



Learning past the pictures in the panels:  
Teacher attitudes to manga and anime texts

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study of teacher attitudes to manga and anime texts in the New South Wales secondary English classroom explores what is visible and what becomes visible when we peer inside the multidimensional influences of teacher decision making for new and distinctive text choices. The specific purpose of this research is to analyse the question: “What are teachers’ attitudes towards manga and anime texts for the Stage 4 and 5 English classroom?” Manga (serialised graphic stories) and anime (animation) are two related popular culture forms that originate from Japan but have proven to be of interest to readers and viewers outside of Japan.

The focus of this investigation is on English teachers and librarians who have experience and knowledge of these texts. The choice to limit this study to single-sex girls’ schools is to investigate in greater detail how teachers perceive female students as readers, and as readers and viewers of manga and anime texts. This research explores how teachers perceive, value and engage with manga and anime within the secondary English curriculum to better inform understandings of curriculum text choices and the ways in which these teachers situate their students as the recipients of those curriculum acts. In demonstrating a willingness to respond to student interests, and at times learn alongside them, the pedagogical practices of these teachers and librarians reveal the significance of distinctive text choices within the formal English curriculum.

## **CERTIFICATE**

I hereby certify that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other  
university or institution.

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Kelly Cheung

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Overview

This study of teacher attitudes to manga and anime texts in the New South Wales secondary English classroom explores what is visible and what becomes visible when we peer inside the multidimensional influences of teacher decision making for new and distinctive text choices. The specific purpose of this research is to analyse the question: “What are teachers’ attitudes towards manga and anime texts for the Stage 4 and 5 English classroom?” Manga (serialised graphic stories) and anime (animation) are two related popular culture forms that originate from Japan but have proven to be of interest to readers and viewers outside of Japan. The focus of this investigation is on English teachers and librarians who have experience and knowledge of these texts, working with students located within two school sites.

## 1.2 Context

The analysis of teachers’ attitudes presented here is set within the contexts of a new New South Wales K-10 English syllabus (2012) and a contested discourse around the significance of Asia as key learning priority within both the national Australian curriculum and the NSW English curriculum. Two key learning foci of the new NSW English curriculum are the cross-curriculum priority of *Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia* and the general capability of *Intercultural Understanding*. These priority areas reach out to a wider political rhetoric which has identified knowledge of Asia (or its lack) as a significant concern, with national and economic imperatives (COA, 2012). Yet some

research (for example, Lingard & McGregor, 2014; Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014) has suggested that teachers lack the competency and expertise to deliver to students the knowledge they will need to navigate a century poised to pivot towards Asia. By investigating teacher attitudes towards manga and anime texts, this study aims to shed light on teachers' pedagogical practices and their identification of both the difficulties and opportunities in traversing curriculum aims and classroom realities.

Concurrent to concerns and disputes as to the relevance of Asia to the NSW English curriculum is the continued polarisation around textual appropriateness and issues of value when it comes to studied texts in the English classroom. It is for this reason that the definitions of key learning terms of 'text', 'literature', 'reading' and 'literacy' have been explored through a review of contesting epistemological lenses. Humanism, critical pedagogy and identity politics were identified as most appropriate to this study with particular echoes found from the research literature and within the data.

This research aims to offer some understanding of how curriculum text choices occur and how such choices can have consequences on student literacy learning. In peering into secondary English classrooms, at that junction in an adolescent's life when agency and choice are so important to them (Lenters, 2006), it can be the choices of teachers that determine whether or not the curriculum is becoming focused on developing a narrow field of academic skills (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Thompson & Cook, 2012) with less time than ever allocated towards reading for pleasure (Manuel, 2012). Conversely, it can be the decisions made by teachers that prioritise student knowledge and demonstrate respect for a diversity of student learning needs (Apple, 1986; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Brabazon, 2006; Teese, 2013; Jogie, 2015). This study explores teacher decision making as a way of articulating the multidimensional processes at work, revealing within these two

case studies the ways in which teachers navigate pedagogical and curriculum challenges in English.

### **1.3 The Approach of the Study**

The importance of exploring teachers' attitudes, and thereby providing insight into the lived experiences within English classrooms, was a vital element for this novice teacher researcher. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993, p.43) argue, "Teacher researchers are uniquely positioned to provide a truly emic, or insider's, perspective that makes visible the ways that students and teachers construct knowledge and curriculum". In order to capture teachers' attitudes to manga and anime texts, and to reveal the 'insider's perspective' this study adopted a qualitative research methodology. Within grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) the voices of nine participants from two school sites were captured through individual semi-structured interviews and coded in order to develop a substantive theory.

### **1.3.1 The teachers**

The teachers in this study came from two single sex girls' schools located in the Sydney metropolitan area of New South Wales. Site A is a comprehensive high school and Site B is an academically selective high school. The schools have a geographic proximity but their differing enrolment procedures result in quite distinctly different student populations and this was part of the appeal for this selection for study. The participants, who included seven English teachers and two librarians, have a variety of teaching experiences between them, an element also of significance for this study. It was important for the researcher to hear from diverse voices within these two sites in order to better understand teachers' attitudes towards manga and anime texts and develop a theory about these.

