of coaching support was impacted by other demands on principal time. A summary of the details evident in the case study of the nature of the demands on principal time which prevented them from accessing coaching support available from the LAA is presented in Table 4.5. In these instances interactions with the LAA in relation to the provision of coaching support for leading literacy learning were rescheduled, cut short, or cancelled altogether. The first column of the table outlines the specific nature of the competing demands on principal time that were evident from the analysis of the data in the school journals. The second column displays the number of times that a particular "nature of time demand" was evident in the analysis of this data. The number of school sites where evidence of that particular time demand had impacted on the coaching support provision for leading literacy learning is indicated in the third column. For example, "unforeseen circumstances," where the nature of the demand on the principals' time was "not specified," was evident in a total of six instances in the school journals as a reason why coaching support provision for literacy leadership could not be

provided. This type of demand on principal time was evident in all four school sites as is indicated by the number "4" in the last column.

Table 4.5

Nature of Demands on Principal Time

Nature of Time Demands	Instances	School Sites
Unforeseen circumstances (nature not specified)	6	4
Management of building programs (e.g. Building the Education Revolution program implementation and management)	5	4
Principal illness	5	3
Human resource management (e.g. staffing interviews, managing poor performance)	4	2
Preparing grant submissions – meeting deadlines	3	3
School management aspects (e.g. end of year, reports)	3	2
Early Learning Centre accreditation and management issues	2	2
Teaching duties due to staff absence and lack of availability of relief teachers	2	2
Organization and supervision of school events (e.g. disco, camp)	2	2
Parent/Community meetings	2	2
Attending conferences/training	2	2
Behaviour management	1	1
Other curriculum demands	1	1

The following comments from one principal were also recorded in the school journal in relation to the impact of competing time demands on Principal's ability to lead literacy learning.

> "Life's busy in this school! Sometimes I wish I could just focus on literacy in the school" (Principal D - comment recorded by LAA in school journal)

In addition, all four principals' made comments about the competing demands on their time in response to the semi structured question: *What has hindered you in leading literacy learning/improvement in your school?* The following comments depict some of the principals' thoughts in relation to his question:

> "Time demands impacting on being able to drive what I want to do." (Principal B)

> "Ensuring that literacy is a priority. It is easy in a busy school to allow priorities to drop down the list." (Principal A)

> "Having the time to meet individually and collectively with staff given all other things have to do. Try to cram as much as can in staff meetings, PD days, release time." (Principal D)

> Pressure of BER made it harder to be in classrooms: unique time, place and space. Demands of projects such as BER not recognized" (Principal C)

Another aspect that inhibited the provision of coaching support was the extent to which regular literacy school improvement cycle processes and practices were embedded within the regular business of the school context. This aspect had particularly impact on coaching support provisions in the contexts where literacy improvement cycle activity was not planned, or overtly scheduled in the school calendar of events. Consequently principals and leadership team members were not accessing coaching support in a 'timely' way as evidenced in the following principal comment recorded in the LAA reflective journal:

> "I should book some times ahead with LAA to ensure aspects related to literacy review and planning stay on the radar and don't fall by the way" (LAA journal)

Of particular hindrance was the lack of coordination and leadership of the processes required to facilitate effective collection, collation and analysis of data, being embedded in practice. These aspects were evident in the following extracts:

> "Principal indicated that limited analysis of literacy data has been undertaken at this stage to inform either Wave 1 or Wave 2 planning for improvement. Principal is not sure of where to go or what to do at this stage. LAA will meet with principal and assistant principal to provide support in relation to Wave 1 and Wave 2 planning for literacy improvement." (LAA comment recorded in school journal)

> "Not having access to relief days to get Literacy Plan together – people did extra and we had to pay release to get done in timely manner." (Principal D – interview comment)

Principal transience, changes in the makeup of leadership teams and scheduled principal leave all hindered the continuity of coaching support provision and effort in leading literacy learning. 17 instances of these types of aspects being evident emerged from the data analysis. The extent to which this aspect hindered coaching support provision and continuity of literacy improvement efforts was dependent on the extent of leadership succession planning that had occurred along with the depth and breadth of the replacement person's skills, understandings and capabilities in leading literacy learning. The impact of this aspect was also exacerbated where literacy improvement action was not explicitly scheduled and embedded in normal school practice and where shared leadership of literacy learning had not been fostered in the school context.

A further aspect that impinged on coaching support provision was the lack of established handover processes in relation to literacy leadership. Principals, assistant principals and curriculum coordinator changes were evident in across the four school sites during the two

year period. Seven instances were recorded in the school journals where the LAA had to initiate, facilitate and model appropriate handover practices to ensure continuity in the leadership of literacy learning and the activity planned for literacy improvement. The following examples were extracted from the school journals:

> "Outgoing principal has provided limited handover in terms of current school improvement action in literacy. Induction being provided by LAA "should assist in filling some of the gaps." (SS4)

> "LAA provided literacy information and previous data analysis undertaken for new principal." (SS2)

The Principals indicated that some Northern Territory Catholic Education System practices inhibited coaching support provision. These aspects were highlighted, to some extent in this thesis, in the discussions relating to system mediation and time demands on principals. The analysis of the data indicated that the lack of processes and policies being provided by the NTCEO to support schools with school management matters were impacting on the ability of principals to engage in leadership of literacy learning. In at least four instances the principals confided to the LAA that more needed to be done at NTCEO level to support principals so they could undertake their curriculum leadership role. The principals indicated that "there were system issues with the quality of processes and policies in place to support principals." It was evident in the reflective comments recorded by the LAA in the school journals, which were based on discussions with the principals, that "a considerable amount of time was being taken up by principals in re-inventing the wheel." The principals considered this was occurring due to:

> "At system level policy, processes, templates and direction were not in place to deal with or manage general school management aspects." (LAA Journal entry August 2010).

> "Lack of system level policy and processes related to school management issues – time spent having to develop these at local level

rather than engaging in curriculum leadership. (Principal B – interview comment)

Throughout the period of this study the principals also raised that a system hindrance that was impacting on their leadership of literacy improvement was the fact that there was no easy way to collate and use teacher judgment data that could be drawn from regular student achievement reporting data stored in Maze. Information Technology support was not readily available because the "system was too small to facilitate this occurring" (Comment recorded in LAA journal from discussion with relevant CEO personnel) The responses from two principals to the following question in the semi-structured interviews also highlighted this aspect: *What further support do you require/would you like in order for you to effectively lead literacy learning/improvement in the future?*:

"Across NT Catholic system – a better way of keeping data systems and how were going as a system and schools is required". (Principal C)

"Would love a RAAD type tool developed as part of national Curriculum implementation that provides efficient and easy access to student achievement data.' (Principal A)

The analysis of the entries in the LAA journal indicated that another hindrance in coaching support provision that was raised by one principal was the extent to which the quality of pre service teacher education and principal leadership training provided the foundations required for teaching literacy and for learning literacy linked to school improvement practices. It was considered by the principal, that given the transience of leadership and teaching staff, some consistency of training was required in both these areas, to support principals in their leadership of literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

4.5   Conclusion

Chapter 4 reported the findings from the analysis of the data. The findings reported that the principals in the study required face-to-face coaching support from a designated coach in five dimensions: explicit instruction, literacy advice, school leadership advice, facilitating learning conversations and modelling of practice, in order to develop their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. These five dimensions of coaching support were provided across five key areas: data literacy, professional learning, teaching learning and assessment, literacy improvement planning, and system mediation. A discussion of the findings on the effectiveness of the coaching support provided was also presented. The findings of the study in terms of the factors that facilitated or inhibited the provision of such support were also highlighted.

