This chapter introduces the project on which this book is based. The project’s university researchers establish the case for ‘why literacy again?’ and outline key themes and emphases of the book. These include new literacy demands and the need for a continuing focus on literacy, middle years literacy requirements, collaborative research to address literacy demands, Design-Based Research methodology, and the pedagogical approaches used by teacher researchers in the project: place-conscious pedagogies, curriculum-specific pedagogies, and digital literacies and youth cultures pedagogies.

Teacher researcher projects are outlined within the overarching frame and goals of the project, and we also foreground the relationship of these projects to literacy in the Australian Curriculum, in both curriculum-specific ways and as a general capability.
This book is about literacy education and innovation in the middle years of schooling. It advances an argument about the importance of literacy and of collaboration between teachers and researchers. It is based on a research project aimed at developing innovations in classroom practice, and in this chapter we outline the nature of this project. But first we make a case for continuing to foreground literacy teaching and learning in the middle years.

There are at least two ways of seeing the relationship between literacy education and innovation. In one interpretation, literacy and innovation are closely tied and mutually informing: many social, cultural and technological innovations call for expanded forms of literacy practice; human life constantly reconfigures, and literacy is recruited, with increasing prominence, to lead or support these reconfigurations. Intensifying those processes are the changing backgrounds and destinations of students, which call for innovative ways of teaching contemporary forms of literacy that are understandable, meaningful and useful to students. A second interpretation, however, places these ideas essentially in opposition: many education systems mandate ways of teaching reading and writing, define their component skills as generic and universal, thoroughly portable across settings, and assessable in standardised forms, with established common developmental milestones. In this sense, any innovation in teaching ultimately needs to show how it provides for closer and closer approximations to correct, standardised practice, with teachers encouraged to innovate, but only in ways that will improve outcomes against standardised and static norms.

In this book we make the case for the first of these views, with literacy education and innovation being mutually informing and responsive to each other. We provide examples of innovation and changed practice, from schools and with teachers where and for whom this view informs planning and practice, and where there is a culture of using teacher research to inform pedagogy that is responsive to the contextualised needs of the students. We outline the implications for teaching and collaborative research and development in classrooms and schools arising from these examples of changed practice. We argue that this is both important and timely work. Innovation in literacy education matters more now than ever because of the conflicting pressures on educators both to standardise practice, and, at the same time, to diversify their practice. The need to standardise arises from increasingly managerial governments and bureaucracies. The need to develop diverse and responsive educational repertoires arises from increasingly variable, sometimes difficult-to-manage communities, students and workplaces. In general, the urgency arises from the rapidly evolving civic, domestic, and private lives of the people who work in schools, the students who attend schools, and who depend on the quality and outcomes of schooling. While our focus in this book is on the teaching and learning of literacy, the overall themes of the work reported here could be applied to other sets of
capabilities – skills, knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions – that bear on the social, cultural, and economic conditions in which Australians currently live and that lie in wait for them.

Why literacy again?

It was in 1908 that Edmund Huey conducted and published the first systematic and extensive review of the available research on the teaching of reading. So literacy educators are probably within their rights to ask, over a century later, ‘Why more on literacy? After all this time, how can literacy education still be a concern?’

There are at least four good answers:

1. the changing modes, platforms and uses of literacy and the resulting need for ongoing refinements and expansions of our definitions of literacy
2. the changing cohort of learners in schools in Australia and many other countries, and the increasing diversity and variety in literate practices and resources learners and their families and communities bring to classrooms, urge us to regularly pause to reconsider what it is to be and become literate
3. the changing accountabilities of educators with regard to student literacy learning on publicly standardised assessments, and with regard to rapidly changing curricula, and accreditation processes
4. the ongoing development of a base of empirical and theoretical work around literacy and literacy education.

Firstly, definitions of literacy are changing, and arguments about definitional developments are not just an academic preoccupation. A useful definition for starting a debate about literacy is this:

Literacy can be roughly defined as communication through visually decoded inscriptions, rather than through auditory and gestural channels (Street & Lefstein, 2007, p. 56).

This is indeed ‘rough’ in the sense of allowing a lot in at the expense of stretching common usage to include visually decode-able objects of all kinds. What are specifically excluded are other semantic (meaning-making) systems, including sound (auditory) channels, and movement (gestural or embodied) channels of communication, semantic systems that are more commonly included in present day multi-literacies. We note that ‘literacy’ is described as the work of the reader, the ‘decoder’, presumably as a member of a culture that designates some things as readable and others not normally so.

