

Chapter One

Background to the Study

1.1 Introduction

The past 30 years have seen some major changes in education, both at a national and an international level. Since a competent standard of literacy is the basis for all western style formal education, it is in the field of literacy, that much debate has taken place, both in the academic and public arenas. Fast-moving technological innovations are having an enormous impact on the type of employment opportunities which exist from year to year (Mierendorff 1993).

Governments are responding to the emerging need for a flexible, highly literate, numerate and computer-literate workforce. Employees need to be able to respond to increasing complexity in our society by reading, comprehending and applying varying levels of information from many sources in their everyday and work lives (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997). In the post-industrial society, it is no longer acceptable to have students who fail (Mierendorff 1993). Gustafsson (1979) states that the term 'post-industrial society' can be defined as a society, which has changed from primarily producing goods, to an economy concerned with service industries and one in which the professional and technical class of workers have pre-eminence. Similarly, Hildebrand (1979) defines post-industrial societies as those in which service industries take the lead in employment figures.

Examples of post-industrial societies include most western countries, USA, UK, Canada, Germany, Japan, Sweden and many other European countries. Their economies have been marked by a rise in the

service sector. Pollard (1979) uses the examples of Sweden, Canada and Japan as countries which have increasing service sectors. Australia is also considered a post-industrial society. In Australia, 63.7 percent of all small businesses and 64.8 percent of other businesses were involved in service industries in the period 1994-95 (ABS 1997b).

Coupled with the increase in service industries is a growth in the 'white-collar' workforce, a group which requires a higher level of education than that needed by workers in industry. The trend has therefore been for a greater demand for higher education in post-industrial countries (Hildebrand 1979). This trend has been mirrored in Australia and has seen a major expansion in the tertiary sector. The Review of Higher Education in Australia (DEETYA 1997a), confirms that there has been far-reaching change in the higher education sector in the last ten years, marked by increases in access and participation, which have changed this sector from an elite to a mass higher education system. Many students are now considering tertiary study or training before entering the workforce. In September, 1995, 24.1 percent of all persons aged 15-24 years attended some form of tertiary institution (ABS 1997c).

Therefore, if students are to succeed in the post-industrial labour market, they need tertiary education. If they are to succeed in tertiary education, they need to succeed at school. For students to achieve an acceptable standard of literacy and numeracy that will equip them for tertiary study, the programs in operation in our schools need to be carefully monitored to ensure that students are achieving required outcomes.

One method of monitoring, increasingly favoured by educational authorities and governments, is to conduct standardised testing in literacy and numeracy. The Basic Skills Tests for students in Years 3 and 5 in NSW government schools are an example of such testing (Raethel 1997c). Test analyses are used to assess if children are achieving at an acceptable

level. Standards set are usually based on age and year of schooling. They tend not to allow for ethnographic or demographic differences, or the types of reading programs used in schools.

This chapter introduces the thesis topic which is focused on literacy and the skill of sustained silent reading. It begins with a discussion of the context of literacy standards in the wider educational community, assessment programs, functional literacy, the social costs of illiteracy and the current policy in NSW towards Aboriginal Education. Specifically, this thesis proceeds by examining the place of a specific literacy-enhancing silent reading program, Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), in the curriculum of one rural State High school in New South Wales. The purpose and significance of this study is to evaluate the DEAR program as it is currently operating, and to assess if there are any major differences in attitude towards it, and reading in general, between specific categories of students, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and male and female students. A list of research questions as well as a brief overview of the methodology conclude this chapter.

1.2 Literacy Assessment Programs

National programs assessing literacy standards have been introduced into a number of countries. One of the first took place in the USA. It was called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and began in 1969. As a result of this project, the trend towards standardised testing in the USA intensified, and many States conducted competency testing in basic skills (Education Research and Development Committee 1982).

A project similar to the American NAEP was subsequently introduced into the U.K. in 1974. The National Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) focused on testing in three main areas, Language, Mathematics and Science. In Australia, the Australian Education Council,

comprising all the State and Territory Ministers of Education commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in 1979 to develop a national assessment program. The Australian Studies in Student Performance (ASSP) program aimed to test students in the areas of literacy and numeracy (ERDC 1982).

The ASSP project and subsequent Basic Skills testing programs were the result of a growing ideology that educational standards should be common to the nation and not just the States, who traditionally hold responsibility for education. The Federal Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, Dr. David Kemp, in announcing a National Literacy and Numeracy Plan for Australian schoolchildren, states in a media release (DEETYA, 1997b:1) that, 'research has shown that young people's participation in education, the workforce and society is influenced significantly by their level of ability in literacy and numeracy'.

With rising unemployment in industrialised societies, there is accompanying pressure to increase educational standards (ERDC 1982). In the mid 1970's in Australia, there was a downturn in the economy which led to a sharp rise in youth unemployment. Concern over educational standards became a real issue at this time, as successive governments blamed low educational standards for rising youth unemployment and called for a national monitoring system. Debate raged over the proposed ASSP tests for a number of years. Critics challenged their validity and shortfalls. Attempts to categorise ethnic groups and Aboriginal students in the analysis were challenged and teacher unions were largely opposed to the testing. However, employer groups were supportive, because test results would allow them to easily decide between applicants for jobs (ERDC 1982).

In 1997, a pilot literacy testing program was introduced to NSW schools, to assess literacy standards in Year 7. The English Language and Literacy Assessment test (ELLA) focused on Reading, Language and

Writing skills. The researcher was involved in administering this test of functional literacy in the study school.

1.3 'Functional' Literacy

The emphasis on 'functional literacy', defined as 'those skills necessary to understand and use information from material which is printed in English and found in everyday life' (ABS 1997d) has gained momentum since the introduction of computers in all levels of industry. This technological advancement has created an enormous technological revolution and rapid change. To cope with this change, governments are calling for a well-trained, literate workforce which is able to respond to innovations, to read and interpret manuals and other technical literature. The 1990 Federal Government *Green Paper* entitled 'Literacy and Language Policy for the 1990's' confirms the link between literacy, technology and education in the post-industrial Australian economy (Bigum & Green 1993).

Christie (1990) states that the standard of literacy required today is higher and more sophisticated than at any time in the past. People need to be able to read a vast array of printed materials as well as other electronic forms of print. Otherwise they will be disempowered and disadvantaged at every level of society.

Brown (1994) uses the term 'higher order literacies' to describe the literacy skills required by workers in a post-industrial society. Levett and Lankshear (1994) suggest that it is no longer the norm for workers to do merely as they are told, workers today often take part in product development and decision-making. For this they need to be highly literate in order to understand the complex printed matter that is a feature of technological advance in our society.

Following similar testing in Canada and the United States, a

functional literacy and numeracy survey was conducted in Australia between May and July 1996 (ABS 1997). The Survey of Aspects of Literacy (SAL), commissioned by the Australian Government, interviewed 9,302 people, aged from 15 to 74, across Australia, but excluded remote and sparsely settled populations. One of the aspects surveyed was 'Prose literacy' which assessed a person's ability to comprehend and apply information from prose texts, such as newspapers, magazines and brochures.

Results of the survey were released to the media by the ABS (Brough 1997) and created some conflict between the Australian Federal Minister for Schools, Dr David Kemp, and State Ministers of Education, who are responsible for schooling. Dr Kemp claimed that literacy standards in Australia were low and measures needed to be taken to improve standards if Australia was to compare favourably with other western societies. State Ministers countered these claims by stating that literacy standards in their schools were in fact improving.

Interpretation and extrapolation of results indicates that up to 6.2 million people in Australia (47.2 percent of those surveyed) may have poor or very poor literacy skills. Brough (1997) states that, of the survey's respondents, approximately 35 percent had average skills, while only 17 percent had high or very high skills. The results are better than in the US and Switzerland but below those of Sweden, Canada and Germany. Myers (1997) reports that the survey prompted calls for a war on illiteracy which may be cost effective when compared to the millions of dollars spent on social problems related to poor literacy skills.

1.4 The Social Costs of Illiteracy

Hartley (1989) states that there are enormous social costs both to an individual and to a community, when illiteracy in the community is not addressed. Individuals are unable to act as informed citizens in elections or

in issues which affect their local communities. They become dependent on others, sometimes falling in to the poverty trap. Their families suffer and the cycle of dependency may be repeated over a number of generations. As consumers they may be misinformed or even cheated because they are unaware of their rights. International Literacy Year in 1990 focused on adult literacy issues and the need for literacy policy initiatives by government (Wickert 1993).

For example, the National School English Literacy Survey (NSELS), conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) (Raethel 1997b) found that 38 percent of children from poor families were assessed as below the standard set for reading, compared with 28 percent from middle-class families and 10 percent from affluent families.