The findings reported from this study provide breadth, depth and richness in describing the nature of support that the principals in the study required to lead literacy learning in their school contexts. The following chapter will provide an interpretation of the findings that emerged under each of the focus areas to inform conclusions and recommendations regarding the nature of coaching support principals may require to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review and synthesize the findings presented in the previous chapter.   In particular, the discussion in this chapter links the interpretation of the findings from the study, regarding the role of specially designated support personnel in building principals' capabilities in leading literacy learning, to the literature. The conceptual framework that emerged from the findings is presented. The interpretation of the findings in relation to the form and nature of coaching support that principals require to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts is discussed. Aspects relating to system support that emerged from the findings are also presented.

The findings reported in Chapter 4 were presented under the key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis. Links between the key themes and the three sub questions that informed the study were made. For purposes of continuity and clarity, the following discussion of the interpretation of the findings, is presented in three sections to maintain the links to the research aims and questions. Firstly, clarification of the forms of coaching support the Catholic school primary principals in the study required to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts is presented to answer the first sub question: *What forms of support were provided to Northern Territory Catholic primary school participants in the "Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL)" pilot project*? Secondly, the effectiveness of the forms of coaching support provided is discussed to answer the sub question: *How effective were these forms of support*? Finally, the factors that facilitated or inhibited the provision of coaching support are presented to answer the third sub question: *What factors facilitated and what factors inhibited the provision of such support*?

The latter sections of the chapter outline the conclusions drawn from the interpretation of the findings regarding the nature of coaching support the primary principals in the study required to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. This collective information informs the conclusions presented in relation to the overall research question:

> *What role has the specially designated principal support officer (known as the Literacy Achievement Advisor) played in supporting principals, working in challenging school communities, to develop their capability to lead literacy improvement?*

The chapter concludes with recommendations that are suggested for future research.

5.2 Forms of Support

5.2.1 Conceptual Framework

Neuman (2006) points out that in qualitative research methodology "conceptualization flows largely from the data (p.186). The conceptual framework that emerged from the findings of this study is depicted in Figure 5.1. The conceptual framework represents the nature of coaching support that emerged from this study that the four principals required to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning in their challenging school contexts. The relationship between the fundamental form of coaching support that was provided and the five focus areas for coaching support provision is depicted. "Coaching support" is presented in the middle box because this was identified as the fundamental form of support that was required to build the principals' capabilities to lead literacy learning. The large upward pointing arrow in the lower part of the diagram depicts the five dimensions that inform the nature of the coaching support that were provided. The core notion of 'coaching support" is linked by arrows to the five boxes on the right hand side of the diagram that illustrate the particular focus areas for the coaching support that was required by the principals to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning. The five focus areas for the provision of coaching support are: data literacy, professional learning, literacy teaching, learning and assessment, literacy improvement planning and system mediation.

Figure 5.1 Conceptual Framework

Coaching Principals to lead literacy learning
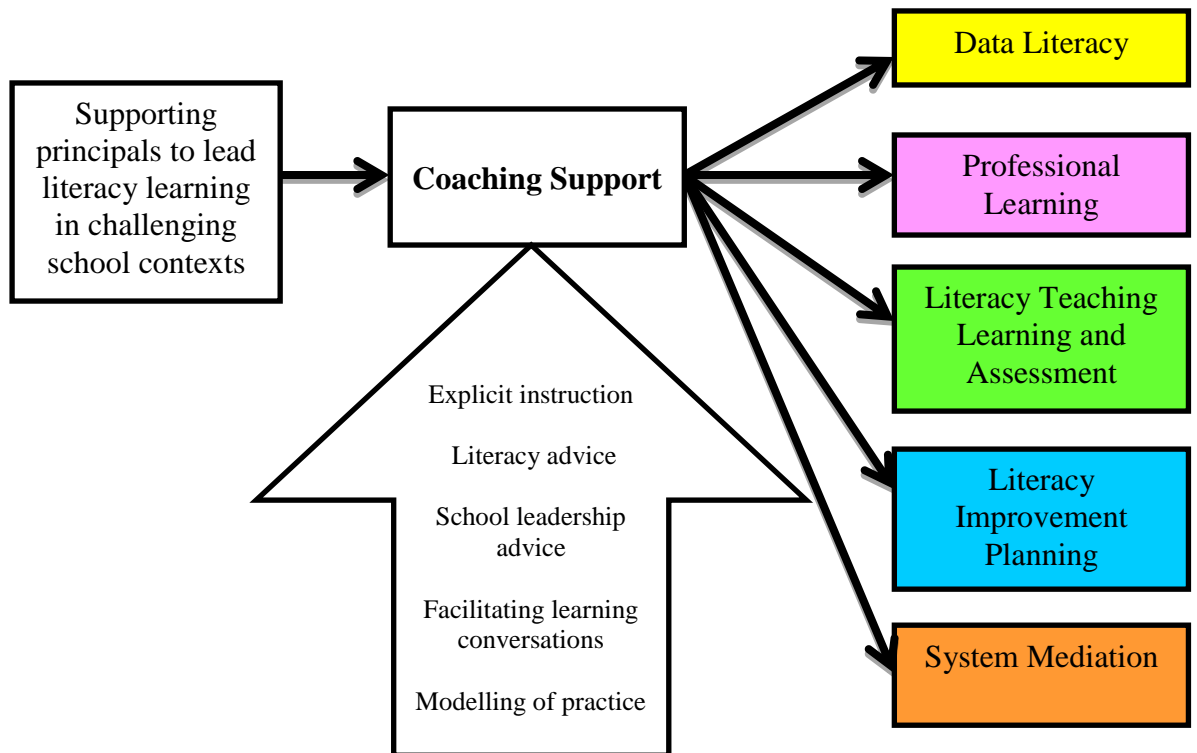
5.2.2   Coaching support and related dimensions

The literature contends that principals at all stages of their career can benefit from the provision of both coaching and mentoring support (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Bush, 2008; Bloom et al., 2003; Fink & Resnik, 2001; Duncan & Stock, 2010). In the current literature, coaching and mentoring are presented as having some commonalities because both are intended to provide individualised support for principals in developing their abilities to lead schools (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Bush, 2008; Duncan & Stock, 2010). However, the literature does provide distinctions between coaching and mentoring when they are applied in educational settings to support principals to lead learning (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Bloom et al., 2003; Bush, 2008; Duncan & Stock, 2010). The distinction lies within the understandings that coaching is more focused on addressing, identified developmental needs in order to build specific skills and capabilities of an individual,

whereas mentoring focuses more on supporting an individual to undertake a particular role (Duncan & Stock, 2010; Fink & Resnik, 2001).