### **1.3.2 The texts**

Japanese manga (serialised graphic stories) and anime (animation) have been available in translated form in Australia and the United States since the mid-1980s. However, until the early 2000s the cost of manga was prohibitively expensive and mostly only available in speciality stores ruling out teen consumption. Anime, in the form of recut, adapted and dubbed animation, often linked to toy sales, was more accessible as it screened on free-to-air channels. The arrival of publication company Tokyo Pop alongside a marketing shift to stock manga in Borders bookstores revolutionised the manga publishing and distribution industry in North America (Aoki, n.d.; MacDonald, 2011). Subsequently, a broadening of distribution channels has affected teens' viewing and reading habits in Australia too, with the proliferation of online content and retail accessibility a catalyst for many individuals' interest in manga and anime texts (Stockins, 2009; Armour & Iida, 2014). The popularity

of local comic conventions (Hicks, 2011; Larkins, 2012; Williams, 2015), including associated activities like cosplay (dressing up as a character), fan art, and fan fiction, indicate the popularity and presence of manga and anime as a (sub)cultural interest for many Australians of all ages.

### **1.3.3 The students**

The teachers and the school sites were purposefully sampled because of their work in educating female students, the silent subjects of this study. Through the voices of these teachers we gain an impression of their students. It was significant to focus on teachers of girls because female readers and viewers of manga and anime, and teacher knowledge of them, appear to be an under-researched area within the educational research literature. We do gain a general glimpse of child and adolescent readers of visual narratives and multimodal texts within sales figures (Hibbs, 2015), the research literature (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2005; Evans, 2013; Frey & Fisher, 2004; Fukunaga, 2006; Grace & Tobin, 1998; Lim, 2011; Moeller, 2011; Sabeti, 2012; Schwartz & Rubinstein-Avila, 2006) and in observation of these young readers in places where we find stories - book stores, libraries and now, online publishing communities (Open Book Toronto, 2014; O'Sullivan, 2014). But rarely, if at all, do we find evidence from within secondary schools that is specific to female students and their reading habits of manga and anime texts.

## **1.4 Organisation of thesis**

This thesis is organised into five chapters. Chapter 1 has introduced the study and situated the context of the research. Chapter 2 reviews the literature cogent to these intersecting domains of pedagogy, popular culture, and the teaching of English. Chapter 3 provides an account of the methodological approach for this study. Chapter 4 reports the research findings. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results and implications for current practice and future research before drawing to a conclusion.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

By exploring teachers' attitudes to manga and anime texts in the secondary English classroom this study aims to explore teachers' values and beliefs in order to consider how these elements influence teacher decision making and shape the ways in which they perceive their students as readers. The interest in exploring such views through a focus on manga and anime texts arises from an intersection of curriculum priorities, broader contesting discourses around appropriateness and suitability of texts, and the aim of exploring teachers' attitudes to female students. From this study it is hoped that we will gain a better understanding of the ways in which teachers navigate new and distinctive text choices within their local contexts in order to make visible practices which enrich the experience of English for students.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Overview

The text holds a cherished place in the English classroom. As an object of study and totem of the English teacher, we have traditionally associated the studied text with great books, a holdover from a cultural inclination to perceive greatness when delivered from an authoritative voice and a revered place (Leavis, 1930; Wilson, 2012). The text still holds a place in the contemporary English classroom but its position and identity is far less fixed than once it was. Buffeted by cultural transformation, media saturation, technological advancements, waves of identity politics and political resistance, perceptions about the text have evolved, a process essentially quickened by the transformative influence of globalisation and internet proliferation over the past twenty years.

In the New South Wales English classroom we now perceive of a text as anything which communicates meaning “produced in any media that incorporates language, including sound, print, film, electronic and multimedia representations” (BOS NSW, 2012a, p.213). Yet, despite the breadth and depth within this definition, there can be an allure in works which are familiar in form, content and medium (O’Sullivan, 2005; Jogie, 2015). To better understand teachers’ attitudes to manga and anime texts is to navigate a history and identity of the text in the English classroom and the ways in which this embodied object has prescribed and reinscribed beliefs, values, behaviours and attitudes amidst a turbulent and at times, contested manner of conceiving of education in English (Apple, 1986; Bourdieu, 1986; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Gilbert & Taylor, 1991; Hutcheon, 1991; 1992; Ruddall & Unrau, 2004; Rosenblatt, 2005; Yiannakis, 2014).

## **2.2 Curriculum controls and politicised English**

To explore teacher attitudes to manga and anime texts is to enter an highly contentious educational space where concerns over textual appropriateness may reflect wider political dissent and fragmentation within cultural conceptions of education. This can be perceived in the successive waves of ‘culture wars’ within the teaching of English in Australia at both a State and Federal level throughout the 1980 and 1990s. While the literature suggests that particular individuals have proved polarising, for instance Dr. Terry Metherell, the New South Wales Minister for Education and Youth Affairs during the Greiner government (1988-1992) and former Prime Minister John Howard (in office 1996-2007), the debates over what should be taught and learnt in English have continued even as these distinctive individuals receded into the currents of history (Braithwaite, 1992; Riordan & Weller, 2000; Brabazon, 2006; Yates, 2009). The influence of former Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne seems to have resurrected the ‘culture wars’ for the current generation particularly through efforts to revise and reform the newly implemented Australian curriculum and its State-based permutations (Donnelly, 2011; Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014). It has been suggested political influence upon the NSW English curriculum may be mediated in part because of its separation as an independent body (Riordan & Weller, 2000).



### 2.3.1 Teacher decision making

There is relative freedom for the classroom teacher in New South Wales to choose texts within a pattern of study set for Stage 4 and 5 English because there are no prescribed texts - a curriculum aspect which can be particularly conducive to autonomous teacher decision making. Within the current syllabi there are text requirements that necessitate certain choices of textual forms to be made, hence the relative aspect of teacher decision making. The breadth in these requirements allows for local decision making while providing a cultural and educative framework. For example, in Stage 4 English, students must study at least 2 works of fiction, film, nonfiction, drama and a wide range of poetry (BOS NSW, 2012a). Students must also be exposed to a range of elements such as:

- texts which are widely regarded as quality literature
- texts that provide insights about the peoples and cultures of Asia
- a wide range of cultural, social and gender perspectives, popular and youth cultures
- nonfiction, picture books, graphic novels
- an appropriate range of digital texts, including film, media and multimedia.