In an influential historical analysis, writing is defined as
the sequencing of standardised symbols (characters, signs or sign components) in order to graphically reproduce human speech, thought and other things in part or whole (Janks, 1993, p. 12).

Here the literacy work is done via the writer’s investment of meaning in inscriptions and conveying speech, but more than speech. Again, technicality is traded off in the interests of including potentially diverse, unpredictable, and culturally specific practices. Assembling definitions of literacy (as in Freebody, 2007) makes it clear immediately that defining literacy is not like defining a triangle or some other idea that exists only via an act of stipulation (eg a triangle, the calculus, a mammal). Literacy is, first and foremost, an open-textured concept. What counts as an acceptable definition is what works productively to cover features of a particular setting at a particular time, and is therefore subject to ongoing change. For example, no matter how pervasive and well-known a term such as ‘humour’ is, it is not definitionally as portable across time and place as is a term such as ‘molecule’.

Two forces try to pull literacy back to a simpler form. The first is a nostalgic retreat from the complexity of the contemporary nature and uses of literacy into the simpler, apparently more literate society of the past, which in turn becomes apparently more literate by having The Basics drilled in. Sadly, for this view there is little to go back to in terms of pedagogical method, curriculum, or school organisation. The old tried and true approaches, which nostalgia prompts us to believe might solve current problems, were designed neither to achieve the literacy standard sought today, nor to assure successful literacy for everyone (Resnick & Resnick, 1977, p. 385).

Further, these approaches were neither tried nor true: variability has pervaded the teaching of reading and writing for at least the last four thousand years (Janks, 1993), and, for most of that period, up to at least 120 years ago, almost no systematic observation, documentation, or assessment of these variations was made.

A second reason to reconsider the question ‘Why literacy again?’ relates to the changes in the student population, the growing diversity of students and their backgrounds, families and communities from which they come. Currently over a quarter (26 per cent) of Australia’s population was born overseas and a further 20 per cent had at least one parent born overseas (ABS, 2013). A growing number of Australian students therefore speak a language other than English at home and bring diverse and variable literacy skills and capabilities to the classroom. To state the case more strongly, they bring with them more, and, to a host society, less visible variations on the nature of reading and writing and the ways in which these are put to work.

Recent migration trends into Australia show a shift from European and English-speaking nations to Asian (especially Chinese), Indian sub-continental,
Middle Eastern and African nations. Apart from English, the most common languages spoken in Australia are Chinese, Italian, Arabic, Cantonese, Greek, Vietnamese, Tagalog/Filipino, Spanish and Hindi (ABS, 2013). So to understand literacy in terms of the reading and writing skills, rules and attitudes that relate only to the use of standard Australian English is even less adequate than it has been as a basis for acknowledging the literate and language resources of Australian learners and addressing their learning needs in English. Recognition within literacy definitions and programs needs to be given to the skills these learners bring and of them as bi or pluri-lingual learners who communicate *translingually* across the languages they use, and who have different literacy learning needs (see Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010).

A third force driving a retreat from the complexity needed for a fully operational definition of literacy originates in the educational administration and policy sectors. These ‘chattering-castes’ need definitions that can support their regulatory needs and that can provide the demonstrations of ‘success’ that constitute their ‘performance indicators’ or ‘achievement standards’. This form of public simplification is based on the drive towards standardisation, convenience of assessment and ease of accountability to the public.

It is important, as we begin to look at literacy education in action, to appreciate the extent to which both nostalgia and administrative convenience continue to push out definitions of literacy that were as inadequate in Edmund Huey’s time as they are now, but that regularly buffet attempts to work with definitions that can not only cope with, but actively engage with the real demands that face increasingly diverse societies as they try to participate in contemporary domestic, civic, and vocational life. Our working definitions, for all their provisionality, need to be sufficiently open-textured to pull their weight in the realities of teachers’ and students’ lives.

There is no ‘neutral space’ in which literacy can be generically defined for all practical purposes. The term literacy has various histories of use. Each of these, of necessity, has produced a manageable object of study and practice for researchers and educators alike. More recently the pressure has been on to produce not just research-amenable versions of literacy but also policy-amenable versions – abstract, portable, and comprehensively measurable. (P. Freebody, 2007, p. 12).

A further answer to the question ‘Why literacy again?’ is independent of the changing nature of literacy use in contemporary societies such as Australia; it concerns the intensification of teachers’ *public accountability* for adequate literacy teaching and learning.