In educational contexts, the literature asserts that the provision of coaching for principals needs to be coherent and focused to address identified needs (Bloom et al., 2003, Bush, 2008; Duncan & Stock, 2010). The literature posits that coaching should be provided by skilled individuals with "high levels of knowledge in specific skills areas" (Duncan & Stock, 2010, p 297). The nature of coaching should be instructional and focused on building the skills, knowledge and understandings required by individual principals to undertake their leadership role (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Bloom et al., 2003; Bush, 2008; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Fink & Resnik, 2001). Coaching support for principals should be ongoing, contextualized and directly targeted at addressing the identified professional leadership needs of individuals (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Davis et al., 2005; Levine, 2005; Macpherson, 2009; O'Mahony & Barnett, 2008). Given that coaching support aims to build the capabilities of the individual, it should be developmental, as well as challenging in nature, in order to achieve the changes in practice that may be required (Bloom et al., 2003; Bush, 2008; Duncan & Stock, 2010).

Mentoring, on the other hand, is described in the literature as having a broader focus on an individual's development (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Bloom et al., 2003; Duncan & Stock, 2010). The nature of mentoring support for principals has generally been more informal and has tended to be provided by more experienced colleagues (Bush, 2008; Bloom et al., 2003). The literature contends that in educational contexts, mentoring relationships focus on passing on knowledge and experience on a range of aspects relevant to the role of the principal within school contexts (Bush, 2008; Bloom et al., 2003; Fink & Resnik, 2001). The role of the mentor in this type of relationship is that of a supportive advisor, guide and critical friend (Bloom et al., 2003; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Anderson & Cawsey, 2008). There are also cautions reported in the literature regarding evidence of inconsistencies and limitations in mentoring support models for principals (Bloom et al., 2003; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Fink & Resnick, 2001). One issue raised in the literature is the extent to which informal mentor models provide timely support in meeting principal needs given other demands that may be impacting on the availability of those providing mentoring for colleagues (Bloom et al., 2003). Another issue alluded to in the literature, is

that the skill set that an individual mentor colleague brings to a mentoring relationship, impacts on the extent to which the school leadership practice of the individual being mentored may be challenged in relation to aspects for development (Bush, 2008; Bloom et al., 2003; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Fink & Resnick, 2001).

The findings from this case study strongly concur with the literature on the value of providing coaching support for principals. In this study coaching was identified as the fundamental form of support that the four principals required to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging primary school contexts. The principals in the study required regular, one-on-one, face-to-face coaching support to develop their capabilities in leading and embedding the processes and practices within their school contexts to facilitate literacy school improvement.

Additional knowledge has been gleaned from this study in relation to the particular nature of coaching that supports principals to build their individual capabilities to lead literacy learning. Five explicit, interrelated dimensions were identified that delineate the specific nature of the coaching support that was required by the principals in the study to build their individual capabilities to lead literacy learning. The five dimensions identified are provision of explicit instruction, literacy advice and school leadership advice, coupled with, facilitation of learning conversations and modelling of practice. This study found that these five dimensions, define the form of coaching support that may be required to build principals' capabilities to lead literacy learning in five related focus areas. These five focus areas are: data literacy, professional learning, literacy teaching, learning and assessment and literacy improvement planning and system mediation.

A diagrammatic representation of the form of coaching support that emanated from this study is provided in Figure 5.2. The diagram depicts the fundamental form of support, coaching, at the core. The five dimensions that inform the nature of the coaching support are depicted in the circles around the outside. A solid circular line is used to link these five dimensions in order to reflect the finding that, more than one of these related dimensions may be involved in the nature of a coaching interaction between the designated support person and a principal. The two way arrows radiating between the coaching support at the core and each of the five dimensions reflect the interrelated use of one or more of these

dimensions in a coaching interaction. The arrows represent the continuous nature of the interrelated movement between the different dimensions of coaching that may be utilized in the provision of coaching support. For example, in a particular interaction, the coaching support provided in the focus area of data literacy initially required explicit instruction on the use of a data literacy skill. Specific literacy advice was also provided linked to the reading and writing achievement standards during the explicit instruction. The coaching interaction subsequently moved to the facilitation of a learning conversation on the application of this aspect of data analysis within the literacy context of the school. Finally modelling of the application of the related data analysis skill linked to the leadership of literacy improvement in the school context occurred.

Figure 5.2

Form of Coaching Support Required to Lead Literacy Learning
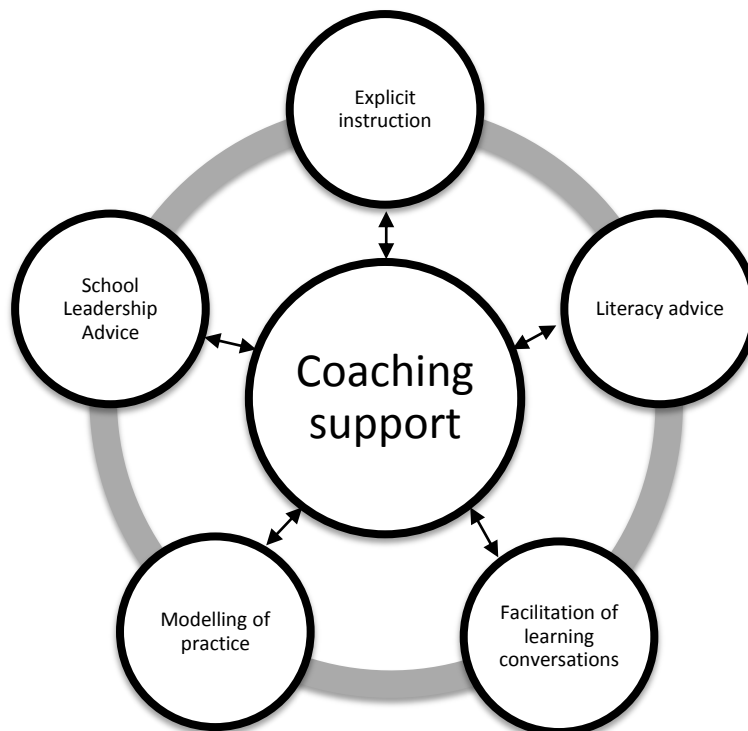
5.2.3 Focus areas for coaching support

5.2.3.1 Introduction

The educational leadership literature stresses the role of the principal in leading learning and identifies key actions for principals to undertake (Earl & Timperley, 2009; Swaffield & Dempster, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson, 2007). The expectation for principals to create the conditions in schools to lead literacy learning is articulated in the literature (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; COAG, 2008; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Fullan, 2003; Reeves, 2009a). The Leadership for Learning Framework (Dempster et al., 2012), which underpinned the PALL Pilot Project, also identified eight aspects to guide principals' action in leading literacy learning: a shared moral purpose; a strong evidence base; disciplined dialogue; shared leadership; professional development; conditions for learning; curriculum and teaching; and parent and community support.

This study found that coaching support was provided by the LAA in four focus areas in order to build principal capabilities to lead literacy learning in reading and writing. The four focus areas are linked to leadership actions identified in the literature (Dempster et al., 2012; Earl & Timperley, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson, 2007; Swaffield & Dempster, 2009) The LAA provided coaching support for the principals to build their capabilities to lead data literacy, professional learning, teaching, learning and assessment and literacy improvement planning. Context specific explicit instruction, literacy advice and school leadership advice relevant to these four areas was provided by the LAA in the leadership of literacy learning for reading and writing. In addition coaching support was provided by the LAA in facilitating learning conversations to challenge thinking and encourage refection on current practice in using evidence informed decision making to inform practice in reading and writing literacy improvement. The LAA also modelled aspects of best practice in all four areas to improve student achievement in reading and writing. Ongoing, individualized coaching support, that challenged current practice (Bush, 2008; Bloom et al., 2003) was provided to build the principals' capacity to lead the collaborative inquiry processes (Earl and Katz, 2006, Timperley, 2009) required in their

schools to ensure that literacy learning addressed the literacy needs of all students in their school contexts.