In selecting specific texts for study in English, teachers should consider the needs, interests and abilities of their students and the ethos of the school and its local community.  
(Content and Text Requirements for Stage 4, BOS NSW, 2012)

The choice to use a diversity of works as set texts for study and analysis within Stage 4 and 5 English appears to be supported by the content and text requirements of the syllabus. Teachers may be aided in their decision making processes by recommendations from the Suggested Text List (NSW BOSb, 2012). However, while the NSW English curriculum provides flexibility for teachers to make text choices seemingly independent of bureaucratic scrutiny, the ministerial response to the planned screening of the documentary film *Gayby Baby* at a Sydney girls high school (see Bagshaw, 2015) has revealed teacher and school choices may not be as politically immune as might be assumed.

### **2.3.2 Teacher Autonomy & Authority**

The extent of teacher autonomy in NSW English classrooms may be related to opportunities for curriculum flexibility alongside a prevailing cautionary attitude within teachers to new texts, and new ways of thinking and teaching with texts (O’Sullivan, 2005; Berlach & O’Neill, 2009; Donnelly, 2011; Yiannakis, 2014; Jogie, 2015). Influential upon teacher decision making in regards to set texts seems to be a perception of professional competence gained from prior experience combined with a desire for authoritative oversight, paradoxical attitudes which have continued to percolate over the past ten years as two new NSW English syllabi presented fresh challenges (see for instance, O’Sullivan, 2005; Yiannakis, 2014; Jogie, 2015).

That teachers are validated by their own perceptions of professional competence and those of others is significant to an understanding of the text choices they make in the classroom. Biesta’s theories of phronesis, or a teacher’s professional wisdom (2005, 2013, 2015) is especially notable to an understanding of the complexities within teacher decision making in the classroom. He reminds us that despite the increasing pressures placed upon teachers, particularly within an intersection of excellence, equity and accountability controls (Thompson & Cook, 2012; Lingard, Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013), the teacher exhibits a multidimensional competence that enables them to traverse the myriad of challenges within their own distinctive classroom practice. The ability of individual teachers to uphold Biesta’s optimistic framing is open to debate but his theory can be resonant when applied to specific examples of practice, as this study will do in Chapter Five.

### 2.4.1 New Texts

Over the past twenty years, English teachers have been presented with a series of rapidly changing definitions for key learning terms that, in their most recent defined form in the new NSW K-10 Syllabus (2012), reveal the broadening complexities of a teacher's intellectual work. Teachers have been required to evolve their understanding of seemingly straightforward terms of 'text', 'literature', 'reading' and 'literacy' in accordance with shifts within academia and wider society. The new NSW K-10 English syllabus defines a 'text' and 'literature' as follows: A text is "Communications of meaning produced in any media that incorporates language" (BOS NSW, 2012a, p.213). Literature "Literally means anything written, but the term is generally associated with works of imagination, fictional and non-fictional. It is often used to mean texts that are highly regarded examples of their forms and media" (BOS NSW, 2012a, p.199). Within both these definitions are an encompassing of past preconceptions of literacy and future possibilities - note the embedded flexibility within the definition of a text as 'any media' and the interpretative potential of 'anything written' carefully hedged around the terms 'highly regarded' within the definition of literature. These definitions carefully set the boundaries of texts and literature broadly. In turn, broad definitions of texts and literature help reset understandings of reading and literacy, creating a reconceptualisation of English competencies within new paradigms.

Within these new paradigms, reading and literacy (or literacies) have multidimensional meanings but there appears to be consensus within the literature and the NSW K-10 English syllabus that 'new' literacy is just as significant to current students as older conceptions of literacy was to students of the past (Roberts, 1995; Gee, 1999; Wilson, 2012; Janks, 2014). New literacy enacted through reading involves the cognitive act of

decoding symbols and assigning meaning. This act can occur through an interaction with a traditional text, such as a piece of prose, but can also occur through the interactions the individual may have with their multimodal, multimedia world around them. The complexity of reading requires multiple forms of concrete, critical and abstract literacies to draw upon as well as fluency and familiarity in a myriad of textual forms (Gee, 1999). It has been suggested that these broad definitions of key learning terms can leave teachers unsettled, especially those who found solace and identity through the power of certainty and authority within prior conceptions of these terms (Berlach & O'Neill, 2009; Donnelly, 2011).

#### **2.4.2 Theorising Canonical Views, Canonical Texts and Contemporary Classroom Challenges**

That definitions of texts and literature, reading and literacy are socially and culturally determined concepts are addressed from the domains of philosophy (Bourdieu, 1986; Wilson, 2012), critical pedagogy (Apple, 1986; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991) and humanism (Leavis, 1930; Berlach & O'Neill, 2009; Donnelly, 2011) among others within the field. These epistemological arguments intersect in moments of contestation and alliance, revealing that English education continues to be a sphere of fomenting alliance and discordance.

From Wilson (2012) we gain a measured understanding of the ubiquitous weight of the historical canon within the English classroom. He explains:

Such texts are closely and reciprocally tied to traditions: each tradition creates its own canon of classic texts, while conversely the canon justifies the tradition, giving it reality and cultural weight... [leading to a] canonical chain: a historical sequence of texts, together comprising a movement of some sort—perhaps of progress, perhaps a series of repetitions, or perhaps both—which confers the semblance of historical continuity (p.350).