People with low literacy skills also seem to be limited in the range of social activities they undertake. Only 5 percent of respondents who scored poorly on the SAL results (ABS 1997) undertook two or more activities weekly, compared with 14 percent who had higher scores. Hartley (1989) suggests that illiterate citizens may also suffer from ill health due to a lack of awareness of health resources, and/or may be locked out of the employment market.

The SAL Report (ABS 1997), demonstrates a clear relationship between literacy skill level and labour force status. Thirty percent of those on the lowest literacy level were unemployed and 63 percent of those on the lowest level also received the lowest income. Trying to overcome low literacy skills is a problem for adults as it is hard to educate oneself without first becoming literate (Myers 1997). New South Wales tends to have a large number of people with low level functional literacy skills because of the high number of migrants in this State (ABS 1997). Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) people tended to fall into the lower literacy categories. So too did Indigenous people. The functional literacy of

Aboriginal Australians is of particular importance in this thesis.

1.5 Aboriginal Education Policy

Indigenous Australians as a minority group in Australia are often categorised as the most educationally disadvantaged group in society. Few Aboriginal students in Australia complete secondary school. The National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (DEET 1995) reported that, in 1993, only 33 percent of Aboriginal students continued to Year 12, compared with the national average of 78 percent. Of those who did stay on, females had a higher retention rate than males.

In the SAL (ABS 1997d), approximately three-quarters of the Indigenous population who live in urban or moderately populated centres, were surveyed. 41 percent were on the lowest skill level for Prose literacy and another 28 percent were on level 2 which is still below an acceptable standard of literacy. These figures were explained in the SAL (ABS 1997d) Report, by the explanation that 62 percent of the Indigenous people surveyed did not complete high school. The educational disadvantage of Indigenous people is marked when compared with non-Indigenous Australians. Only 36 percent of the general population did not complete high school.

Many Aboriginal families are dependent on welfare, due to high unemployment and a lack of opportunity in Aboriginal communities (Green 1996). The level of illiteracy among Aboriginal Australians may be due in part to a past history of exclusion from mainstream schooling. This problem is currently being addressed by successive governments in an attempt to improve the educational achievements of Aboriginal students, so that they may take their place as equal partners in Australian society and break out of the cycle of poverty. A Joint Policy (DEET 1995) endorsed by all States and Territories in 1989 has set goals for ensuring that Aboriginal students attain the same standards of skills as other students and

that they complete Year 12 at the same rate as the rest of the general community. The current NSW Department of School Education Aboriginal Education Policy states that its primary goal is 'To promote the educational achievements of Aboriginal students' (Aboriginal Education Unit 1996:1). It builds on the 1982 Aboriginal Education Policy which aimed to improve retention rates.

The new policy, which has been generously funded (NSW Department of School Education 1997), focuses on intensive literacy and numeracy programs so that outcomes for Aboriginal students will be comparable to those of non-Aboriginal students. This will allow the Aboriginal students to compete successfully for places in vocational education and employment programs. The recent SAL results and the NSEL Survey (Raethel 1997b) report that only 19 percent of the Aboriginal students surveyed meet the Year 3 reading standard. The need for effective literacy and reading programs for these students is substantial and evident.

1.6 Literacy and Reading Programs

Students need to be able to read competently, that is, to read quickly, accurately and effortlessly (Braggett 1996). For students to read effectively, they need to be interested and motivated in what they are reading. Braggett (1996) quotes Stanovich's 'Matthew effect' in reading which suggests that reading practice improves reading ability and it is the practice, or lack thereof, which differentiates good from poor readers. In High school, students are expected to progress from the learning to read stage to the reading to learn stage (Braggett 1996). If one assumes that the former is represented by oral reading competence in Primary school and the latter assumes competency in silent reading, required in Secondary school, it follows that students progressing from Primary to Secondary education need to develop good silent reading skills if they are to succeed at the High school level.

1.7 The DEAR program

The question arises as to how to provide appropriate reading practice and develop good reading skills. One solution that has been embraced by a number of schools, both in Australia and overseas, is a sustained silent reading program called Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), which is specifically designed to allow for practice in silent reading. As part of DEAR, Students sit quietly in a classroom and read. They are expected to bring a novel with them, but they may read newspapers, magazines or any other reading material which is available. A teacher sits in with the group and also reads silently. The whole school participates in the program. Usually the Roll teacher is also the DEAR teacher.

The DEAR program has been operating in New South Wales High schools for more than 10 years. The researcher, through informal discussions at her own school, has ascertained that the rationale for its incorporation into the school timetable was generally unknown to the majority of teachers who have become part of the High school system, since the initial period of implementation. Twenty minutes per day is set aside for DEAR. This amounts to 100 minutes per week or two periods. In a timetable which is so full that several senior courses are conducted before school, at lunchtimes or after school, the DEAR Program is allocated significant time. This thesis investigates students' attitudes to sustained silent reading through the DEAR program in a rural high school.

1.8 Selection of the Study project

This research developed as a result of personal observation and curiosity. As a new teacher in a rural high school in NSW, the researcher enquired about the rationale for DEAR. It soon became evident that few teachers or students understood the educational purpose of the DEAR sessions each day and that in some classes, students would interact and cause discipline problems instead of reading silently. Absenteeism,

cause discipline problems instead of reading silently. Absenteeism, especially among senior students was also notable. Frequently, Aboriginal students in the school would come to the researcher's staffroom at DEAR time looking for the Aboriginal Education Assistant. While their main purpose was ostensibly to get some reading material, they would often time their visit so that they missed most of the DEAR session. When questioned by the researcher, the Aboriginal students appeared to be negative towards the DEAR program. As a result of these observations and a long established interest in reading, the researcher formulated the following research question.

Is the DEAR program perceived by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students as beneficial in improving silent reading skills and thereby enhancing literacy?

The study also sought to find the origins of the DEAR Program, to examine the rationale behind the Program's introduction as a silent-reading program, its subsequent implementation in NSW schools, and to also examine teachers' perceptions of DEAR. Differences between Aboriginal student and non-Aboriginal student perceptions of the benefits of DEAR were of particular interest.

1.9 Limitations to the Study

Since the purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of High School students towards a sustained silent reading program, it did not intend to include literature dealing with reading acquisition or oral reading. Similarly, the study did not intend to focus on specific literacy problems, experienced by individual students, such as dyslexia. Adult readers were also excluded, except where they acted as role models for students.

The study was primarily concerned with students aged from 12

years to 18 years, in Years 7 to 12. As such it focused on adolescents and adolescent attitudes towards silent reading. This is an important time in a child's educational development and attitudes formed during these years often influence students in their adult lives. It was important therefore to examine this age group separately from other groups of silent readers.

The study also focused on rural urban Aboriginal students and did not wish to include the enormous amount of work which has been done in literacy in remote Indigenous communities. The backgrounds of the students in the study school are quite different from those of Aboriginal students in remote rural communities.

The study also distinguished Non English Speaking Background (NESB) students in the survey. This was done to assess if there were any real differences or similarities between this group and urban Aboriginal students. Since the study found that the NESB students were similar in their responses to non-Aboriginal students, their responses were included in the non-Aboriginal category. The methodology used in this study also had some limitations. These are dealt with in depth in Chapter 4.

Despite these limitations, one of the strengths of this research project was the position of the researcher as a teacher in the school. As an insider, the researcher already had the confidence of the Principal, Executive, other teachers and students. The researcher was also aware of correct procedures required for implementing such a project as this in a State high school. This awareness contributed enormously to the smooth conduct of the survey and any follow-up that was necessary. The researcher was also able to draw on her extensive experience as a teacher in this school to support arguments in the literature which concern themselves with the educational process in high schools.

1.10 Significance and Potential Contribution of the Study

This study is significant because it examines and evaluates a literacy-enhancing program which has been taken for granted by many teachers and students in the study school. The rationale for its introduction appears to have faded from current discussion of the school curriculum. As a result, few teachers in the school seem to be aware of the importance of DEAR and the place of silent reading in the development of literacy skills in secondary school. To the researcher's knowledge, the attitudes of students and teaching staff towards the DEAR program have not been formally documented in either the school under study or in other comprehensive High schools in New South Wales which include DEAR in the regular timetable.

Several important issues were addressed by this study. Firstly, the levels of acceptance of DEAR by male and female students and by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students are of particular interest to teachers and to the executive of the study school. It should support any decisions regarding school timetabling and curriculum additions.

Secondly, as the DEAR Program is a part of the school curriculum in other schools across the State of NSW, this study may inform other school staff wishing to evaluate their own programs. It may also be of interest to schools which are not currently running a DEAR Program but which may be considering the possibility. The study contributes important information about attitudes to sustained silent reading which may be used by the NSW Department of School Education in formulating policy.