Following is an interpretation of the findings from this study on the specific forms of coaching support that were provided in each of the four focus areas to build principals' capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

5.2.3.2 Leading data literacy support

The literature points out that making sense of data is part of "an on-going, iterative inquiry process" (Earl & Katz, 2006, p. 9) that principals need to facilitate in their school contexts (Bernhardt, 2009; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). Interpretation of data involves principals leading learning conversations to stimulate inquiry based discussion and thinking to ensure evidence informed improvement in literacy (Hoer, 2008; Irvin et al., 2007; Love, 2004; Pettit 2009). However, the findings from this study are commensurate with the literature that argues that not all principals may have the highly developed capabilities required to lead and facilitate evidence informed practices in their school contexts (Earl and Katz, 2006; 2008; Pettit, 2009; Wu, 2009).

The findings indicated that all the principals in this study required coaching support to build their capabilities in:

- understanding and applying skills in data literacy, and
- leading the interpretation and analysis of multiple data sources.

All the principals involved in this study required coaching support to develop their capabilities in leading the interpretation and triangulation of data to inform focused literacy improvement action at classroom, cohort and school levels (Reeves, 2009b). Explicit instruction, literacy advice, school leadership advice and modelling of practice were provided by the LAA to develop the principals' general understandings and skills in leading data literacy practices. Coaching support, which included the facilitation of learning conversations, was also provided to build the principals' capabilities in leading the application of system achievement standards to the interrogation of a range of data sources

available in each school context to inform improvements in reading and writing. Contextualized explicit instruction, literacy advice, school leadership advice and modelling were provided to build principals' capabilities to lead the identification, use, collection, collation and disaggregation of multiple sources of data to inform improvement in literacy learning.

5.2.3.3   Leading professional learning support

The literature stresses the importance of principals ensuring that on-going professional learning occurs in their school contexts (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Earl and Timperley, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005; Reeves, 2009a; Robinson, 2007) to promote and embed literacy learning that is focused on improving student achievement. The key role of principals in leading and facilitating professional learning communities in their school contexts is argued in the literature (DuFour and Marzarno, 2011). The need for principals to lead learning by facilitating evidence informed discussions that challenge practice, encourage rethinking on directions and promotes continual monitoring of progress is stressed (DuFour and Marzarno, 2011; Earl and Katz, 2006).

However, this study identified that all the principals required coaching support to build their capabilities in the aspects outlined above. Coaching support was provided in:

- assisting principals to apply their own professional learning in their school contexts
- facilitating the professional learning of staff relevant to the context,
- the establishment of principal networks based on improvement of literacy learning.

In this study ongoing literacy advice and school leadership advice was required to build the principals capabilities' to apply what they had learnt from the PALL professional development modules to address the literacy needs of the diverse students in their school contexts. The LAA facilitated learning conversations, provided literacy advice and modelled practice to coach the principals on how to apply key information from PALL professional development modules in their four school contexts.

In addition, explicit instruction, literacy advice and school leadership advice was provided by the LAA to coach the principals' in building their capabilities to access and provide relevant professional learning opportunities that would address their own development needs, as well as those of staff, to improve literacy learning in their challenging school contexts. Coaching support was provided in modelling the facilitation of learning conversations that aimed to build the principals' capabilities to lead the use of evidence informed practice to improve reading and writing in their school contexts.

Targeted, contextualized professional development was provided by the LAA for the principals and staff in each school that was linked to improving the literacy outcomes for all students in reading and writing. In staff professional development sessions, and during learning conversations with the principals and school leadership teams, the use of available system and school level literacy resources, to inform teaching, learning and assessment practice in reading and writing, were also modelled by the LAA.

Coaching support was also provided by the LAA through the establishment and facilitation of cross sectorial networks that focused on building the capabilities of the principals to lead literacy learning in their challenging school contexts.

5.2.3.4   Leading teaching, learning and assessment support

The expectation for principals to lead the development of comprehensive and consistent whole-school practices in their school contexts that are focused on improving the literacy achievement of all students is articulated in the literature (COAG, 2008; DEST, 2005; Fullan, 2003; Pettit, 2009). However, the literature also highlights that principals may not have the depth and breadth of understanding and skills in literacy to lead the nature of the learning that is required in challenging school contexts to meet the needs of all students (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Fink & Resnik, 2001; Fullan, 2003; Reeves, 2009a). To date, there is paucity in the literature, particularly within the Australian context, on what principals actually do to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts and how they can be supported in undertaking this role.

The findings in this study are commensurate with the literature in that they support the view that principals require coaching support to develop the depth and breadth of understandings, skills and knowledge required to lead the complexities of literacy teaching, learning and assessment in challenging school contexts (ACARA, 2012; Cummins, 2006; Frawley et al., 2010; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Zuengler & Millar, 2006). The findings also add to knowledge in this area because they begin to delineate the specific nature of coaching support that Australian primary principals may require to build their capabilities to lead literacy teaching, learning and assessment in challenging school contexts. This study identified that the principals required coaching support to develop their capabilities to lead:

- Whole school literacy practice
- Literacy intervention practice
- Assessment practices to inform literacy improvement

The LAA facilitated learning conversations, provided explicit instruction and shared literacy advice to support the principals' to apply the literacy understandings they had gained about teaching and assessing reading from the PALL professional development modules to their school contexts.

The principals in the study required coaching support to build their capabilities to facilitate learning conversations and lead pedagogical practices in their challenging school contexts that ensured literacy teaching, learning and assessment at Wave 1 and Wave 2 is focused on meeting the literacy developmental needs of all students. Explicit instruction, literacy advice, school leadership advice and modelling of practice was also provided to assist the principals in developing their understandings of appropriate whole school literacy and intervention practices to address the reading and writing developmental needs of all students in each school context. In addition, explicit instruction, literacy advice and modelling of practice were provided to build the principals' capabilities to lead pedagogical practice that catered for the literacy needs of Indigenous and EAL/D students (Harrison, 2011; Hudson & Berry, 1997; Konigsberg & Collard, 2000).

Coaching support was provided in the development and application of resources that supported the principals in building their capabilities in leading literacy learning in their school contexts. The LAA contextualised available resources or developed new resources to support the principals in their leadership of literacy teaching, learning and assessment in their challenging school contexts. Explicit instruction, literacy advice and modelling were provided to develop the principals' capabilities in the application and use of these resources in their school contexts.

5.2.3.5 Leading literacy improvement planning support

The literature highlights the requirement for Australian school principals to lead school improvement planning processes focused on improving literacy learning in all school contexts (DEST, 2005; COAG, 2008). However, the effective leadership and embedding of appropriate whole school, evidence informed improvement planning practices may not be a reality in all Australian school contexts (Pettit, 2009). In addition, in challenging school contexts, the literature highlights the requirement for principals to have the intercultural sensitivities to lead literacy improvement in intercultural educational contexts (Frawley et al., 2010) that effectively addresses the needs of all students.