The interweaving of texts and tradition within a systemised and deliberate process can be seen as a vital aspect of English education, particularly for those who ascribe to a vision of civilisation instilled within and through formal schooling. Within this view is the perspective that cultural fragmentation and social dislocation are the end products of an English curriculum which loses sight of its finest forms (Leavis, 1930; Berlach & O'Neill, 2009; Donnelly, 2011). F.R. Leavis (1930) did much to establish a proud tradition of literature in English academic thought. His work helped conceptualise studies of English and ways of thinking about texts in a way that promulgated cultural hierarchy, yet in doing so, also contributed to polarising conceptions of high and low culture. Ideologically, the significance of the literary canon is still held up by some humanists and Leavisites as quintessential to an adolescent's schooling years (Probst, 1994; Donnelly & Wilshire, 2014).

Facing off against the certainty of the humanists and Leavisites are the voices of others who argue that the canon can be force of academic and social exclusion, perpetuating social and cultural inequalities through the marginalisation of distinct groups who are disempowered by the cultural hegemony around them (Freire, 1970; Foucault, 1980; Apple, 1986; Bourdieu, 1986; Delpit, 1995; Teese, 2013, Jogie, 2015). From Foucault's exploration of postmodernism, we gain the understanding that all ideas, all ways of thinking and knowing ourselves and the universe, are fluid to contingencies of power. Foucault helps us see how the institution of the school constitutes the subjects within it in particular ways (Foucault, 1980). This definition of constituted subjects is developed further through Bourdieu's (1986) theory of embodied capital and subjectified bodies, helping us recognise the ways in which schools and school cultures reward and punish students for certain knowledges and behaviours.

In articulating the extent of forms of power and in exploring how such forces develop hierarchies of constituted subjects within particular environments, postmodern theories like those articulated by Foucault and Bourdieu make visible hidden power dynamics within education cultures. Making visible what is hidden and giving voice to those whom have been silenced are facets of both critical pedagogy - a conscious evocation of critical scrutiny upon all interactions within educational spheres (Apple, 1986; Buckingham, 1998), and identity politics (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991; Hutcheon, 1991; 1992; Hooks, 1994), which has raised the profile and distinctiveness of gender, race and class within necessary sub-cultural fragmentation. Accordingly, it is argued that postmodernism in alliance with critical pedagogy and identity politics provides the tools to address structural and systemic inequalities within the education sphere by empowering the voices of the vulnerable and the marginalised (Freire, 1970; Apple, 1986; Gilbert & Taylor, 1991; Hutcheon, 1991, 1992; Hooks, 1994; Buckingham, 1998).

### **2.4.3 Popular Culture and Graphic Texts in the Classroom**

The relevance of popular culture text within the English classroom comes from the position that schools have a responsibility to be inclusive and respectful of all students and their diverse knowledges, cultures and backgrounds (Apple, 1986; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Buckingham, 1998; Brabazon, 2006; Teese, 2013, Jogie, 2015). In order to do this, the English curriculum must broaden conceptions of textual worth and appropriateness - a notable development within the NSW K-10 English syllabus (2012). However, despite policy and theoretical developments, there appears to be a tension for some teachers who are unable to resolve a perceived disjunction between popular culture texts and the literary canon in the English classroom.

To consider popular culture texts like manga and anime as having equal ‘worth’ or ‘quality’ as those associated with the literary canon is to find some allegiance with the values of postmodernism and with the movements of critical pedagogy and identity politics. This may be due to the ephemeral and fluid characteristics of popular culture forms which can move faster and spread quicker through a group or groups than a curriculum can keep up. This quickening of culture, digested, intersected, regurgitated and transformed by different groups and individuals, may lead to an openness of meanings which can be continuously interrogated from different epistemological positions (Luke, 1998). For those from a more humanist or Leavisite position, the shifting uncertainties may seem untenable.

Finding value in popular culture is to value and respect the student whose knowledge and understandings may not always easily connect with the formalised English curriculum (Apple, 1986; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Buckingham, 1998; Brabazon, 2006; Teese, 2013, Jogie, 2015). The extent to which popular culture texts inform adolescent understandings has been insightfully explored by Hall (2011). Her research revealed how frequently adolescents use popular culture texts to comprehend, interpret and reinforce their verbal arguments when studying social science texts. While some have addressed worries that teachers ‘colonise’ student pleasures by incorporating their chosen texts within the curriculum (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991; Grace & Tobin, 1998), others have argued that such incorporation is significant as a way of connecting students’ prior knowledge to current learning goals (Buckingham, 1998; Brabazon, 2006; Howard, 2011; Singh, 2015).

## **2.4.5 Manga and Anime in the Classroom**

Manga and anime are popular culture texts that challenge traditional conceptions of textual quality and validity in terms of classroom resourcing and student consumption (Armour & Iida, 2014). As a static sequence of panels, utilising sequential images and distinctive artistic and textual features, manga initially requires students to be able to ‘read’ the story as a decoding process (Ruddall & Unrau, 2004). As students become more competent decoders of the distinctive multimodal features of manga, they also engage in processes of interpretation, utilising contextual cues in the text but also applying their own prior knowledge (Rosenblatt, 2005). Anime, as an animated form, may be more fluid and less challenging than manga for students to ‘read’. However, it too requires students to employ processes of interpretation.