In Australia as in other places, this literacy accountability includes the performance of students on assessments that enter teachers, schools, jurisdictions,
systems, states, and even nations into competitions whose rules – definitions of key concepts, forms of assessment, relations to ongoing curricular learning, etc – they did not set. Doing well in these competitions is not just achieved through assessed levels of overall literacy achievement, but also comprises indices for equity in the distribution of literacy skills. For instance, Australian schooling has been described as a ‘high performing, low equity’ system (McGaw, 2007), and it clear that, on the measures deployed by international agencies such as the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD), such as through its Programme for International School Assessment (PISA), how well literacy capabilities are distributed across a society is highly variable, independently of overall, average levels of scoring. That an organisation so focused on standardised testing and reportable and comparable outcomes is prepared to consider variability in societies and recognising these in literacy capabilities points to the need for this view to be considered more widely.

Australian teachers also face new accountabilities in relation to literacy arising from recent major curriculum innovations, in particular national curriculum and assessment programs. These initiatives are largely made up of:

1. a new curriculum in English that has a designated literacy strand (along with language and literature strands)
2. cross-curricular general capabilities that include literacy (along with, numeracy, intercultural understandings, personal & social capabilities, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capabilities, critical and creative thinking, and ethical understanding)
3. cross-curriculum priorities (Indigenous Australian culture, Asian perspectives, and sustainability)
4. a national assessment program in literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN) involving brief standardised tests at school Years 3, 5, 7, and 9.

State, territory, and regional jurisdictions across the country are not reacting in uniform ways to these interventions. Some authorities have aligned their local assessment and reporting schemas to comply with new national curricular and assessment regimens; some have developed specific, lesson-plan-level materials and pedagogical approaches to support teachers’ transition to the new curricular content; some have developed mobile support groups to work with school leaders and local and school-level leaders to implement these initiatives; and one has re-written the national curricula into new formats and sequences, aiming to retain local authority over the ‘syllabus’ used in its jurisdiction.

In addition to the challenges of a new national curriculum, definitions of literacy and pressures to teach to national testing priorities, teachers are required to engage with new national registration, performance appraisal, and accreditation processes through the suite of programs developed by the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). The central AITSL document, Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2012), now underpins teacher
registration, re-registration, promotion, performance planning and professional learning for teachers nationally.

Conforming to and reporting against generic standards necessarily sets boundaries around what innovations are possible, and how locally responsive teaching practices can be developed, disseminated, and sustained. In that these standards name what counts and does not count as acceptable educational activity, teachers need to engage with them by re-defining and re-evaluating practice.

It becomes important, in that light, to develop (and to study and document) settings in which teachers can both broaden their teaching repertoires and work in sustainable and rewarding ways within commonly understood, nationally defined and managed frameworks. In this way, through teacher inquiry, collaborative practice and innovative pedagogies, individual teachers and the system at large can extend the envelope of practice models understood to be relevant to particular community settings. Objectifying the standards as features of teachers’ activities, and comparing them to what teachers in those settings actually do can open up the possibility of debate about how teachers should respond to standards, and the ways in which their work matters. The strengths and drawbacks of the use of generic standards can thus be scrutinised, in professional and public domains, in light of the full range of conditions facing Australian teachers.

A further answer to ‘why literacy again?’ concerns the ongoing empirical and theoretical work around questions to do with the nature, teaching and learning of literacy. The study of the teaching and learning of reading, writing and literacy has developed in significant ways over the last generation of teachers and researchers. For instance, a generation ago there was comparatively little theoretical development around writing in education; anthropologists may have studied literacy, but educators for the most part studied reading. In their early 1970s reviews of reading research published in the leading research journal in the area, *Reading Research Quarterly*, Samuels (1973) and Williams (1973) identified four recurring themes: the assessment of ‘reading readiness’, visual and auditory training as the basis of reading development, the widespread use of word lists in research and teaching, and the first signs of interest in reading what was termed ‘meaningful prose’ and later ‘extended discourse’. Most of these have faded into history or linger as minority pursuits. The mid to late 1970s saw researchers beginning to pay serious attention to an extended range of literacy-education areas, including:

- comprehension of the texts that appear in real educational settings (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983)
- a growing distinction between capabilities with limited acquisition periods and those that continue to develop significantly (Paris, 2005)
- classrooms as sites of everyday literacy learning (Comber, 2000)
- the importance of equity issues in the educational distribution of literacy practices (Comber & Nixon, 2009)
• the significance of digital and online technologies in literacy teaching and learning (Lankshear, Snyder, & Green, 2000).