The findings from this case study are commensurate with the literature in that they highlight that the primary principals in the study did require support to build their capabilities to lead and facilitate effective improvement planning processes that are focused on addressing the literacy needs of all students in challenging school contexts. In this study the principals required ongoing coaching support to develop their capabilities to lead:
- School improvement practices and processes
- Whole school Wave 1 literacy improvement planning
- Wave 2 literacy intervention planning

The following comments made by two participants in this study, demonstrate the need for coaching support for principals in this area:

"Doing this planning wasn't that easy when really focusing on meeting student needs for Wave 1 and Wave 2 improvement. I realize it (planning) needs a lot of work in order to focus what they (teachers) need to do." (Principal A)

"Principals aren't good at this planning. We need help like that provided by the LAA to do this." (Principal D)

The principals in the study required on-going school leadership advice to keep them focused on a continuous process of school improvement (Reeves, 2009a). The LAA facilitated learning conversations with the principals to reflect on their role in leading school improvement practices and change management processes within their school contexts. Explicit instruction, modelling of practice and school leadership advice was provided to build the principals' capabilities to lead the embedding of more effective school improvement planning processes and practices within their school contexts. Literacy advice, explicit instruction and school leadership advice was provided in relation to the leadership of Wave 1 and Wave 2 literacy improvement action to address identified needs within each school context. Explicit instruction and coaching support in the facilitation of learning conversations was provided to build the principals' capabilities to lead monitoring and review processes to inform Wave 1 and 2 improvement targets. Explicit instruction, school leadership advice and modelling of practice was provided to coach the principals in setting up and articulating annual schedules, processes and responsibilities for the collection, collation and analysis of literacy data to inform improvement planning in a timely manner. Explicit instruction and modelling of practice was provided for reviewing progress, setting targets and addressing the whole school agenda for Wave 1 and Wave 2 reading and writing improvement efforts.

5.2.3.6   System mediation support

The application of the negative case study data analysis method in this study resulted in the emergence of a fifth focus area for coaching support that was not evident in the literature reviewed. System mediation was identified in this study as a focus area for coaching that is required to support principals in building their capabilities to lead literacy

learning. In this study the principals required support from the coach to mediate issues that arose, linked to the leadership of literacy learning, with the Northern Territory Catholic Education system and between the NT Catholic and Government systems of education.

The focus of the within system and cross sectorial mediation coaching support provided was to clarify and address issues that that had been identified, during the coaching support interactions between the LAA and the principals, that were directly impacting on the principals' leadership of literacy improvement in their school contexts.

Specific within system issues that were impacting on the principals' leadership of literacy improvement that were mediated by the coach related to addressing:

- Inconsistencies evident in the application of literacy achievement standards across the school sites due to the system policy that was operating in this area.
- Inadequate system support in the establishment and use of effective mechanisms to assist schools in the collection, collation and reporting of common literacy related data sets.
- Inconsistencies in the common understandings held at system level in relation to the requirements for literacy improvement relevant to the school context identified needs.
- The capacity of system personnel to support principals in their leadership of literacy learning in their school contexts.

Specific cross sectorial system issues that were impacting on the principals' leadership of literacy improvement that were mediated by the coach related to addressing:

- The availability and processes for accessing NAPLAN data sets.
- Issues pertaining to the use of NAPLAN data sets.
- Access to professional learning opportunities
- Reporting requirements for national partnership funded linked to system requirements for literacy improvement planning

The findings in relation to this fifth focus area for coaching support provides new knowledge in relation to the nature of support principals may require to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. The implications of these findings for the broader NT Catholic Education system are highlighted in the recommendations section of this study.

5.3 Effectiveness of coaching support

The effectiveness of the forms of coaching support provided is discussed in this section to answer the sub question: *How effective were these forms of support*?

In this study the principals' responses to the interview questions indicated that the nature of the coaching support provided by the LAA was effective in building their capabilities to facilitate and lead evidence informed decision making for literacy improvement relevant to their school contexts. Links were evident between the elements of effective coaching articulated in the literature and the nature of the responses provided by the principals in this study (refer to section 4.3.2) on the effectiveness of the form of coaching support provided by the LAA.

Bush (2008) contends that coaching is most effective when three conditions exist in collaboration. Firstly, the coach and the individual receiving the coaching support need to be "carefully matched" (p.45). Secondly, the nature of the training provided by the person providing the coaching needs to be "thorough and specific" (p.45). Thirdly, the coaching support provided needs to be "integral to the wider learning process" (p.45).

The literature also asserts that coaching support is most effective when it involves a combination of aspects including sharing of critical knowledge, teaching of skills required, modelling practice, providing direction, giving feedback, asking challenging questions, providing encouragement and promoting independence (Bush, 2008; Duncan & Stock, 2010). The findings from this study on the effectiveness of the coaching provided are commensurate with those that are outlined in the literature for individuals to effectively provide coaching support (Anderson & Cawley, 2008; Bloom et al., 2003; Duncan & Stock, 2010; NHS Leadership Centre 2005; O'Mahony & Barnett, 2008).

This study highlighted that, for an individual to effectively undertake coaching support that is focused on building principal capabilities to lead literacy learning, depth and breadth of skills, knowledge and experience relevant to the following characteristics are required;

- literacy expertise,
- school improvement leadership experience,
- experience in similar school leadership roles,
- credibility with those being coached, and
- flexibility in the nature of coaching support provided to meet individual needs.

This study identified specific capabilities of a coach that contributed to the effectiveness of the coaching support provided for the principals in the four Northern Territory Catholic school contexts. Individuals undertaking coaching roles in these challenging school contexts require:

- the interpersonal skills and capacity to coach others
- a commitment to improving literacy learning.
- an ability to use data to inform decision making for improvement.
- an excellent background knowledge of the context in which the coaching support is to be provided.
- the ability to model and facilitate learning conversations that challenge current thinking and inform changes in practice.
- the ability to explain and model application of leadership of literacy improvement processes and actions linked to identified student needs and the school context.

Two other aspects identified in the study that contributed to the effectiveness of the coaching support provided are also evident in the literature. The one to one, face-to-face, ongoing coaching support reported in this study was individualized and based on the identified needs of each principal (Bloom et al., 2003; Bush, 2008; Dempster et al., 2009; MacPherson, 2009; O'Mahony & Barnett, 2008). Secondly, the nature of the coaching support provided was contextualized relevant to the realities of each school context (Bush, 2008; Fullan, 2003).

5.4   Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors

The factors that facilitated and inhibited the provision of coaching support are presented in this section to answer the third sub question: *What factors facilitated and what factors inhibited the provision of such support*?

5.4.1   Facilitating Factors

The literature contends that an effective coach "draws on his/her experience to accelerate individual learning and development" (NHS Leadership Centre, 2005, p 15). Efficient coaches move between "instructional coaching and facilitating strategies" (Bloom et al., p4) to build an individual principals' capabilities. The coaching needs to be contextualized and integrated into the scope of the learning required by the individual principal (Bush, 2008). In providing coaching a balance needs to be provided between supporting and challenging principals (Bush 2008). However, there is a paucity of detail in current literature on what factors facilitate the nature of effective support in building principals capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging Australian primary school contexts. Therefore the interpretations of the findings outlined below provide some delineation of the facilitating factors required for the provision of coaching support to build principals' capabilities to lead literacy learning in Australian primary school contexts.