Even in Japan and Korea, where such texts are far more commonplace and popular amongst students than in Australia, educators are more likely to ban their presence than accept them into the curriculum with fears that such texts lack rigor and educational relevance prevalent (Allen, & Ingulsrud, 2005; Lim, 2012). Yet, manga texts have been credited for the high levels of literacy amongst Japanese students, with children as young as three observed making meaning from manga texts (Yamada-Rice, 2014). In Lim’s (2012) study on the reading habits of 7-11 year olds in South Korea, she observed that it was educational graphic novels that the children repeatedly chose for pleasure reading alongside ‘real’ books like novels. (Korea, like Japan and China has its own culture of graphic storytelling. The term for such texts in Korea is manhwa. Notably for such an exam driven culture, it also leads in the educational graphic novel market too according to Lim, 2011). From Lim’s interviews with children in her 2012 study, it became apparent the participants were savvy independent readers, capable of circumnavigating the educational



content in the Korean titles by focusing on the entertaining qualities of the texts as well. However, Lim noted that from the time South Korean children enter Middle school there is both parental and school pressure to drop reading for pleasure activities in order to concentrate on academic excellence and exam culture (Lim, 2012, p.15).

That manga and anime are relatively new texts within the English curriculum within Western traditions of education is evident both in their presence and absence in literature. There is a body of research on manga and anime texts by cultural studies and anthropology researchers (see, for example Schodt, 1983; Napier, 1998; Shamoon, 2013). However, there is limited exploration into the ways in which manga and anime have application in contemporary school contexts. Different papers, written within the field of librarian scholarship, have grouped all forms of graphic novels and comic books together regardless of cultural origin meaning that it is hard to track the growth of teen interest in manga and anime specifically (Hughes-Hassell & Hodge, 2007; Hughes, King, Perkins & Fuke, 2011; Sabeti, 2012). The few studies that do reference adolescent readers of manga and anime texts specifically (Snowball, 2008; Moeller, 2011) often do not intertwine their analysis of readers with classroom pedagogy. Those studies that do address manga and anime pedagogically, offer more broad considerations for teachers as to what manga and anime are, defining their multimodal characteristics and didactic potential but absent a consideration of the adolescent reader (Schwartz & Rubinstein-Avila, 2006).

Prior research from Frey and Fisher (2004) about teacher engagement with manga and anime texts indicated that teachers felt that they were outsiders to this reading and viewing subculture, viewing it as the domain of students, and a place they were hesitant to step into, let alone bring into their classrooms. More recent research with preservice teachers in the United States by Connors (2011) has revealed that graphic texts have been viewed with suspicion with the relationship between pictures and text presupposing an easy and

unchallenging read, thereby making them unsuitable for classroom use. According to Clarke (2013), preservice teachers in the United States have also expressed concerns that choosing to use graphic texts in a classroom could draw contempt from colleagues and ire from school administrators or the wider school community over suitability or appropriateness of content. Recent controversies over graphic novels on college reading lists highlight that within the United States, applying an analytical lens to graphic texts continues to be a transgressive educational act (Leopold, 2015; Williams, 2015).

Within the work of researchers who have addressed student interests in manga texts, a significant study of influence for this project is that of Frey and Fisher (2004) who were drawn into graphic novel comic culture because of student enthusiasm for the medium. While doing no disservice to Frey and Fisher's reflexivity, it is important to note they only spoke from their own classroom experiences. This study intends to broaden the discussion by bringing in educator voices from both the English classroom and the school library. While teachers still mostly control what students read and view in the classroom (O'Sullivan, Carroll & Cavanagh, 2008) this study will attempt to offer some insight into teacher receptivity to manga and anime consumption in an English classroom. It will also do so from a unique and significant frame - the consideration of female students as readers, viewers and consumers of manga and anime texts.

For a long time, comic books and graphic novels were associated with male adolescent readers yet the female centred storylines of shojo (girls) manga and the empowered heroines of Studio Ghibli films, have helped break down such binary gender divisions. The marketing decision of American publisher Tokyo Pop to actively cater to female readers revolutionised the comic and graphic novel space in America (Alverson, 2011) and consequently, opened up market awareness of the importance of catering publications to diverse groups of readers. Yet, despite some observations of female readership interest in

manga and anime texts (Choo, 2008; Stockins, 2009), few studies have addressed the significance of these texts for adolescent females in the classroom. Moeller's (2011) work researching gender consumption of graphic novels and popular culture texts observed how female participation in graphic novel reading was discouraged by societal conventions which positioned boys as the target demographic. Similarly, in her coeducational case study with adolescent readers Hall (2012) observed that during discussions females were shut down by their male peers when they threatened masculine interpretations of texts. The association of male readers with graphic novel texts has dominated many of the different studies on adolescent readers (Hughes-Hassell & Hodge, 2007; Hughes et.al, 2011; Moeller, 2011; Hall, 2012; Sabeti, 2012). This research study examines the attitudes of teachers and teacher-librarians in two girls' schools.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This review of the literature has addressed the significance of the set text in English and the ways in which teacher decision making can be affected by internal and external forces upon schools, individuals and broader society. In New South Wales schools, teacher decision making in regards to text choices is guided by the framework of the NSW K-10 English syllabus. Yet, the framework provides possibilities for teacher autonomy to be responsive to student needs within local contexts. The ways in which teachers navigate the possibilities within text choices in English can reflect their own epistemological positions - a factor for the continuing coexistence of competing interpretations of text value and worth from the domains of philosophy, critical pedagogy and humanism. Yet, the encroachment of popular culture within school spaces points to shifts currently underway as awareness of student interests gain greater prominence within teacher decision making processes.