Thirdly, the study will be of interest to parents, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal who are interested in the educational outcomes of their children, particularly with regards to literacy. With the wide range of electronic distractions available to today's youth, reading for pleasure may be seen as an unexciting alternative. The study attempts to examine the

attitudes of adolescents towards reading as a recreational pursuit.

Finally, the study attempts to categorise the most popular forms of reading material being selected by the students surveyed. There is scope here for further research which may be of interest to libraries, booksellers and publishers.

1.11 Research Questions

The research questions and sub-questions posed in this study were:

1. Does the current DEAR program in the study school fulfil the initial aims documented in the literature and in school policy documents?
 - a. Is the program conducted according to recommended guidelines or has there been an erosion of adherence to guidelines over time?
 - b. Have there been any alternative programs introduced in the school being studied?

2. Is the DEAR program as carried out in one rural State High School perceived by students and teachers as beneficial?
 - a. Do the majority of students enjoy the DEAR session?
 - b. Do they believe it leads to an improvement in reading achievement?
 - c. Do they believe it leads to a greater enjoyment of reading?
 - d. Is there a difference in attitudes between males and females?
 - e. Do attitudes change in the senior years?

- f. What is the most popular reading matter?
 - g. What are the attitudes of teachers at the school to the DEAR program?
 - h. Do their attitudes differ significantly from those of the students?
3. What are the attitudes of Aboriginal students towards the DEAR program?
- a. Do these differ significantly from those of non-Aboriginal students?
 - b. Do these differ significantly from those of Non English Speaking Background (NESB) students?
 - c. What are their attitudes towards reading in general? Do they read similar material?

1.12 Brief overview of Methodology

The study observed and examined current practice of DEAR by comparing it with the original guidelines set when the DEAR program was first implemented. This was done to evaluate whether program guidelines had been eroded since initial implementation.

The attitudes of students and teachers in the school towards DEAR were examined by means of a major survey. A pilot questionnaire was first drawn up and administered in another High School which is similar in size and type to the Study school. The pilot was conducted in order to ensure that ambiguities in questions were clarified and that the questionnaire would be easy to administer and effective in collecting data. Any necessary changes to questions were then made before the final questionnaire was developed.

The questionnaire was then administered in the Study school and data sheets were collected. Data were entered onto a master spreadsheet

and summaries were made for different categories and questions. Summary spreadsheets were then drawn up for comparisons of data. A series of bar graphs and pie charts were also compiled to provide easy visualisation of comparisons. Responses to individual questions on the student questionnaire were examined using the statistical tool of Chi Square to assess any significant differences between groups of students. Finally, results obtained from data collection were analysed systematically following the order of the research questions.

1.13 Conclusion

In an education climate where literacy is gaining more prominence, where 'functional' and 'active' literacy are required more and more by our post-industrial society, where technological change requires workers to have a high competency in reading, the focus on literacy education in our schools is becoming stronger. Students in secondary schools need to develop their silent reading skills in order to be able to cope with the complex reading material that they will meet both in the modern workplace, in tertiary studies, and in the wider community.

Some schools have realised that there is a need for time to be set aside to provide for practice in silent reading, and have introduced sustained silent reading programs, such as DEAR. But the rationale for such programs is not always clear and attitudes among students and teachers towards such programs are rarely evaluated to assess whether the programs are perceived to be beneficial or not.

This study which focuses on the major research question: 'Is the DEAR program perceived by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students as beneficial in improving silent reading skills and thereby enhancing literacy?' will add to our knowledge of current student and teacher attitudes to sustained silent reading programs and hopes to highlight any major differences in attitudes between the groups surveyed.

1.14 Definitions of Terms and Acronyms

Active literacy	Reading and writing skills directly related to an individual's participation in society.
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AEA	Aboriginal Education Assistant - responsible for welfare of Aboriginal students in state schools.
AEU	Aboriginal Education Unit, NSW Department of School Education
APU	Assessment of Performance Unit - U.K. test of literacy, numeracy and science knowledge.
ASSP	Australian Studies in Student Performance - Australian test to measure literacy and numeracy knowledge.
Basic Skills	Australian test of Primary school children measuring literacy and numeracy knowledge.
DEAR	Drop Everything And Read (Silent Reading Program)
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training, Commonwealth Government.
DEETYA	Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Commonwealth Government.
DSE	Department of School Education, NSW
ELLA	English Language and Literacy Assessment - pilot test administered to Yr. 7 students in NSW.
ERDC	Educational Research and Development Committee
ESL	English as a Second Language
Functional literacy	Reading and Writing skills necessary to comprehend and apply information written in English (in Australia) and found in everyday life and in the workplace.
IRP	Individualised Reading Program - Hunt's (1967) early silent reading program in America.
IRPR	Integrated Reading Performance Record - Campbell's et al. (1996) Survey of students in America.

Literacy	Collective term for reading and writing knowledge.
NAC	National Aboriginal Council
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress - literacy test conducted in USA.
NESB	Non English Speaking Background student - one who comes from a country where another language other than English is spoken.
NSELS	National School English Literacy Survey
OM	Otitis media - a chronic ear infection which may lead to permanent hearing loss.
Numeracy	Collective term for mathematical concepts and processes knowledge.
Post-industrial	Term given to developed countries which are technologically advanced and those in which the service sector is more important as an employment base than the industrial sector.
Primary school	First 7 years of schooling from Kindergarten to Year 6
RCADIC	Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths In Custody
RIOTT	Reading Is Only the Tiger's Tail - McCracken & McCracken's (1972) silent reading program
Roll teacher	Teacher who checks student attendance each day.
SAL	Survey of Aspects of Literacy - Australian National Survey commissioned by the Australian Government into literacy standards.
Secondary school	Next 6 years of schooling from Years 7 to 12.
SSR	Sustained Silent Reading
SWELL	Schoolwide Early Language and Literacy - a program developed at Macquarie University for beginning readers.
Tertiary sector	Post-school education system involving vocational and professional training. In Australia the main deliverers of tertiary education are universities and 18.
USSR	Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading - Hunt's (1970)

second silent reading program, sometimes called
'Russian reading'.

'white-collar' Term applied to professionals earning a salary rather than a wage. 'White-collar' workers usually work in administration, government, management or at an executive level. Most have tertiary qualifications.

Chapter Two

Sustained Silent Reading

2.1 Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of silent reading and developments which led to the introduction of sustained silent reading (SSR) programs in American schools in the 1960s. Some early schemes are outlined with special emphasis on factors such as teacher and parent modelling which are vital for the success of such programs. The successful American SSR format was soon adopted by Australian schools and is the basis for the scheme currently being used in the school in this study.

A brief examination of the pre-reading process and the need for early word recognition practice begins the chapter. The acquisition of reading skills by beginning readers is then also briefly examined, including current methods used to teach beginning reading and to encourage the development of reading skills. It is this independent stage, or the sustained silent reading stage (SSR), which is the focus of this study. SSR has been shown to be vital for incidental vocabulary acquisition (Shu, Anderson & Zhang 1995), because it provides the practice needed to improve reading skills. Hunt (1967) suggests that regular SSR motivates children to develop a life-long enjoyment of reading. SSR schemes are known by several acronyms, such as DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) and these have been listed. DEAR is the name of the SSR program examined in this study.

A discussion of student interest in reading follows, including a summary of findings from surveys of reading preferences which include

examinations of gender differences. The chapter concludes with a list of guidelines set down by the staff of the study school at the time of the introduction of DEAR.

2.2 Early Word Recognition Practice

Learning to read is a highly complex process which involves an integration of many skills and cognitive processes. McCracken and McCracken (1972, 16) define it as “the interpretation of alphabetic symbols and the use or application of the ideas interpreted. Sometimes the use is an overt action; sometimes it is only thought”.

Cultures with oral traditions do not require writing as a form of communication in their languages. Where there is no written language, the skill of reading, as we know it, is unnecessary. In cultures which do utilise the skill of writing, however, there is a great variation in the types of alphabetic symbols used and reading acquisition depends on developing the skills needed to interpret symbols into the words or ideas expressed by the author. Blachman (1991) states that reading is an artificial process which requires explicit tuition. Few individuals acquire reading skills has been the subject of much research.

Jennings (1965), supported by Adams (1990), states that reading begins with learning to recognise that all objects have names and that the world around us is categorised in our spoken language. Unless children develop this training in early recognition, it is difficult for them to progress to reading which involves an alphabetic code in European languages. Beginning readers need to visualise what is meant by words and concepts to be successful.