The nature of the ability of the person undertaking the coaching role was the factor that was identified in this study that facilitated the provision of support to build principals capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. The principals reported that the abilities of the LAA, coupled with the manner in which she performed her role, facilitated the provision of coaching support. Principals highlighted that an "excellent background knowledge and being good with data" coupled with "a balance of push and encouragement" facilitated coaching support provision. In particular the coaching support provision was facilitated by the LAA's ability to:
- contextualize professional learning.
- access and customize the use of available data and system literacy resources to address the needs of each principal and school context.
- "walk the talk" when coaching the principals.

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- explain and model the application of leadership of literacy improvement processes and action to meet identified student needs relevant to each school context.
- initiate and lead ongoing learning conversations with the principals, members of school leadership teams and with staff.

5.4.2 Inhibiting Factors

There is limited literature on the factors that inhibit the provision of coaching support (NHS Leadership Centre, 2005). However, the specific inhibiting factors that impacted on the provision of coaching support that emerged from the negative case data analysis that was undertaken in this study have the potential to inform policy and practice in the Northern Territory Catholic education system in relation to providing support for principals in leading literacy learning.

The competing demands on principal time was the most common, recurring theme that emerged in the data analysis that inhibited the provision of coaching support to build principals' capabilities to lead literacy learning. The complexity of the role of the principal is not a new phenomenon (Fullan, 2003; Reeves, 2009a) within the discussion of principal leadership of learning. However, the detail that has emerged from this case study in regard to the specific nature of demands that are impacting on principals' ability to access coaching support and lead literacy learning in a timely manner is new information.

A major inhibiting factor impacting on the ability of principals to engage in coaching support interactions and leadership of literacy learning that emerged from the study was to do with issues emanating from the quality of some NTCEO system level processes and policies that were linked to aspects within school management. Consequently, principals had to spend valuable time managing issues that arose from the inadequacies of these policy and processes. The aspects listed below, which were detailed in Table 4.4, were identified as impacting on principal time.
- management of government initiated building programs,
- issues relating to human resource management,
- preparation of grant submissions
- accreditation processes for Early Learning Centres
- Principal attendance at conferences and training sessions

These aspects require attention and further clarification by the Northern Territory Catholic Education system to ascertain the extent to which they can be addressed in order to reduce the management demands on principal time.

Three additional aspects were identified in the findings from this study that inhibited the effectiveness of the provision of coaching support for principals. The aspects outlined below require further attention and exploration by the NT Catholic Education system level in relation to the implications for principal professional learning:

- The extent to which principal leadership training provides the foundations required for the leadership of literacy teaching, learning and assessment, linked to school improvement practices, in challenging school contexts

- The extent to which regular literacy school improvement cycle processes and practices are scheduled, planned and embedded within the regular business of schools.

- The extent to which the processes required to facilitate effective collection, collation and analysis of data are coordinated, lead and embedded in practice.

Two further aspects emerged from this study that inhibited the provision of coaching support. Both require attention at the Northern Territory Catholic Education system level. The two aspects relate to inadequacies evident in:

- Succession planning to address principal transience, changes in the makeup of leadership teams and coverage of scheduled principal leave.

- Handover processes in relation to literacy leadership.

Another system issue that was identified in this study as an inhibiting factor impacting indirectly on the provision of coaching support emerged from the fact that system Information Technology support was not readily available to support the collection, collation and reporting of common data sources because the NT Catholic Education system was considered to be too small to facilitate this occurring.

5.5   Conclusions

This qualitative case study sought to explore the specific nature of support that principals require to develop their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts. In particular the study aimed to describe and analyze the role that specially designated support personnel play in the development of principals' capabilities to lead literacy learning.

There is abundant literature, predominantly situated in contexts outside of Australia (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008) that stress the critical leadership dimensions for the role of the principal in leading learning (Earl & Katz, 2006; Earl & Timperley, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005; Reeves, 2009a; Robinson, 2007; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012, Swaffield and Dempster, 2009; Wu, 2009). The literature also asserts the requirement for principals within the Australian context to lead the whole school planning and approaches that focus on improving the literacy outcomes for all students (COAG, 2008; DEST, 2005). It is also acknowledged in the literature that principals may not have the capabilities required to lead the complexities of literacy learning (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Fink & Resnik, 2001; Fullan, 2003; Pettit, 2009; Reeves, 2009a)   in challenging, intercultural educational contexts (Frawley et al., 2010). The value of providing coaching support for principals at all career stages, which is linked to school context, is argued in the literature to be an effective form of leadership professional learning (Bloom et al., Bush, 2008; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Fullan, 2003). However, there is limited information in the literature (Dempster et al., 2012; Reeves, 2009a) on the specific nature of support that principals require to develop their capabilities to lead literacy learning.

This study is a bounded case study (Creswell, 2008) that explored from multiple perspectives, the nature of the interactions between the LAA and the "purposeful sample" (Creswell, 2008) of principal participants from four Catholic primary school contexts in the Northern Territory. A comprehensive and staged purposeful synthesis qualitative research methodology (Bethel & Bernard, 2010) was employed to facilitate an in-depth analysis and synthesis of multiple data sources (Bernhardt, 2009) in order to answer the research question and three sub questions that informed the study.

The findings from this study add to current knowledge on the nature of support that principals require to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging Australian Primary school contexts. There is a growing interest in coaching as a means of supporting principals (Dempster et al., 2012). However, to date, the literature has not unpacked what the nature of that coaching involves in relation to building principals' capabilities to lead literacy learning.

A major contribution of the work undertaken in this study is the development and exposition of a model of coaching support that fills a significant gap in the literature. The study outlines both the substance of coaching (the what) and the means of coaching (the how) that are not evident in the literature. The study also explored the role played by those providing coaching support for principals in mediating the influence of 'the system.'

The findings from this study identified that the interrelated nature of five dimensions of coaching support; *explicit instruction, literacy advice, school leadership advice, facilitation of learning discussions and modelling of practice*, when linked with five focus areas for literacy leadership support; *data literacy, professional learning, literacy teaching, learning and assessment, literacy improvement planning and system mediation*, define the specific nature of the coaching support principals may require to build their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

This study provides a starting point in delineating the specific nature of one-on-one, face-to-face, individualized coaching as a fundamental form of support for principals in building their capabilities to lead literacy learning in challenging Australian primary school

contexts. The study has identified the form of coaching support that principals may require to build their capabilities in relation to the following aspects:

1. Principals knowing what literacy data are telling them about what student and teachers can do and what needs to be improved

2. Principals having the skills to lead discussions and professional learning with staff to inform what needs to happen in teaching, learning and assessment at Wave 1 and Wave 2.

3. Principals knowing what effective literacy teaching and learning looks like so they can lead the processes and practices in their school contexts to identify and address the literacy needs of all students at Wave 1 and Wave 2.

4. Principals having the capacity to orchestrate and lead the teaching, learning and assessment improvements that need to occur to ensure progress is made by all students relevant to the achievement standards required for the acquisition of Standard Australian English literacy skills.

5. Minimization of the influence of system issues that impact on principals' capacity to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts.

However, it is important to note that, as previously discussed in section 3.9.2, that the research undertaken in this study is limited to four Catholic primary school sites that operate under the auspices of the Northern Territory Catholic Education Office. Therefore, due to the nature of this limited sample, the findings are not expected to be generalizable and further research is required in order to explore the application of the coaching model identified, to other Catholic and Government school contexts, as a form of support in building principal capabilities to lead literacy learning.