## **RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN**

### **3.1 Overview**

This chapter presents the method that was used to conduct the research and the manner in which data were collated, analysed and reported. The limitations of the study and potential transferability of findings to other contexts are identified.

The research question was ‘What are teachers’ attitudes towards manga and anime texts for the Stage 4/5 English classroom?’

The central concern of the research was to explore teacher attitudes to manga and anime texts in the secondary English classroom. The aim was to develop insights into teacher attitudes to these texts by exploring the first hand accounts of educators with varying degrees of experience and exposure to manga and anime within specific school environments. The choice to limit this study to single-sex girls’ schools came from a desire to explore in greater detail how teachers perceive female students as readers, and as readers and viewers of manga and anime texts. By situating my research on curriculum and pedagogical practice within two case studies, I am also providing some evidence about how two geographically similar but demographically distinct schools are navigating the opportunities and challenges presented by the new NSW K-10 English Syllabus.

### **3.2 Development of the Research method**

#### ***Qualitative Research Paradigm***

Qualitative research provides a rich epistemological framework to guide our understanding of the multiple realities that shape and reshape human relations within particular sites and circumstances. It privileges the individual experience and the significance of the individual voice, yet allows researchers to ‘discover’ the patterns that interlink individuals within a larger socio-cultural framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kvale, 1996). “The notion of discovery...includes discovering first the world as seen through the eyes of the participants and the basic social processes or structures that organize that world” (Hutchinson, 1986, p.51). This ability to ‘discover’ and interpret the inner views of participants holds particular relevance within the field of education research where qualitative methods such as grounded theory provides processes to access insider knowledge or, as close to insider knowledge that can be realised, by an outsider to a group or phenomenon.

Qualitative research by teachers about aspects of education legitimises teacher authority in the construction of knowledge and can be perceived as a vital element to make visible the deeper nuances of school life than can be revealed by quantitative approaches (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Klehr, 2012; Sallee & Flood, 2012). As a teacher-researcher, the qualitative research paradigm was especially suited to my goal of exploring teacher attitudes to manga and anime texts because it enabled the voices, views and experiences of teachers to be heard within their own situated contexts while also uncovering curriculum and pedagogical insights that others may find transferable to their own contexts.

### ***Grounded Theory:***

Grounded theory values and respects the contradictions and alignments within human experience by capturing the perspective of participants through a socially constructed methodology that is alive and responsive to dynamic interplays between researcher and participants. In confronting and rejecting a positivist interpretation of the world, grounded theory enables us to perceive that, “human reality is not simply “out there” awaiting scientific study. Instead it is socially and symbolically constructed, always emerging and relative to other facets of social life” (Hutchinson, 1986, p.51). Hutchinson’s vivid definition of the emergent and relative aspects of the grounded theory epistemology aligns with Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) original approach of discovering nuance and complexity within human experiences, not from the cold scrutiny of a lab but from a place of responsive discovery. As the team originally wrote, “our position is not logical; it is phenomenological” (p.6), a confronting and challenging interpretation of science but one which validates the study of human phenomena through the capturing of living selves across and through singular and multiple forms of data.

Schools are paradoxically universal and relative sites for researchers exploring human phenomena. It has been argued that school cultures are more responsive than ever to global and transnational influences, where corporate concerns have greater influence than nation-states or political actors (Apple, 1986; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Thomson, 2013). Schools can be perceived as universal in that they are treated within curriculum and policy fields as block entities united by educative goals and within normative frameworks, guided by government influence. Yet, schools also have distinctive cultures, demographics and contexts that evolve, often within a generation. The contextual differences between and across cultures has been explored by Charmaz (2014) who persuasively presents an interpretation of grounded theory that is nuanced by a researcher’s continual reflexivity as to shifts within constructions and representations of power by individuals, institutions and

groups within their respective contexts. The exploratory lens of grounded theory, nuanced by an awareness and sensitivity to contextual differences, can thereby offer us greater access to the lived social and cultural complexity of schools. Other quantitatively derived methods, in their generability, can blur the distinctiveness and uniqueness of human experience. Grounded theory is the most appropriate method in this study in order to capture the lived social and cultural complexity of schools.

### ***Method: Semi-structured interview***

A semi-structured interview form was selected as the most appropriate method because it provided clarity to participants as the the scope of the study while providing the researcher the flexibility to adapt fields of inquiry to the circumstances of individuals and to the data as it was revealed. Furthermore, to use the semi-structured interview form as a methodological choice validates the voice of the interview subject and the distinct knowledges they hold while allowing us to see into “a manifold and controversial human world” (Kvale, 1996, p.3). This also facilitated the flow of information and provided moments for participants and researcher to seek clarity within the conversations.

The interviews followed a semi-structured interview plan, with participants receiving an outline of the questions to follow. A copy of the questions can be found in the Appendix (3). The order of the questions was specifically designed to draw out participant attitudes to English texts within the secondary English curriculum and their view of students as readers before narrowing the research lens to their attitudes to manga and anime texts. The reason for this order of questions was to gain the broader perspectives of participants on text choices within secondary English so as to better explore and understand their position on manga and anime texts in this same space. Along the same lines as the use of grounded theory, this process provided opportunities for the researcher to implement constant

comparisons of incidents and phenomena in order to integrate categories, test theories and develop a substantive theory (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Kolb, 2012).

The semi-structured interview questions were developed from the research question:

‘What are teachers’ attitudes towards manga and anime texts for the Stage 4/5 English classroom?’

The following three semi-structured interview questions provided structure to the three focus areas of the interview with participants:

- a) How important do you think it is that students read for pleasure?
- b) What has been your experience with manga and anime texts?
- c) How has your school responded to the cross curriculum priority of Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia and the general capability of Intercultural Understanding in the new Stage 4/5 English syllabus?