Blachman (1991) suggests that children need to develop an

awareness of the phonological segments in words. The next step is learning to manipulate these and make connections between print and speech. Hatcher, Hulme and Ellis (1995, 131) define 'phonological awareness' as the 'ability to identify, reflect upon and manipulate the sounds of spoken language'. In the researcher's experience as a former Primary and Infants teacher, such training in early word recognition is usually the responsibility of parents, family and other child-carers through informal language development at home. Children quickly learn that all objects have names and many young children are introduced to books at an early age. As they enter school, the majority of children, already come well equipped with a small child's knowledge of the world around them. The early years of schooling continue the process of recognition training, linking objects and concepts with words, while simultaneously beginning the complex task of teaching children to read.

2.3 Teaching of Reading

The appropriate method in the teaching of reading is a controversial subject. From the researcher's point of view, it seems that every ten years or so, a new scheme is introduced into schools (for example, Phonics, Whole Word and Big Book), which is purported to be superior to the previous scheme. Coltheart (1996) claims that, historically, there seems to be no one way to teach children how to read and some methods are more effective than others. This is because of individual differences in learners. A method that may be successful for a visual learner may not succeed for a child who prefers auditory methods. As a language teacher, the researcher believes that a combination of both auditory and visual methods is needed for successful teaching.

The debate about the teaching of phonics as an intrinsic part of teaching reading has been intense over the last decade. Visual letter

recognition is not enough, according to Adams (1990). Fluent readers need to know a large number of words, they need to be able to spell, pronounce and define such words and be aware of contextual nuances.

Coltheart (1996), who has researched early methods in teaching reading, reported that as early as 1590, Mulcuster found that using the whole-word reading method exclusively did not teach people to generalise decoding skills to unfamiliar words and that alternatively, the sole use of the phonics method appeared to make reading meaningless. So a combination of both approaches seems necessary to ensure the acquisition of reading skills. Recently, Wheldall (1997), suggested that a whole-language approach may be sufficient for some beginners, but that low-progress readers require tutoring in phonics, word recognition and reading of texts in a one-to-one situation, either with a supportive tutor or parent.

In support of this view of the teaching of reading, Harris and Coltheart (1986) outline four phases in learning to read English. The sight-vocabulary phase emerges usually around the age of four or five, when children are able to 'read' whole words using cues other than letters. For example the words Coca Cola which are always written in a distinctive font and colour on billboards, vending machines and on the bottles themselves. The second or discrimination-net phase uses fragmentary cues, such as word-length or double letters, to discriminate between familiar words in an individual child's restricted vocabulary bank. As the written vocabulary bank begins to grow, Harris and Coltheart (1986) suggest that children move on to another phase where phonological recoding occurs. This facilitates children's reading of sounds and introduces them to sound-letter relationships. These phonics skills are important as they equip students to read unfamiliar words. The final or orthographic phase allows children to use context in order to distinguish between homophones and thus deduce correct meaning.

Additionally, Hatcher, Hulme and Ellis (1995, 134-135) report the results of a study in 'phonological linkage'. They state that teaching "phonological skills in isolation from reading and spelling skills may be less effective than training which forms links between children's underlying phonological skills and their experiences in learning to read". Their study found that linking phonological training with learning to read activities definitely improved the reading skills of 'reading-delayed' 7 year olds. Teaching each skill in isolation was of little or no use in this study, however, it is evident that children needed to be taught to see the relationship between sounds and letters.

2.4 Extension of Reading skills

After children do learn to decode, they need to practise the reading skills they have acquired. In the researcher's experience as a teacher, little recognition has been given to this important requirement in our schools. It seems to be assumed that once the skill of reading has been attained (usually in Primary school), students will continue reading independently, automatically improving skills and vocabulary over time. Anderson & Freebody (1983) suggest that as the annual vocabulary growth for most children who read is large, then independent learning is much more efficient than the direct teaching of vocabulary. Shu, Anderson & Zhang (1995) support the work of Anderson & Freebody (1983). They estimate that 3,000 plus words are added annually to a child's vocabulary in the middle school years with only a small percentage of this increase the result of direct teaching and much of it due to independent reading.

Adams (1990) also suggests that given only a 5% chance of word acquisition, it is possible to increase vocabulary by 800 to 1,200 new words each year through reading. In fact the increase may be much higher. Shu, Anderson & Zhang (1995) document an increase in vocabulary

through independent reading of 10% for American children, and 8% for Chinese children living in America. Independent reading, therefore, seems essential for incidental vocabulary acquisition.

Coltheart (1996) suggests that in order to understand new words encountered during reading, children need to be able to sound them out. As a normally achieving eight-year-old has a much higher command of words in speech than in print, new words may be recognised if they are sounded out accurately. With practice these words then become part of the child's sight vocabulary.

What of children who don't practise reading? In the researcher's experience, much of our academic system in High Schools relies on students having competent reading skills. Students who enter High Schools are expected to have mastered the basic skills and be reasonably fluent readers of age-appropriate materials. They need to be able to recognise a vast number of words in print and understand their meanings. How can a student complete a unit in History, if s/he cannot research factual information in history texts? Such students need to be encouraged by teachers to read independently and to practise the skill of sustained silent reading.

The practice of sustained silent reading (SSR) is a modern phenomenon. It is the final stage in the learning to read process and is a skill which is fundamental to secondary and higher education as well as adult life. Up until the mid 1960's, schools concentrated on the teaching of reading skills, but did not necessarily incorporate the practice necessary to improve performance (Morck 1972). Research into silent reading in schools has explored three aspects of the process, eye movements, speed reading and sustained silent reading.

2.5 Silent Reading in an Historical Context

McCracken & McCracken (1972) define SSR as the drill or practice necessary to extend reading skills; something which should be part of every school day. The development of good silent reading skills could be compared to playing a musical instrument or developing a sporting skill. As Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson (1985) suggest, the practice of reading should last a lifetime, and not just be confined to schooling.

Pugh (1978) states that silent reading is a surprisingly modern activity, which accompanied the increase in the number of readers last century. The change in materials and the uses to which reading was put necessitated different approaches to reading. Oral reading became inappropriate and inefficient in many settings. The advent of mass-produced newspapers led to more people reading silently. Studies in silent reading behaviour soon followed. Javal's (1879) research into eye movements in the late 19th century was subsequently linked to work on the development of reading speed and this had a marked impact on the teaching of reading in American schools up to the 1960s (Pugh 1978).

Another early educationist, Huey (1908), debated whether purely visual reading is possible, or whether reading is always accompanied by some form of inner speech, where the pronunciation is 'up in the head'. Huey (1908) suggested reading aloud to oneself (sub-vocalization) is less preferable to one's 'inner speech' (silent reading) and hinders the development of reading speed. Reading efficiency, may also be affected by sub-vocalisation as it increases the amount of muscular involvement needed to read (Buswell 1920). While lip movement is universal at the early reading stage this usually disappears with practice (Huey 1908).

Huey (1908) also claimed that the eyes of rapid readers follow a

rhythmical pattern. In other words readers establish regular rhythmical eye movements as they become rapid readers. His findings led to the assumption that readers could then be taught to read rapidly if their eye movements were systematically trained. The assumption led to the development of speed reading programs. However, the premise for all these activities was flawed. Adams (1990, 23) states that modern research into eye movements show that our eyes do not move smoothly along text lines but 'leapfrog from word to word, fixating briefly toward the centre of each and then jumping to the next'.

Speed reading methods have now largely faded from the educational context and have been replaced by sustained silent reading. Coltheart (1996) argues that people who learn to speed read actually take in less information. They may finish a book faster but they do not comprehend as much as they would if they read the book at a speed which allowed maximum comprehension.

Today, it is recognised that reading is more than quick word recognition. Coltheart (1996) states that it requires comprehension of the text and a construction of the message being conveyed. The speed of how well this material is understood often depends on the complexity of the subject. Even the best readers will slow down and occasionally sub-vocalise in order to thoroughly grasp the meaning of a difficult text.

Adams (1990) suggests that children need to 'hear' stories read by a teacher or a parent in order to develop a personal passion for reading and to build the background knowledge required to understand a text. Consistent with Adams (1990) suggestions, the Emergent Literacy Program, which forms Stage 1 of a Literacy Scheme, developed at Macquarie University called Schoolwide Early Language and Literacy or SWELL (Center 1997), focuses on story-telling and retelling as a first step in the learning to read

process. This process is often a natural component of child-rearing in the pre-school years for many children. However, for various reasons, some children do not have this early exposure to text and may be impeded in their reading progress because of a lack of understanding of the association between spoken sounds and text (Center 1997).

What of silent reading itself? As a skill it is more complex than it may appear at first glance. Pugh (1978) identifies five major styles of adult silent reading. All are important skills for students to master if they wish to succeed at High School and in their adult lives. Consequently, the next section will examine Pugh's (1978) styles of silent reading.