5.6   Recommendations

As a consequence of the conclusions drawn from this study the following recommendations are made in relation to supporting principals to lead literacy learning in challenging school contexts:

Recommendation 1:   All principals in Northern Territory Catholic schools may benefit from contextualized professional development designed to build their capabilities to lead data literacy in their school contexts.

Recommendation 2:   Consideration should be given to providing contextualized professional development in leading literacy teaching, learning and assessment, linked to the implementation of the *Australian Curriculum* and the acquisition of Standard Australian English for EAL/D students, for all principals and curriculum coordinators in Northern Territory Catholic schools.

Recommendation 3:   The findings of this research should inform the design and delivery of a contextualized training program that aims to build the capabilities of all Northern Territory Catholic school principals to lead and facilitate literacy school improvement planning processes and practices in their school contexts.

Recommendation 4:   Principals in Northern Territory Catholic schools would benefit from coaching support, informed by the findings from this research, to build their capabilities to lead school improvement planning processes that facilitate the leadership of contextualized literacy learning commensurate with the implementation of the literacy student achievement standards outlined in the *Australian Curriculum*.

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Recommendation 5:	A training program, combined with coaching support, should be provided for relevant Northern Territory Catholic Education Office leadership and support personnel to build their knowledge, common understandings and capabilities to support principals in leading literacy learning in Northern Territory school contexts.
Recommendation 6:	An electronic data system to facilitate the collection, collation and reporting of common data sources that are linked to the *Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards* should be designed and established by the Northern Territory Catholic Education Office to support principals in their leadership of data literacy processes to inform improvements in learning.
Recommendation 7:	The Northern Territory Catholic Education Office should address the policy and process management issues identified in this research that are impacting on principals' ability to lead literacy learning.
Recommendation 8:	School leadership handover processes and practices should be reviewed within the Northern Territory Catholic Education system to ensure sustainability in the leadership of literacy learning improvement activity when principal changes occur.

Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendation 9:	Further research should be undertaken, linked to the implementation of the literacy component of the Australian Curriculum, to explore the applications of the findings from this research in relation to the nature of support principals require to lead literacy learning, to other primary, middle and secondary school contexts.

Recommendation 10:   Further qualitative research should be undertaken to investigate how systemic policies, processes and practices impact on principals' capabilities to undertake curriculum leadership in their schools.

Recommendation 11:   Further qualitative research should be undertaken to explore the role played by those providing coaching support in mediating the influence of "the system".

Recommendation 12:   Further research should be undertaken to test the model of coaching support that emerged from this study in similar challenging contexts. The research should include the trialing of training and development modules for "would be" coaches.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Overview of Structure of PALL Modules and Tasks

All five professional development modules delivered in the PALL Pilot project consisted of one day programs. These five modules were delivered over a 15 month period. The first two modules were presented on two consecutive days in South Australia at the commencement of the PALL Pilot Project. The Northern Territory principals and LAA travelled to South Australia to attend these modules along with their PALL colleagues from the other three states. The third and fourth modules were presented for each group of principals in their home state or territory in terms two and four of the first year of the project implementation. Module 5 was presented in South Australia on the same day for all participants in the PALL Pilot Project in term 2 of the project.

In all instances the focus for LAA's interactions was to mentor and coach principals in undertaking the follow up tasks outlined for each module.

Module Title	Schedule of Module Delivery	Follow Up Task Focus
Module 1: A Leadership For Literacy Learning Blueprint	Delivered in term one of first year of PALL Project in Adelaide	Development of a School Profile. Use Leadership for Learning Blueprint to prioritise literacy improvement action.
Module 2: What leaders need to know about learning to read	Delivered in term one of first year of PALL Project in Adelaide	Undertake an analysis of the teaching of reading in the school through use of Literacy Practices Guide. Select three classes (PP/K, Years 2 – 4, Years 5 – 7).
Module 3: Leading Literacy data gathering and analysis	Northern Territory session presented in Darwin in second term of first year of PALL project.	Conduct a disciplined dialogue about and write a reflective journal entry on a literacy intervention in the school.
Module 4: Designing, implementing and monitoring literacy interventions	Northern Territory session presented in Darwin in fourth term of first year of PALL project.	Complete and implement a literacy intervention plan.
Module 5: Intervention evaluation and future planning	Delivered in term two of second year of PALL Project in Adelaide.	Evaluate and report a literacy intervention undertaken in the school.

(Dempster, et. al., 2012)

APPENDIX B
LAA Aide Memoire Screen Shot

Semi Structured Interview Recording Form

Supporting Principals in Leading Literacy Learning in Challenging Contexts

1. Gender: _____

2. How long have you been in a principal role?   _____years _____months

3. How long have you been in a principal's role in the NT? _____years _____months

4. What was or how would you describe your background in leading literacy learning prior to your participation in the PALL Pilot Project?

5. What support has been effective in developing/building your capacity to lead literacy learning/improvement in your school?

6. What has hindered you in leading literacy learning/improvement in your school?

7. What further support do you require/would you like in order for you to effectively lead literacy learning/improvement in the future?

8. Any other comments?

Human Research Ethics Committee
Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Prof Mike Gaffney

Co-Investigators:

Student Researcher: Linda Dawson

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project: Primary Principals to Lead Literacy Learning in Challenging Contexts

for the period: 1/6/2012 – 30/9/2012

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: 2012 105N

Special Condition/s of Approval
Prior to commencement of your research, the following permissions are required to be submitted to the ACU HREC:

The following <u>standard</u> conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (2007) apply:

(i)   that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
- security of records
- compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
- compliance with special conditions, and

(ii)   that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
- proposed changes to the protocol
- unforeseen circumstances or events
- adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed: Date: 13/06/2012
(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

catholic education
NORTHERN TERRITORY DIOCESE OF DARWIN

Ref: D-CEO\EA\12\120

Linda Dawson
15 Watkins Road
Gelorup WA 6230

Email: linda.dawson@nt.gov.au

Dear Linda

In response to your email of 26 April 2012 seeking support for your ethics approval application linked to your research on "*Supporting Principals in Leading Literacy Improvement in Challenging Circumstances*".

I am pleased to give approval in principle for you to approach the principals of the five schools involved in the Principals as Literacy Leader Project to access the generated documents and surveys as part of the PALL project. However, please be advised that it will be the principal's decision with regard to the school's participation in this project.

I would like to request that, at the completion of the project, a copy of the research findings be forwarded to this office.

Yours sincerely

Michael Avery
DIRECTOR OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION
Diocese of Darwin

22 May 2012

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INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS
TITLE OF PROJECT: Supporting Primary Principals to Lead Literacy Learning In Challenging Contexts
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Linda Dawson
PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: Professor Michael Gaffney
PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED: Master of Education

Dear Participant

As you may be aware, I am undertaking a research study for a Masters Degree, through Australian Catholic University. The purpose of my research is to investigate the nature of the support principals require to build their capacity to effectively lead literacy improvement within the challenging context of the Northern Territory. This research has the potential to inform policy and practice for the Northern Territory Department of Education and Catholic Education in relation to the nature of support principals require to lead the literacy improvement agenda in the Northern Territory context.

A considerable amount of information relevant to this study can be gleaned from my work with you, your leadership team and the staff in your school through my role as the NT Literacy Achievement Advisor for the Principals As Literacy Leaders (PALL) Pilot Project within the context of the Northern Territory.