As with any other field of academic and professional complexity and urgency, the literacy ‘business’ surges ahead along with literacy research, and with increased activity in the policy and commercial sectors. Literacy teaching and learning has thus become consequential in political debates and in the marketplace.

These are all reasonable answers to ‘why literacy still?’, but some of Huey’s findings should still draw our attention. Huey pointed to the critical role of literacy in learners’ expanding social experiences: ‘reading and writing are learned in the service of what the children are doing as a social community’ (Huey, 1908, p. 300), and he warned of the potential for the ritualisation of certain pedagogies beyond their utility - a warning as fresh and relevant today as it was over a century ago.

As a school subject, reading is an old curiosity shop of absurd practices. … We have made a fetich [sic] of our doctrine of formal discipline, and formal reading has kept its artificial place in our curriculum supported in part by this now fast-decaying prop (Huey, 1908, pp. 9-10).

The goal of the work we report here, as with so much contemporary literacy education research and development, is to encourage teachers’ analysis of and responses to the conditions in which they work and the students with whom they work, and to use these experiences as bases for their sustainable and fulfilling professional growth as teachers. We hope that this book also provides examples of the potential role of collaboration between researchers, teacher educators, and classroom practitioners in the process of building and disseminating new knowledge about the teaching and learning of literacy in times of rapid change on numerous fronts.

New literacy demands in the middle years: Learning from design experiments

The project on which this book is based aimed to foster collaborative classroom research on innovative classroom practice. It focused on the middle years of schooling because this stage of schooling has been under-researched even though it poses particular challenges to literacy teaching and learning. For example, it is at this stage of schooling where children are expected to read and write independently. The literacy required of students in the middle years also changes as they begin to read and write to learn across the subject or ‘discipline’ areas. They need to use a variety of new resources and media. Teachers begin to look for evidence of conceptual understanding, content details, appropriate genres and discourses,
and the capacity to work with extended and complex texts that incorporate verbal, visual, and hybrid modes of communication. Evidence suggests, however, that gaps between those who perform highly and those who perform poorly on standardised measures of literacy increase rather than decrease at this point of schooling, and that these gaps relate to aspects of students’ background. Hence there is a need to investigate how different teachers design rich curriculum and explicitly teach middle years students to handle new and changing literacy demands that assist them to develop complex repertoires of literacy practices. There is also the need to take into account, in a continual and ongoing way, the particular literacy learning needs of diverse students at this point in their schooling. The need for ongoing studies of this kind is partly because the cultural and linguistic resources that students attending Australian schools bring with them is changing in rapid and unpredictable ways, in ways that are almost certainly beyond what many teachers were prepared for via their initial professional education, and beyond their own immediate social experiences.

The project aimed in particular to document and improve student literacy across the curriculum in the middle years (Years 5-9) through collaboratively crafted design experiments, an approach that we explain here. The idea for the research grew out of long-term collaborations between the department of education, teacher-researchers, the teachers’ union and the university researchers. Our earlier studies demonstrated the potential of change-ready teachers actively working with theories concerning literacy and pedagogy to inform their classroom practice. To formalise their inquiries to some degree, we decided to employ a design-based experiment approach to the classroom inquiries (Reimann, 2013; Reinking & Bradley, 2008). Briefly this approach means that teachers collect baseline performance data on an area of students’ learning they are wanting to improve, design, and implement a pedagogical intervention informed by theory and related research, and subsequently collect another set of student performance data to compare with the first. Further analysis occurs, and further intervention(s), in iterative cycles of amended practice and data collection, with teachers refining their interventions on the basis of their classroom inquiries and students’ work. Final data and analyses are used to inform theoretical understandings and for dissemination to wider users in the field of inquiry. Working explicitly with contemporary theories of literacy as socio-cultural practice, digital communication and youth cultures, and approaches to place-conscious pedagogy, a group of teacher-researchers from primary and secondary schools designed classroom curriculum and pedagogy to assist their students address the specific new literacy demands, and the affordances, associated with middle school learning in contemporary classrooms.