2.6 Silent Reading Styles

The styles Pugh (1978) identified are **scanning; search reading; skimming; receptive reading; and responsive reading.**

Scanning is used within a text to locate a specific symbol or group of symbols (such as a particular phrase, formula, name or date). Many readers use scanning techniques when researching dates in history textbooks, checking statistics, looking up words in dictionaries and flicking through the newspaper or searching for the weekend football scores.

Search reading, on the other hand is more complex in that the information sought is more general. The reader has an outline and some key words and may spend a long time closely examining the text. School students can use search reading techniques when they are asked to do a project on a particular topic

Skimming, while similar to scanning in some respects, differs in that it may be used to obtain superficial information or to check on a

writer's tone and structure. It is more complex than scanning or search reading, for it requires the reader to organise and remember selected information.

Receptive reading requires the reader to follow the printed word sequentially and pay close attention to small visual units. In this form of reading, the reader is totally involved and is usually able to ignore peripheral noises. The reading of novels, newspaper and magazine articles are examples of receptive reading.

Responsive reading differs from Receptive reading in that the reader may spend considerable periods in creative thought reflecting on the text, sometimes giving the impression of day-dreaming. The dream has been initiated by the reader's involvement with the text. Such an activity can easily be misinterpreted by a teacher.

Of the five styles of Silent Reading, it is **receptive reading** which is the focus of this study and which McCracken & McCracken (1972) refer to as sustained silent reading.

2.7 The Origins of Sustained Silent Reading Programs in Schools

Lyman C. Hunt's Individualised Reading Program (IRP) was one of the first programs to address the encouragement of independent silent reading in American schools. The IRP program aimed to allow children the opportunity to read extensively and independently from a wide array of books and to develop a life time love of reading (Hunt 1967, Carline 1969).

Hunt's (1967) program was structured and teacher controlled. It involved a selection of reading activities and supported children to make personal choices about what they read. Although monitored by the teacher, students read at their own pace and developed silent reading skills independently. Monitoring was done by conferencing with the teacher about what was read, summarising books, and keeping a record of the texts read.

The scheme formed an intermediate step between a fully structured oral-reading lesson and a free silent reading period which was later introduced in some schools. Hunt (1967) stated that an important aspect of the IRP method was that the development of skills progressed at an individual rate and level. Students made up their own word recognition lists and were given opportunities to master and utilise them in creative writing activities. Thus reading and writing were linked in a purposeful and integrated way.

The IRP scheme was a departure from the tightly-controlled and highly-structured methods of reading utilised in American schools at that time. Hunt (1967) felt that although children were learning to read by these methods, they were missing out on the enjoyment of reading. He considered this factor of primary importance because it would encourage them to pursue recreational reading beyond the school room and in later life. His innovative scheme led teachers to question the whole process of reading acquisition and attend to the necessity for independent practice once the mechanical skills had been mastered.

2.8 Rationale for Sustained Silent Reading Schemes in Schools

Following the success of his IRP scheme, Hunt (1970) introduced

USSR (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading) into American schools. He claimed that the ultimate goal of reading instruction should be to develop students who could sustain themselves without interruption in silent reading for periods of half an hour or more.

Hunt (1970) contended that reading should be more than learning alphabetical letters, phonics and words. He wanted students to immerse themselves in books. He believed that students who chose their own reading material could eventually overcome limitations in reading skills. Because they had chosen material to read out of personal interest, they could progress beyond their expected level of performance (Hunt 1970).

Hunt's (1967, 1970) work inspired other schemes. McCracken & McCracken (1972) introduced the Reading is only the Tiger's Tail (RIOTT) program. They believed that reading instruction in schools at that time utilised three stages: word recognition, comprehension and motivating children to engage in wide reading outside of the classroom. McCracken & McCracken (1972) suggested that the steps needed to be reversed. Children should begin with a love of books and stories, then go on to realise that books have symbols which need to be interpreted. This realisation would provide the motivation to learn to recognise words. In this way, McCracken & McCracken (1972) shifted the educational practice from teacher-centred to child-centred learning. Their RIOTT Program emphasised sustained silent reading rather than requiring children to pronounce words correctly as was the standard practice during the early 1970s.

2.9 Student Decline in Interest in Silent Reading

Introducing a sustained silent reading program into a High school is easier said than done. Percz (1986) states that some students are resistant

to such programs due to a personal lack of interest in reading and that many of those who do read independently while at high school, give up reading for pleasure once they leave school.

Some findings are fairly alarming. In a study of 5th Graders in the U.S., conducted by Fielding, Wilson & Anderson (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson 1985), 50 percent of the children surveyed read books for an average of only four minutes per day or less, 30 percent read for two minutes per day or less and 10 percent did not read at all. This evidence was supported by Wheldall & Entwistle's (1988) report, Farquar (1987), Garvey & Hegarty (1987) and Whitehead, Capey, Maddred & Wellings (1977). All these studies suggest that children read very few books and spend only a small amount of time reading.

Beck (1990) found in an attitude survey that only 15 percent of elementary students in an American school selected reading as a favourite leisure-time activity. The Principal of the same school was under the impression that over 50 percent of the students would select reading in preference to other activities, due to the emphasis given to reading in the school (but not a sustained silent reading program). The students in this particular school listed sports, television and video games as their preferences. It appears that even motivational reading programs do not maintain interest for long (Beck 1990).

The relationship between literacy skills and frequency of reading books is logical and strong, naturally helping to build good literacy skills. In the SAL Report, mentioned in Chapter 1, only 36 percent of people on the lowest literacy level read books weekly. This compared with 45 percent on level 2, 60 percent on level 3 and 71 percent on the highest levels (ABS 1997). In the current education climate in Australia, where Federal and State governments are increasingly concerning themselves with

raising community literacy standards (Myers 1997), it is therefore important that Australian students be encouraged to read more books.

With regard to high school students in particular, there is some evidence to show that the popularity of reading amongst adolescents tends to wane with an increase in age. McCoy, Larson & Higginson (1991) supported by Read (1988), found that early adolescence was a critical time in the development of a individual's reading habits. Pikulski (1984) reports that, in a survey of U.S. teenagers, 54 percent of American 9 year olds admitted reading most days for pleasure, but the percentage dropped to 35 percent for 13 year olds and 33 percent for 17 year olds. Russikoff & Pilgreen (1994) report that the age when students read the most is between eleven and thirteen.

There may be good reasons for this decline in reported reading apart from a lack of interest. The opportunities for independent silent reading both within school and outside of school hours may decrease during early adolescence, as other activities become more important. Encouragement by teachers may also be less effective as reading lessons shift from a teacher-centred oral-reading approach in Primary school to one of student-centred independent reading in High school. In a survey conducted of college and seventh and eighth graders in a variety of American schools, it was revealed that over 70 percent of each age group reported that the teacher had stopped reading to them by the seventh grade, and that silent reading also shifted to a low priority by the seventh and eighth grades (McCoy, Larson & Higginson 1991). Reasons given by the students for less independent reading were that they were too busy or had lost interest. Most students ranked watching TV, sports and socialising as their favourite leisure activities, with reading lowest on the scale.

Another survey of 6th, 7th and 8th Grade students in rural northern

Michigan by Cooledge, Farrons, Cline, Geller, Keeney, Meier & Paul (1995, supported by Whittemore 1992), found that students ranked sporting activities highest, followed by doing things with friends, watching television, reading, playing computer games, doing homework and listening to music. Younger students rated reading more highly than older ones, who rated spending time with friends as important. Preference for this activity increased with age, and is probably influenced by peer group pressure. Although reading books was not rated as highly as playing sport among older adolescents, reading about sports in the newspaper was popular with male adolescents (Schultheis 1990).

Apart from leisure activities displacing recreational reading, other factors involved may include socio-economic differences. McKenna, Kear and Ellsworth (1995) found in their study that African Americans displayed more negative attitudes toward reading than white or Hispanic Americans, but could not explain their finding without further research. They did state, however, that students who had difficulty reading expected to be frustrated during the reading process and as a result avoided it, giving themselves less chance to improve their skills.

Students from impoverished socio-economic backgrounds may not have ready access to interesting reading material and this could also suppress their enthusiasm. Campbell's et al. (1995) Integrated Reading Performance Record (IRIPR) survey noted that African-American and Hispanic students rely on the library more for reading materials than do white students. There is a relationship between literacy levels and books in the home. In the SAL Report (ABS 1997), fewer people (70 percent) on the lowest literacy level claimed they had 25 books or more at home, than those with the highest level; (98 percent) of literacy.

Another factor which should be considered when exploring

adolescent literacy is that of gender.