Therefore I seek your consent to use the following information relating to my work with you and your school to inform this study:

- ☐ Information recorded in the research journal and Aide Memoir database relating to the nature of support provided to you and your leadership team to lead literacy learning in your school context.
- ☐ Documents developed by the NT LAA to support your leadership of literacy learning that pertain specifically to the context of the Northern Territory.
- ☐ Email transactions between yourself and the NT LAA relating to support required for leading literacy learning in your school.
- ☐ Email transactions providing feedback on the effectiveness of the work of the NT LAA relevant to her work in your school context.
- ☐ Synthesized evaluations of literacy focussed professional learning workshops provided for you and your staff.
- ☐ Relevant information shared during Network meetings relating to the nature and effectiveness of the support provided by the NT LAA.
- ☐ Accessing the collated information from the Principal survey and interviews for the Northern Territory coordinated by ACU as a project partner in the PALL Pilot Project relating to the nature of support and effectiveness of the LAA role in this context.

In addition I would invite you to participate in interviews to assist in interpreting and validating the information (listed above). Your time commitment will not exceed 2 hours in total.

The study has been classified by the ACU as low risk. The information that you provide will be confidential. This confidentiality will be maintained by ensuring the names of principals and schools are coded and not disclosed at any time, either during data collection or the writing up and dissemination of the findings of this research. The results will be reported to the participant group in the form of a study synopsis.

Please be assured that you are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time without giving a reason.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed in the first instance to myself,
Linda Dawson as the student undertaking the research,
Ph 0467 794 567
Email: smokeyd@tpg.com.au
or to
Professor Michael Gaffney (as Principal Supervisor)
(02) 6209-1218
School of Educational Leadership
Signadou Campus 223 Antill Street Watson ACT 2602
Email: michael.gaffney@acu.edu.au

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or have any query that I have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee:

> NSW and ACT: Chair, HREC
> C/- Research Services
> Australian Catholic University
> Strathfield Campus
> Locked Bag 2002
> STRATHFIELD NSW 2135
> Tel: 02 9701 4093
> Fax: 02 9701 4350

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you are willing to participate in this research, please sign below and return to me. Many thanks for taking the time to consider this request. Your contribution is very much appreciated.

Research Student *L. Dawson*

Supervisor

Principal agreement to participate: _____
name:_____

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM
Copy for Researcher / Copy for Participant to Keep

TITLE OF PROJECT: Supporting Primary Principals to Lead Literacy Learning In Challenging Contexts

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: Prof Michael Gaffney

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Linda Dawson

I seek your consent to use the following information relating to my work with you and your school to inform this study:

- ☐ Information recorded in the research journal and Aide Memoir database relating to the nature of support provided to you and your leadership team to lead literacy learning in your school context.
- ☐ Documents developed by the NT LAA to support your leadership of literacy learning that pertain specifically to the context of the Northern Territory.
- ☐ Email transactions between yourself and the NT LAA relating to support required for leading literacy learning in your school.
- ☐ Email transactions providing feedback on the effectiveness of the work of the NT LAA relevant to her work in your school context.
- ☐ Synthesized evaluations of literacy focussed professional learning workshops provided for you and your staff.
- ☐ Relevant information shared during Network meetings relating to the nature and effectiveness of the support provided by the NT LAA.
- ☐ Accessing the collated information from the Principal survey and interviews for the Northern Territory coordinated by ACU as a project partner in the PALL Pilot Project relating to the nature of support and effectiveness of the LAA role in this context.

In addition I would invite you to participate in interviews to assist in interpreting and validating the information (listed above). Your time commitment will not exceed 2 hours in total.

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I .... *(the participant)* have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research understanding that it may involve interview(s) and related follow-up discussion to clarify and validate findings. This would involve up to 2 hours of your time. I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ....

SIGNATURE..   DATE.................................

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: ....DATE: ………………………..

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: …………………………
DATE:........................…

Northern Territory Principals as Literacy Leaders Project

Expressions of Interest – Literacy Achievement Advisor

Applications are being called for a Literacy Achievement Advisor for a national Pilot Project: *Principals as Literacy Leaders*

The Pilot Project

The *Principals as Literacy Leaders* (PALL) is funded under the Australian Government *Literacy and Numeracy Pilots in Low SES School Communities* initiative. Total project funding is $2.1mil.

PALL is designed to develop principals as effective literacy leaders. It addresses the fundamental question: *What capabilities do principals need in school leadership as well as in literacy teaching and learning, to improve student literacy achievement in low SES school communities?* The project will assist principals to examine and enhance the teaching and learning of literacy in their school. The project will enable principals to develop their capability to analyse and use student achievement information, to design and implement a literacy improvement strategy, to lead a professional learning community, to sustain improvement in literacy achievement, and to support local and system-wide developments.

The project involves the development and trialling over two years, of a series of leadership modules with sixty primary principals selected from low SES school communities in Queensland, the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. Fifteen government and non-government principals will be selected for the Northern Territory Pilot. These educators will be supported in their efforts to improve literacy achievement by a *Literacy Achievement Advisor (LAA).* This person will have extensive knowledge and experience of primary schooling, a demonstrated understanding of the demands of leadership and a strong commitment to the centrality of literacy learning for primary school children.

PALL is cross jurisdictional, cross sectorial and governed collaboratively by the Australian Primary Principals Association, the South Australian Department of Education and Community Services, Griffith University, the Australian Catholic University and Edith Cowan University. The project is being delivered in partnership with State/Territory government and non-government education authorities.

The Position

The role of the Literacy Achievement Advisor is to assist principals to improve literacy achievement in their schools. To this end the PALL Project Northern Territory Reference Committee is seeking to appoint an experienced primary school principal, with acknowledged expertise in leadership, a commitment to literacy learning and a capacity to mentor others. The Literacy Achievement Advisor will work closely with 15 peers from Government and Catholic Primary Schools over a two year period by:

- participating in the face-to-face delivery of leadership learning modules and following up on their implementation in schools;
- initiating and maintaining constant mentoring contact with the 15 principals;
- monitoring, analysing and advising them on issues, developments and strategies associated with literacy development in their schools;
- facilitating teleconferences and online communication;
- liaising regularly with the Northern Territory PALL Project Reference Group about project implementation issues and outcomes.

Applications will be accepted from personnel who have had principal or senior leadership experience in either government or non-government schools (including principals who may have recently retired).

The Literacy Achievement Advisor will participate in an induction program in March, 2009 with the three other appointees taking similar roles in Western Australia, South Australia and the Queensland. Together, these four people will form an essential network of leadership expertise able to share significant information, strategies and achievements

from the sixty schools as they arise. At the end of each year of the project, the four Literacy Achievement Advisors will meet to prepare formal reports to the State and Territory National Project Reference Committee.

Selection Criteria

Demonstrated Essential Requirements

- high level leadership and management skills in Primary School settings;

- strong capacity to mentor others and to facilitate and lead communities of professional practice;

- comprehensive knowledge and understanding of primary school curriculum and the central place of literacy for all children as they learn;

- high level written and oral communication and interpersonal skills; and

- ability to analyse and interpret achievement data and to apply outcomes productively.

Knowledge and experience of schools in low SES environments will be an advantage as the Literacy Achievement Advisor will assist principals to implement effective literacy learning plans, strategies and processes based on data and practice in these school sites.

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