The value of design-based experiments is that change-ready teachers can trial innovative theoretically informed practice in situ and rigorously evaluate the effects with their students. Accounts of their experiments can then provide
useful starting points for other educators working in other contexts. These well-documented classroom experiments can test and demonstrate what might be possible in actual classrooms and in so doing pave the way for wider innovation by a broader community of practitioners. However the project recognises that change is not easy, that innovation may be context-specific and that improvements in individual classrooms and broader school reform are hard to sustain, especially in the face of changing policy and systems demands as discussed above. Hence in this book the authors will explain the particularities of their school and classroom contexts that both allowed for their innovative work to be undertaken and also limited what they were able to accomplish. They will also make recommendations about what they have learned in the light of the national curriculum and testing agendas. An initial point needs to be made that these reports are not just about a variety of topics or approaches. Each is expressed in a distinctive ‘voice’; we have not standardised the teachers’ and university researchers’ accounts into some supposedly neutral inter-language, but rather we set out to capitalise on the genuine variety that true collaboration embodies. Each chapter begins with an overview of the work reported that connects it to the overall aims of the book.

Classroom inquiries into literacy in the middle years

Teachers conducted inquiries into curriculum and pedagogy informed by theory and research about three areas of significance for learning in the middle years: place-conscious pedagogies, curriculum or subject-specific literacies, and youth cultures and digital literacies. Each of these three areas has implications for teaching and learning in the context of linguistically diverse classrooms and an Australian curriculum that prioritises learning in the disciplines, cross-curricular capabilities and the use of digital and online technologies. Before summarising the contexts of these inquiries we explain some of the reasons for our emphasis on these three areas.

Place-conscious pedagogies

The need for pedagogies and curriculum that engage and motivate adolescent learners through relevance in their lives is rarely disputed (Hayes, Mills, Christie, & Lingard, 2006). Project-based cross-curricular rich tasks are seen as one approach to ensuring the connections between the real world and students’ academic learning. Within this broad tradition of authentic curriculum, placed-conscious pedagogies address current environmental and social challenges in ways that mobilise young people’s involvement in community and schooling (Gruenewald, 2003; Smith & Sobel, 2010; Sobel, 2005). In a series of recent projects Comber and colleagues have explored the connections between place-conscious pedagogies...
focused on environmental issues with adolescent learners, with promising results for students’ literacy and academic engagement (Comber, Nixon, Ashmore, Loo, & Cook, 2006; Comber, Nixon, & Reid, 2007).

‘Sustainability’ is a cross-curriculum priority in the Australian Curriculum, embedded within each subject area (ACARA, 2013a).

In the Australian Curriculum, sustainability will allow all young Australians to develop the knowledge, skills, values and worldviews necessary for them to act in ways that contribute to more sustainable patterns of living. It will enable individuals and communities to reflect on ways of interpreting and engaging with the world. The Sustainability priority is futures-oriented, focusing on protecting environments and creating a more ecologically and socially just world through informed action. Actions that support more sustainable patterns of living require consideration of environmental, social, cultural and economic systems and their interdependence (ACARA, 2013a).

Place-conscious learning projects work with these notions of sustainability, drawing on and extending learning across curriculum areas in projects meaningful to the local students and teachers, in their local communities, at the same time taking initiatives active citizens engaged with their world and able to contribute to their futures. In developing literacy and language skills, a focus on sustainability …

… provides rich and engaging contexts for developing students’ abilities in listening, speaking, reading, viewing and writing. The Australian Curriculum: English assists students to develop the skills necessary to investigate, analyse and communicate ideas and information related to sustainability, and to advocate, generate and evaluate actions for sustainable futures. The content in the language, literature and literacy strands is key to developing and sharing knowledge about social, economic and ecological systems and worldviews that promote social justice (ACARA, 2013a).

In Chapter 2 of this book, two primary teachers teaching in the same primary school explain the reasons for their long-term approach to place-conscious education and its benefits for their students’ literacy understandings and achievements, as a cross-curricular capability. Working within a context of a large public and private partnership project of urban renewal, they have assisted their students to develop complex literate repertoires by positioning them as researchers in their changing local natural and built environments. This approach has enabled them to develop culturally responsive curriculum, work across the discipline areas, and also to achieve good outcomes according to standard measures, such as NAPLAN tests.
Curriculum literacies

Basic skills around decoding, comprehension and production of a range of genres remain key issues for learning as students move into the middle years of schooling (May & Smyth, 2007; May & Wright, 2007). In addition, it is well established that students often struggle with the sudden requirement to engage with discipline-specific literacy demands with minimal scaffolding or little explicit instruction (Morgan, 2012; O’Brien & Stewart, 1990; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). In fact students require targeted support and the development of core as well as specific subject skill-sets, and this is likely to be complex work for students for whom English is an additional language (Morgan, 2012).