2.10 Student Reading Preferences and Gender Differences

Self-selection of books is an important factor in the success of any silent reading program (Wheldall & Entwistle, 1988; Pluck, Ghafari, Glynn & McNaughton, 1984). Students often have a particular interest, such as horses or sport. If they are to develop an interest in reading, then adolescents need to have the freedom to choose their own reading materials. Titles often have youthful heroes and heroines with whom the readers can identify. There also appear to be marked gender differences in the selection of reading materials and the amount of time spent reading. For example, Schultheis (1990) found that the average time per month during the school year spent on reading is 21 hours for adolescent girls but only 15 hours for boys.

Apart from Schultheis' (1990) work, gender differences in the reading habits of adolescent students have been noted by other researchers. Campbell's et al (1995) IRPR survey of Grade 4 students in America, found that more females (94 percent) read in their spare time than males (88 percent). Ciccone (1981), supported by Whittemore (1992) found that boys read only 17 books on average, compared with 24 books for girls over a 9 week period. On the basis of a national survey of over 18,000 American children in Grades 1- 6, McKenna, Kear and Ellsworth (1995) conclude that girls show more favourable attitudes in all years toward both assigned reading and reading for pleasure. Such gender differences do not appear related to the reading ability of the students but may reflect differences in maturity levels between students.

In Australia, gender differences may have affected the general literacy standards in the community. The SAL report (ABS 1997) states

that more females were classified in the higher literacy levels than males in all age groups up to 55 years.

Russikoff & Pilgreen (1994) report that between the ages of six and eighteen, students' top reading preferences were comic books, magazines, romance, mystery and adventure novels. Schultheis (1990) also claims there is a gender bias in the type of literature that students select to read. Adolescent males opted for adventure, humour, horror and science fiction, while females favoured romance, relationships, mystery and humour. A study conducted by Whittemore (1992) and supported by Isaacs (1992), found that the most popular fiction categories selected were horror, mystery, adventure, suspense, fantasy and romance. Stephen King was the most popular author at the time. Isaacs (1992) found that peer recommendation was important among adolescent readers. Similarly, Snellman (1993) found that girls selected mystery, humour and adventure, with romance towards the bottom of the list while boys selected humour, adventure and mystery. Sports were not an option in this survey. Authors mentioned by students in Snellman's (1993) survey included Roald Dahl, Madeline L'Engle, Judy Blume and Christopher Pike.

In an Indian survey, Aranha (1985) reported that both sexes showed interest in stories about other children, animals, fantasy, and short stories. Boys preferred adventure and historical books, while girls liked humour. These preferences could possibly be influenced by cultural differences.

Magazines are also popular but are subject to cultural and locational differences. Snellman's survey (1993) identified 'Boys Life', 'Sports Illustrated' and 'Popular Science' as the favourite magazines of male students. All the male students surveyed said that they liked to read magazines, while 96 percent of the female students agreed. These findings

compared with only 54 percent of the male students nominating newspapers as a reading choice, while 100 percent of females said they liked to read the newspaper. As this was a study of sixth-grade students, such results may not be applicable to the reading preferences of senior students.

Such gender differences between what male and female students read are of interest to the present study. Isaacs (1992) states that science fiction is read almost exclusively by males, and that they prefer titles with male heroes, while females prefer titles with female heroes, such as those by Judy Blume. The books of Stephen King appeal to both males and females. Students tend to read what their friends read or whoever is popular at the time. Television and films also exert some influence on what students read.

Access to books and other reading material varies also. Snellman's (1993) survey has found that most books are borrowed from the school or public libraries or from friends. When asked if they liked to read in their spare time, 80 percent of the female students in this survey answered 'yes', compared with only 38 percent of boys. Snellman (1993) suggests that it may not be socially acceptable for boys to admit that they like to read.

Rasinski (1989) found student inertia to be a stumbling block in motivating students to read for pleasure. Student inertia is particularly important when students begin a new book. Getting some students started is the most difficult part and Rasinsky (1989) advocates methods such as reading aloud until students are hooked and want to continue the book on their own. Rasinsky (1989) suggests a daily period of sustained silent reading but warns against allowing students to leaf through magazines as this is not receptive reading.

2.11 Acronyms for Sustained Silent Reading Programs

As more schools followed Hunt's (1970) example and introduced sustained silent reading programs, educators tried to individualise the process in an attempt to make the scheme sound more appealing to adolescents. Hunt (1970) named his scheme USSR or Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading. The acronym USSR caused the program to be labelled 'Russian Reading' by some teachers. This was not a popular tag in the U.S. (due to the Cold War) and other acronyms which spell out catchy words were created by various schools or authors.

McCracken & McCracken (1972) report that in one American community, a fifth grade teacher called the program SRD (Silent Reading Drill). Oliver (Mork 1972), at Eastern Washington State College, referred to it as HIP or High Intensity Practice. Overall, however, schools were more intent on emphasising sustained silent reading periods as being enjoyable. Campbell et al. (1995) named it ERIC (Everyone/Enjoy Reading in Class). The following list (Johns 1986, 7) demonstrates the variety of acronyms adopted in schools, both in America and overseas.

RIP	Read In Peace
DEAR	Drop Everything; And Read
GRAB	Go Read A Book
SQUIRT	Sustained Quiet Uninterrupted Independent Reading Time
RABBIT	Read A Book Because Its There
WALTER	We All Like The Extra Reading
SURE	Sustained Uninterrupted Reading Enjoyment
FRED	Free Reading Every Day
WAR	We All Read
RINGO	Reading Is Now Going On
RIOT	Reading Is Our Thing

OSCAR Our School Cares About Reading
GRINCH Good Reading Is Now Coming Here
RIBET Reading Is Bringing Everyone Together
SUPER Silent Undisturbed Private Entertainment Reading
FRISBEE Free Reading In School By Everyone Everywhere
SAFARI Students And Faculty All Read Independently

2.12 Expansion of SSR Schemes

Whatever the acronym, during the 70's, sustained silent reading was introduced widely into American schools as an integral part of the total reading program (Evans & Towner 1975; Beck 1990). Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) became a popular name for the general program. Each school decided how the program would be conducted, however.

In a personal communication with a teacher in Texas, U.S.A. (1996), the teacher stated that her school ran DEAR for many years and that the school took the acronym literally. At any time of day and at the whim of the Principal, an instruction would come over the intercom to each classroom to 'drop everything and read'. It was this literal adherence to the acronym that eventually caused the scheme to be abandoned in her school. Both teachers and students were very unhappy about interrupting lessons to suddenly stop work and take out a book. Having a set time of day for the program appeared to be a more successful practice.

Yatvin (1978) documented the recreational reading program at her school, Crestwood, in Madison, U.S.A. The school set up a half-hour reading time that involved every child and every staff member in a variety of reading activities, including sustained silent reading. The program was considered a great success and was extended.

Internationally, the scheme was introduced into several countries. Southgate (1975) spoke to British teachers about SSR at the 1974 United Kingdom Reading Association Conference. She suggested starting with a five-minute session and gradually lengthening the time allowed up to 30 minutes or more. The idea was to help students acquire a lifelong habit of reading for pleasure.

Aranha (1985), Principal of a school in India, introduced SSR to her school, because she was worried about the general lack of library facilities in India. She felt that the school would be a good place to encourage independent recreational reading and hoped that reading attitudes would improve by allowing students to select material and by providing a comfortable environment for their reading.

2.13 The Introduction of Sustained Silent Reading Schemes in Australia

In 1980, Stevenson, an enthusiastic supporter of SSR, introduced the philosophy of Hunt's USSR program to Australian teachers. Several schools in Queensland introduced the scheme soon after, calling it USSR. In other parts of Australia, the acronym DEAR was used.

A closely monitored scheme, involving Year 7 students was introduced in The King's School, Parramatta (Kefford 1981). One English period per week was used for sustained silent reading in the Library. Students were asked to select titles from six thematically-organised lists of 25 books. Students were expected to read four titles from each list in a six-week period. This program deviated from Hunt's (1970) recommendations by not allowing free choice of reading material which is an important factor in developing reading interest and responsibility.

Across NSW, DEAR periods were included in the timetable at a set time of day, in order to provide students with practice reading time, which hopefully, would lead to a greater enjoyment of reading. The sessions were to be unstructured, student-centred and not used for teaching reading skills (Pulvertaft 1984). Students were also encouraged to bring along books of their own choice from home (Patullo 1983).

Woollooware High in NSW elected to keep the acronym USSR and set aside two 40 minute periods a week for the purpose (McKirby 1984). The sessions were held in permanent, well-stocked, specialist reading rooms or the library. Apart from the obvious practice in reading, the sessions were also intended to provide a pleasurable but educational break from more hectic academic studies and develop a positive attitude towards silent reading.