These general questions guided participants through the three focus areas. Participants were prompted by additional probe questions which helped direct their thoughts to matters most relevant to this study. Additional questions were responsive to the views shared by participants and were applied intuitively by the researcher based on the direction of participant answers. For instance, in response to a) How important do you think it is that students read for pleasure? participants may have been these probing questions:

- Tell me about wide reading - is it part of your school’s culture?
- How do you get your students to read?
- What type of books do you see your students reading for pleasure?

At the end of each interview, participants were invited to add comments or to clarify their positions on what they had expressed or may have wanted to express on the focus topics.



### ***Participant Selection***

Seven English teachers and two school librarians were selected to participate in the study. These teachers and librarians came from two geographically similar school sites in Sydney within the New South Wales government school system. Site A, is a comprehensive girls' school, Site B, is an academically selective girls' school. The schools are geographically similar but different enrolment procedures between comprehensive and academically selective public schools has resulted in distinct student populations. It was significant for this study that the teachers were able to speak to their experience with manga and anime texts AND their observation of female readers and viewers, thus the choice of the single-sex girls' school. Participants were sought from the English faculty and from each school's library in order to better understand how and why teachers perceive of students as readers in particular ways.

### ***Data collection and management***

Data were collected during semi-structured interviews. A face-to-face audio recorded interview was held with each of the five participants from Site A and four participants from Site B. Interviews lasted 25-35 minutes and were conducted at times convenient to participants on their respective school sites. In this study, the data collected were transcribed and analysed shortly after each interview. This decision to transcribe throughout the process rather than at the end of all interviews, from a grounded theory perspective, means the data elicited from earlier interviews can inform and allow comparisons to be made during later interviews. Thus, theoretical sampling, a system of scoping and evaluating emerging categories within the data (Kolb, 2012; Charmaz, 2014), could occur progressively up to theoretical saturation, the emergence of a strong, supported theory of teacher attitudes' to manga and anime texts. The transcribed interview data and audio recordings were held electronically under password protection. Only the researcher and supervisor had access to the data.

## ***Data Analysis***

The analysis was informed by comparative analysis under the guidance of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory in order to "yield a 'meaningful' picture" (p.39). Concurrently, a contemporary interpretation of grounded theory presented by Charmaz (2014) was also utilised in order to overcome some of the analytical boundaries set by Glaser and Strauss. These have since been superseded within intersectional research cultures. As such, the researcher engaged with research literature throughout the period of study rather than leaving it until later in the analysis process as suggested by Glaser and Strauss. This decision was made under the guidance of Charmaz (2007) who advises that "...research needs to be theoretically informed, but not theoretically pre-formed. Hence, we begin inquiry with sensitizing concepts that alert us to look at what occurs" (p.80). For this reason, the researcher explored theorists from philosophy, humanism and critical pedagogy in order to better identify, understand and develop a sensitivity to the inner views of participants while consciously distancing herself from pre-formed or deductive approaches.

In merging Glaser and Strauss' recommendations with Charmaz (2007), the researcher engaged in active coding processes while also "writing for discovery", an analytical process that "engages writers in actions through which they learn what they are going to say...[it's] active, emergent, and open-ended" (p.83). For instance, in coding teacher attitudes to students as readers, general codes were used to distinguish teachers' "aims/objectives". During the first iterative phase, these codes identified curriculum influences, pedagogical approaches, and some early forms at identifying the phenomena of student subjectification by teacher participants. This stage of analysis was enhanced through the process of "writing for discovery" because in creating a narrative for hypothesised phenomena, the researcher was able to cross reference developing theories with the raw data and early codes and categories. During this process, some codes and

developing theories proved to be unsupported. Theorising along unsupported lines ceased. Theoretical sampling continued until emergent theories were supported by the data.

### ***Researcher Reflexivity***

Engward and Davis (2015) provide a multidimensional schema on reflexivity and why it is so significant for the qualitative researcher to be reflexive in order to maintain the validity of their work. They explain reflexivity “is about developing transparency in decision making in the research process at multiple levels: personal, methodological, theoretical, epistemological, ethical and political” (p.1532). This researcher has engaged in reflexivity throughout the study by interrogating her own values and rethinking how her own experiences in teaching and in her own life prior to research have predisposed her to value certain epistemological and political interpretations over others. Memo-ing her observations and thoughts throughout the study has enabled the researcher to distinguish and ward against bias, and maintain the analytical lens.

Reflexivity has been especially important as the researcher had a relationship with both schools chosen for the study. Site A is her current place of employment and she had worked at Site B ten years previously. The participants at Site A knew the researcher as a colleague and two of the Site B participants had also worked alongside the researcher in a teaching capacity. Two of the Site B participants had no prior relationship with the researcher. Seven of the participants had some familiarity with the researcher’s background, and her own use of manga and anime texts in the English classroom. The researcher consciously maintained a professional demeanour throughout the research process, modelled on Charmaz’s (2007) recommendations for effective interviewing, as she neither wanted to take advantage of the trust placed in her by colleagues, nor did she want to allow her relationships to affect the findings and her analysis.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

This study was approved by the Macquarie Human Ethics Board and by the NSW Department of Education Strategic Research Directorate. A copy of the ethics approval letter can be found in the Appendix (1). Additionally, permission was also sought and granted from the Catholic Education Office, Parramatta and from a Principal within the Independent School System. However, a decision was made to maintain the research lens on the two geographically similar single sex schools within the government system because of their teachers' experience in using manga and anime texts. Communication with the non-government schools was thus ended.