Teachers in our project investigated curriculum-specific literacies in school subjects including English, History, Science and Maths. Their work is represented in this book in Chapters 4 and 7. Chapter 4 provides background to understanding the current curricular literacy debates, and describes case studies in Science, Maths, History and English teaching, specific to the context and needs of the teachers and their students involved. Chapter 7 reports on the inquiries of three primary school teachers from one school who investigated the curricular literacies of Science that are required for success in the upper years of primary school and transition to secondary school; along with teacher well-being in relation to teaching Science in the primary school, with reference to new literacy and content demands arising from the introduction of the Australian Curriculum.

Youth cultures and digital literacies

It is increasingly evident that basic print skills are necessary but not sufficient for effective engagement in new economies and life worlds. The students in present-day Australian classrooms, like their global counterparts, are increasingly turning to screen-based textual practices and digital literacies in order to engage effectively in a range of communities of relevance and subcultural identity performances although they are still often doing so outside school hours. The value of digital youth cultures in (re)engaging students in school-relevant practices has been noted and explored by a number of researchers (Carrington & Robinson, 2009; Davies & Merchant, 2009; Freebody & Muspratt, 2008; Freebody, Muspratt & McRae 2008). However, a recent review of research on technology integration in elementary and middle school classrooms suggests that technology in education continues to be considered through traditional lenses and argues that more comprehensive and longitudinal research is needed (Abrams & Merchant, 2013).

Recent digital technologies have an impact on knowledge production and its presentation in everyday life as well as across curriculum areas and modes. Indeed the Australian Curriculum recognises the importance of digital technologies in relation to multimodal encounters with knowledge, learning and contemporary
citizenship and nominates digital literacy as one general capability that young people need to develop.

In the Australian Curriculum, students develop ICT capability as they learn to use ICT effectively and appropriately to access, create and communicate information and ideas, solve problems and work collaboratively in all learning areas at school, and in their lives beyond school. The capability involves students in learning to make the most of the digital technologies available to them, adapting to new ways of doing things as technologies evolve and limiting the risks to themselves and others in a digital environment (ACARA, 2013b).

In terms of literacy, the impact of new technologies is profound, including influence not only on modes of text production and transmission, access and use; but also in regard to how these multiliteracies arising from digital technologies are changing how young people communicate, relate to each other, and relate to the devices and platforms for information exchange. Literacies of the present-day are inextricably related to these digital dimensions, and are compelling educators to reconsider notions of literacy and learning.

In this book there are two teacher-researchers who report on why and how they make digital and online technologies central to their curriculum and pedagogy for middle years learners. Chapter 3 is a primary school teacher’s account of how she uses new media and the digital arts to assist the literacy learning and development of students who have English as an additional language. In Chapters 5 and 6, the ‘digital domain’ is discussed in more detail, and a middle years’ secondary teacher of English explains how in her design-based experiment she assists her students to develop the skills required to effectively conduct research on the internet, a complex skill set that is increasingly required for success in many discipline areas.

Consolidating approaches to new literacies

The final chapter of the book, Chapter 8, provides a reflection on the learning and understanding gained from this project in relation to teachers’ work across the different pedagogical approaches, across the curriculum, and across the middle years, in providing insights into fruitful, ‘suitable to the moment’ literacy learning and examples of innovative practice that will be of use to teachers in many contexts.

There are two ways in which these teachers’ work connects to the Australian Curriculum and the literacy challenges inherent in newly revised subject areas, content, inclusions and expectations. The first is that a single national curriculum applies additional pressure on educators for more overt and effective adaptations
and differentiations across a wider range of context. The second is that the new national curriculum package emphasises the integration of particular curricular contents with a variety of broader ‘general capabilities’ (literacy, numeracy, ICT capability, critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical understanding and intercultural understanding) and cross-curriculum priorities (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia and sustainability). These additional curricular layers call upon teachers to develop new forms of integration of knowledge in their use of materials, their pedagogies and their assessments of students’ work beyond their core curriculum areas. These two features of the work expected of teachers in the contemporary Australian setting were important motivators for this project.

Finally, we take the view in this project that the profession at large, university researchers included, should help sustain the work of teachers and be concerned for their professional well-being and sense of fulfilment. Inquiry of the sort that Design-Based Research represents lies at the centre of this commitment to sustainable and rewarding practice. It can provide a meaningful way for teachers to put forward examples of ideas that work, challenging and validating what they do, as well as informing and motivating their colleagues.