2.14 Addressing Problems with Silent Reading Programs

Any new program is bound to attract some criticism. Smith (1983), supported by Beck (1990) reports that some teachers expressed concern about negative student attitudes to sustained silent reading programs. There was no problem with students who had mastered the mechanical skills necessary to sustain themselves in reading for long periods of time. These students had clearly demonstrated a love of reading and for them the program was seen to be successful. It was found that there was a real difference in attitude between good readers and poor readers, usually due to the latter's low attention spans and the difficulties which they had in reading texts at their interest level.

In the researcher's experience, mixed ability groups include some students who choose to talk quietly to friends, or do homework, study, write letters or draw. Rather than read, these students become disruptive

and it then becomes impossible for anyone to read silently. Much depends on the teacher's powers to control the class. Maintaining silence is difficult in a small classroom with 20 or more students present. However, if it is to succeed, SSR must be uninterrupted until the habit of silent reading has been established (Mork 1972).

Smith (1983) offers a few solutions if a disruptive situation occurs. The SSR session could be abandoned for a period of time and some type of structured reading program introduced to replace it. Students could be grouped into conscientious readers and others, or the program could be revitalised. This can be done by bringing in community representatives to explain why reading is important to them. The classroom could also be reorganised to be more comfortable and the range of reading matter available could be expanded to include magazines, newspapers and comics.

Some students are also affected by the time of day that SSR is conducted. Wheldall & Ertwistle (1988) claim that the number of students on task declines when the SSR sessions are held in the last two lessons of the afternoon, or when the sessions are preceded by a physical education lesson. Campbell et al. (1995) suggest the placement of SSR alongside a natural break in the school day, such as recess or lunch. This appears to be the most successful strategy. Levine (1984) offers many suggestions for initiating a successful SSR Program. He quotes Barbe & Abbott (1975), who recommend a minimum of 100 books be available in the classroom at all times. These titles should be changed regularly.

Levine (1984) suggests that attitudes to reading definitely improve in students, who are involved in regular and successful SSR program. These positive attitudes may also contribute to an improvement in reading achievement.

2.15 Sustained Silent Reading and Reading Achievement

For many students, the extra time and opportunity to practise reading has resulted in a genuine improvement in reading achievement (Levine 1984). Farrell (1982) found that 90 percent of her students in a junior high school made gains of 1 to 2 years on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test after participating in a year of sustained silent reading. The poorer readers achieved gains of up to 5 years. Despite these claims, there are too many variables involved to claim that SSR was solely responsible for this progress but the results are strong and interesting to consider. Campbell et al. (1995) state that the matter is still somewhat controversial and no definite link between SSR and reading achievement has emerged due to the complexities involved.

Beck (1990) suggests that good leisure-time readers have positive attitudes towards reading. There is obviously a link between reading achievement and reading interest, but does achievement lead to interest or does interest lead to achievement? Hunt (1970) suggested that new tools are needed to measure the full effect SSR has on reading achievement. For example, Farrell (1982) monitored the reading, used vocabulary lists compiled by the students in her lessons and encouraged each student to write a book report on books they had read. Even without standard measuring tools, many teachers remain enthusiastic and supportive of SSR.

Smith (1983) reaffirmed her strong commitment to SSR as a way of helping students improve their reading skills. If high school students are to develop an interest in silent reading, they must develop a positive attitude towards SSR programs. Several attitude surveys have been conducted to assess how students feel about SSR in schools and about silent reading in general. These surveys will now be discussed.

2.16 Attitude Surveys towards Silent Reading

Several factors are mentioned as contributing to positive student attitudes towards sustained silent reading. Manna (1987) lists a number of positive and negative factors. Positive factors include family involvement in reading, use of libraries, influence of friends, teachers being enthusiastic towards reading and reading to their students in a range of school subjects and discussions about stories. Manna (1987) found that when students were required to write book reports, read in groups or participate in reading competitions, they found such activities embarrassing and developed negative attitudes towards reading. These factors may have been due to cultural factors or to the competitive process itself which may inhibit slower readers.

Obviously, Hunt's (1970) design for an SSR program tried to do away with competition and monitored progress by providing individualised reading progress and focussing on reading interest. Sadoski (Manning-Dowd 1985) concluded that such SSR programs were effective in promoting positive attitudes towards reading and it was these positive attitudes towards silent reading that appeared to improve the most from an SSR program, rather than reading achievement. But how are such positive attitudes measured? Any evaluation needs to be carefully designed.

Halpern (1981) suggests that, for an evaluation of an SSR program to be useful, it would need to include interviews, surveys, observations, record-keeping by students of what they have read, and feedback from librarians and parents. Halpern's (1981) own design for an attitude survey was welcomed by teachers across Canada who found that, when they administered the survey, it gave them useful feedback of the potential strengths and weaknesses of their own SSR programs.

Halpern's (1981) survey design involved a simple questionnaire which asked students whether or not marks should be awarded for reading during USSR, students who disturb others should be punished, comics and magazines should be provided, outside noises prevent sustained reading and whether or not USSR is considered a valuable activity. They were also asked to identify where they obtain their reading material, whether their parents were interested, whether their teachers should also read and their preferences for the timetabling and length of USSR. Survey results could then be used by individual teachers to improve on their own SSR programs.

Another approach, which was used in Campbell's et al. (1995) IRPR survey, examined reading habits, reading attitudes, literacy-supportive environments, reading fluency, reading responses, independent reading experiences and instructional reading activities. Findings indicated that, although the library was an important source of books, students preferred to read in their own homes. Two thirds of fourth graders reported that they read silently every day and wrote stories about what they had read. As the IRPR survey was concerned with younger students, results may not be applicable to the survey in this study which focuses on high school students in one comprehensive State high school.

Snellman (1993) conducted a survey of sixth grade students to determine their reading interests and concluded that the amount that students read was related to their level of interest in reading. Using Estes Attitude Scales to measure responses to the SSR Program Aranha (1985) found high gains in the high and low ability subgroups and a significant difference between boys and girls. It appeared that the Indian boys benefited more from SSR than the girls. One of the variables involved in successful SSR programs, as mentioned by Hunt (1970) was the role of teacher as model.

2.17 The Importance of Teacher Modelling

Since the introduction of Hunt's SSR program in 1970, the acceptance of sustained silent reading as an integral part of the school curriculum has been widespread. Coupled with its introduction has been an examination of the role of the teacher and the importance of teacher modelling of reading behaviour. Bandura (1977) maintains that much human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling and most social learning in children happens through watching and copying, especially when the models are parents or teachers. Perez (1986), supported by Howard (1993) states that if teachers want their students to enjoy reading, they need to demonstrate enthusiastically, their own love of reading for pleasure.

Several researchers, reported by Perez (1986), have investigated the role of teacher as model. For example, Smith (1978) maintains that teachers can only be credible if they read widely themselves and talk to children about books. Additionally, Spiegel (1981) asserts that it is difficult to sell something if you don't believe in it yourself. Teachers need to communicate their own love of reading if they want students to make reading a priority. Hickman (1984) and Howard (1993) reiterate how important a teacher's influence is on their students' reading habits. These principles are supported by research conducted by Halpern (1981), Pluck, Ghafari, Glynn & McNaughton (1984) and Bandura (1977).

McCracken & McCracken (1978) state that SSR only works if the adults in the classroom participate fully. Therefore the behaviour of the teacher determines what happens in the classroom during an SSR session. Pluck, Ghafari, Glynn and McNaughton (1984), studying the effects of USSR on students in New Zealand show that both low and high ability readers remain on-task when the teacher also reads and that this is

particularly noticeable with low achievers.

McCracken & McCracken (1978) list the messages that children get from successful SSR schemes which utilise teacher modelling. These are, that reading books in large sections is important and something anyone can do. Reading is communicating with an author, and that everyone is capable of sustained thought. Their findings are supported by Smith (1983) and Mork (1972).

To underscore the importance of modelling, McCracken and McCracken (1978) report that, most unsuccessful SSR programs have no teacher modelling. If the teacher or classroom aides do not read, but instead watch the children, the students think that they do not need to read either.

In the ideal modelling situation, Stevenson (1980) suggested that everyone in the school from the Principal to the gardener should stop to read at some time each day. Stevenson reported an interview with a Queensland school principal, who claimed that, for some children, observing their teacher read a book was the first time they had seen an adult read a book for pleasure.

Teachers, however, are not the only adults in children's lives. Obviously, the home environment and parental modelling must be another factor in influencing children's reading habits. Adams (1990) believes that if parents demonstrate a love of books and read regularly, the example set by them must have an influence on their children. Conversely, if parents do not read for pleasure, one might assume that there would be little incentive for children to do so.

2.18 Home Environment

Mork (1972) believes that the home background plays an important part in the development of reading interest. It is an accepted fact that young children learn about literacy through interactions with parents and close friends and that the family plays a major part in literacy development (Campbell et al. 1995, Beck 1990). If family members read, children will also read. However, if conditions are not conducive to reading silently at home, because of conflicts or noises such as incessant television, then it is more difficult for children to learn the pleasures of sustained silent reading.

The value of parents reading aloud to their children cannot be underestimated. Smith (1989, cited in Beck 1990) claimed an increase in vocabulary, comprehension and language development in children whose parents read to them regularly. At the same time, the children were being exposed to different literary styles. Similarly, Aranha (1985) reflected on the lack of reading materials in some homes and the lack of a culture of reading in the home as being important disincentives for her students.

However, one has to be most careful in applying a deficit perspective to this problem. Auerbach (1995) states that it is easy to assume that if the parental level of literacy is low, the value of literacy in the household is also low. This may not be so. In the researcher's extensive experience as a teacher of both primary and secondary students, many parents see improved literacy in their children as a way of progressing to a better life than the one they themselves lead.

The importance of parental encouragement cannot be understated and wise principals will use this knowledge to the advantage of their schools and students. In a whole-school plan to improve reading achievement at an American school in Rockaway, New York State, parents were even offered

incentives if they participated in reading activities (Comcowich & Quinn 1995). Beck (1990) cited the case of one commercial incentive, the Book It! Program, as an example of community involvement.

Such actions are becoming more common as schools become more closely linked to their communities. Governments are also more aware of the need to involve the family in the issue of literacy. For example, in the U.S. alone, there are now over 1,000 family literacy programs (Auerbach 1995). In most NSW Primary schools, parents are invited to come into the school and listen to beginning readers practise their reading skills on a regular basis. The children read aloud while parent volunteers listen and help where required. As a result, children in those schools become aware of the importance of reading in society, not only for children but also in the adult world.

The emphasis on reading practice in primary schools in the researcher's local area is continued into the secondary system, in a different way. Students are encouraged to read silently rather than orally, and both State high schools in the local area conduct a period of sustained silent reading each day. This study explores the effectiveness of an SSR program in one of those schools.

2.19 Introduction of DEAR to the School in the Study

The school in the study is one of two comprehensive high schools in an inland New South Wales town. It enrolls students from Year 7 to Year 12 who live in and around a large regional town with a university.

The school caters for student diversity, through mainstream classes, an Intellectually Moderate (IM) class and a Special Education Unit. There is access for disabled students and the school has currently enrolled a junior

student, who is severely physically disabled. The school attracts senior students from outlying towns, who are seeking greater competition and a better range of subject choice for their Higher School Certificate year. At the time of the survey, there were approximately 900 students enrolled at the school.

Students come from a wide range of socio-cultural backgrounds, from wealthy families to welfare recipients. There are a number of students with a Non English Speaking Background (NESB) in the school, some of whom have one or both parents completing post-graduate studies at the university. Others are recent immigrants and a small percentage of the NESB students are fee-paying Asian students.

The population of students who identify as Aboriginal in the school is usually between 30 and 40 each year and are represented in each year group. The school encourages their involvement and participation in all aspects of school life. The Aboriginal Education Assistant (AEA) devotes much time and energy to encouraging improvement in academic achievement. There is also a strong Aboriginal Studies curriculum in the school and Aboriginal perspectives are included where possible. This strategy has led to some positive outcomes. For example, the female school captain for 1996 identified as Aboriginal as did the youngest recipient of a gold award to date.

In 1988, the English Department introduced SSR into the English curriculum. SSR sessions were modelled closely on Hunt's (1970) scheme, with uninterrupted silent reading, teacher modelling and student choice of reading material central to the scheme.

In a notice to parents and staff (1988a), it was suggested that the school introduce a DEAR period, to begin on the first day of Term 2. The

notice indicated that DEAR would be included in the timetable each day except Tuesday, when it would be replaced by an Assembly. The aims of the DEAR period for this school were:

- * to encourage the development and practice of reading skills throughout the school, which will benefit students in all curriculum areas and in their lives outside school;
- * to encourage students to develop reading as an active and worthwhile leisure activity;
- * to further recent initiatives in the area of student welfare by providing a quiet, peaceful time in the school day when students and teachers can relax and enjoy together a worthwhile activity;
- * to provide another session when personal contact can be made with students in their vertical roll groupings.

The DEAR periods were based on Roll Groups. Rather than the school organising books to read, provision of reading material was deemed the responsibility of the student. Teachers gave the following directions in a Memo to students (1988b) at the introduction of the scheme.

- * The reading time is UNINTERRUPTED. No discussion between students or between student and teacher is to occur.
- * The reading time is sustained for 20 minutes. Students must bring sufficient material for this length of time. Thumbing through magazines, glancing at pictures will not be accepted.
- * The reading time must be SILENT. There will be no oral

reading.

- * All teachers in the school consider this to be a very important activity and even the Principal and the Deputy Principal have been assigned to Reading Groups.
- * The fact that such a central time in the day has been chosen for the scheme indicates how important it is considered to be as a whole school activity.

The teacher's role in the scheme was outlined by the Head of English and circulated in a Memo to staff (1988c). The Staff Memo reiterated that the enthusiastic participation of teachers was crucial to the success of the scheme and that their modelling of SSR was vital. Teachers were instructed to be punctual and to insist that students should also be punctual. Students were to choose their own material, unless it could be considered offensive or unless there was minimal reading content. Students not complying were to stand outside the room.

Teachers were encouraged to choose what they considered to be valuable reading material and instructed to bring extra materials along in case some students turned up without books. Teachers were reminded of their modelling role and their need to maintain a positive attitude. Those teachers who did not read or who marked books were warned of the negative influence of this behaviour on students.

In the annual School Magazine (1988d: 51), the introduction of DEAR is reported as "bringing a touch of sanity and tranquillity to the school for 20 minutes a day". It is also suggested that students are reading more widely and that the biggest success has been to get the Maths staff to go "beyond looking at the pictures and the Social Science staff to put down

their chalk and pencils”.

In 1989, the *School Magazine* (1989, 63) reported that the DEAR scheme was both popular and achieving its aims. Borrowings from the Library were up and “in a survey of students almost 80% stated that they were reading more than they had previously”.

In a letter to a professional journal about the DEAR scheme, a member of the English staff (Knight 1996), reports that after eight years, the scheme was still working. Students were allowed to select their own books, but were discouraged from reading magazines as the temptation to scan pictures and headlines or captions was too great. This was not receptive reading which was the goal of DEAR. Some monitoring of students' reading in the school took place through reading journals, which were completed in English classes. Teachers also monitored students' reading choices and suggested new titles to students whose reading was becoming limited.

Another strategy mentioned by Knight (1996) was the serialisation and reading aloud to the class of part of a novel. This activity could kindle and broaden interest in books or authors which students might not otherwise have chosen. Not all students accepted recreational reading as something pleasurable. There would always be some resistance from some students. However, Knight (1996) claims that there were far fewer failures today, than in the past when each child was forced to read a set novel in class.

2.20 Conclusion

From the research, one can conclude that sustained silent reading or the practice of silent reading is a valuable part of any school curriculum. Its

success relies on a whole school approach coupled with parental involvement. If secondary students are to improve their receptive reading skills, they need to be given opportunities, good example and encouragement from both teachers and parents. They need to be shown that silent reading is as important as any other school subject and is integral to their success both at school and in later adult life.

Early American programs, such as USSR and RIOTT, were the forerunners of Australian schemes, such as the DEAR scheme, of interest in this school. Such schemes have been shown to have widespread benefits in improving adolescents' interest and attitudes towards reading. Although it is hard to measure, some researchers also claim a marked improvement in reading achievement, attributed at least in part to SSR programs. It is clear that the success of a silent reading scheme is dependent upon teacher and parent modelling.

There are many further aspects of SSR that can be systematically investigated. What do students and teachers in the study school feel about DEAR? Do they feel the scheme is beneficial? Is there a difference in attitudes between males and females? Does the current DEAR program in the study school fulfil the initial aims documented in the literature and in school policy documents? Is the program conducted according to recommended guidelines or has there been an erosion of adherence to guidelines over time?

The study has been designed to answer all of these questions in an evaluation of the scheme as it currently operates in one school. This research will also add to our knowledge about adolescents in Australia and their recreational reading habits. A further aspect of interest is the evaluation of how the program is perceived by Indigenous students at the school. Do the attitudes of Aboriginal students towards silent reading differ

significantly from those of non-Aboriginal students or from a specific group of Non English Speaking Background (NESB) students? What do Aboriginal students read? Do they read similar material to non-Aboriginal students. Are there differences in attitude towards silent reading between male and female Aboriginal students?

The next chapter deals with Aboriginal education, some historical perspectives, current issues and the special needs of Aboriginal students, particularly in the area of literacy. It also provides a further theoretical and contextual discussion of the issues of interest which inform the research questions and predictions of this study.