### ***Letters of Consent***

Consent was obtained from school principals and from participants and a copy of the signed consent form was given to each participant. A copy of the consent forms can be found in the Appendix (2A & 2B).

### ***Confidentiality***

The researcher transcribed the interviews to maintain the in-confidence assurance that only she and her supervisor would listen to the audio recordings and have access to the transcripts. Ethical standards were maintained at all times to keep the data confidential. Pseudonyms were used to preserve the identity of the participants and their schools.

### ***Transparency***

The researcher was conscious of the way she may have been perceived by participants at Site A and the way their relationship with her may have influenced their responses. The researcher developed the manga and anime program that is used but due to parental leave had not taught the unit nor been present on site during the pilot year. In order to circumvent potential bias or 'polite' responses with colleagues, the researcher identified

her own subjectivities and explicitly asked them to be as honest as they could in explaining their experiences and views of manga and anime texts at the start of their interviews.

Ongoing discussion with the supervisor addressed matters of subjectivity and research protocols. It was also made very clear to participants that there was no obligation or onus on them to participate in the study and that they could withdraw at any time without explanation or consequence.

### ***Limitations***

One of the limitations of the study was its focus on participants from just two schools. However, as a purposive sampling technique at a Masters level of research for a small intensive study it provided a focus on teachers with experience teaching with manga and anime texts. A longer study may be able to cross-reference the findings of this study with the attitudes of teachers in other schools. However, the validity of this study lies not in its generability - for as a limited qualitative study that is not the goal. The validity of this study lies in the transferability of results and conclusions by others to their own contexts. It is for this reason that researcher reflexivity was an important aspect within this methodological design.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the methodological approach the researcher developed in order to address the research question. It has discussed the rationale for a qualitative approach within a grounded theory lens and the importance of this methodology to capture the lived experience within schools. By presenting the manner in which the study was undertaken, it is hoped others may find some usefulness in the results and conclusions.

## **RESULTS**

### **4.1 Overview**

This chapter presents the key research findings to the question: ‘What are teacher attitudes to manga and anime texts in the secondary English classroom?’ These results have been compiled from the semi-structured interview data, the collation of which has been described in chapter 3. Reported here are the views shared by the nine teachers from the two school sites who discussed their observation of students as readers and their own experiences of manga and anime texts.

Site A has been using manga and anime texts in Year 8 English since 2012. The Stage 4 manga and anime program was written under the prior NSW 7-10 English syllabus (2003) with clear attention paid to the directions of the new NSW K-10 English syllabus (2012) during the consultation stages. During 2012, the program was piloted with two Year 8 classes before implementation with all Year 8 English classes from 2013. The program was refined and updated to meet the requirements of the new NSW K-10 syllabus at the end of 2014. All of the participating English teachers had experience teaching this manga and anime unit at least once over the previous four years. The librarian was newly arrived to the school in 2015.

Site B has been using Western graphic novels and anime texts for at least six years under the prior NSW 7-10 English syllabus (2003). The English faculty chose to revise their programs and continue the use of these texts with Year 9 English for the new NSW K-10 English syllabus (2012). There is scope for teachers to include manga texts within this

Year 9 English anime program. Two out of the three English teachers who agreed to participate had experience teaching with anime and Western graphic novels. The third participant was new to the school and would be teaching with these texts later in the year. The librarian has been at the school since 2003.

The data from Site A and Site B were coded for comparable and contrary themes under an exploratory inductive lens. Across these two sites, the teachers were able to provide their views about manga and anime texts and also offer a glimpse into the tensions underpinning debates over textual appropriateness within English curriculum choices and how the educational philosophies of individual teachers can determine the ways in which they choose, interpret and teach with texts.

It is worth noting that in New South Wales, it is the teacher, the faculty, or the school that sets the texts for Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8) and Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10) English. Text determinations come from internal negotiations over curriculum, syllabi and student needs in accordance with English syllabus content and text requirements (BOS NSW, 2012a). There is no prescribed text list for English in Stages 4 and 5. Prescribed texts are only mandated within the English programs in Stage 6. There is a however, a suggested text list for the new K-10 English syllabus (BOS NSW, 2012b) that offers guidance and support for teachers in their text choices. There are two listings for manga and one for anime on the Suggested text list. One of the manga listings is a graphic novel adaptation of Anthony Horowitz's *Stormbreaker*, noted for its "manga-style illustrations" (BOS NSW, 2012b, p.228). The other manga listing is Peter Carey's travel memoir *Wrong About Japan*, a prose title that offers insight into manga and anime culture through the insider/outsider experiences of Carey and his son as they travel through Japan. The only anime listing is the film *Princess Mononoke*, directed by Hayao Miyazaki.

This chapter is presented into three sections in order to reveal the participants' distinctive attitudes about manga and anime texts. These sections report and illustrate that in these two case studies, the teachers' knowledge of their students as readers shapes their curriculum decisions; that despite variance in pedagogical approaches, or teaching style, teachers make pedagogical decisions about the use of manga and/or anime texts in order to enrich the curriculum for their students; and that teachers demonstrate complex, informed decision-making processes when considering manga and anime texts that supports their work as educational professionals.

## **4.2 Significance of reading**

All teachers at Site A and B support curriculum decisions that model, value and prescribe the significance of reading for students of English. However, demographic differences between the student populations have led to different approaches in embedding and inscribing good reading behaviour.

The teachers at Site A, the comprehensive girls school, were conscious that the students that they teach come from various socio-economic and cultural circumstances. 35% of Site A students come from the top socio-economic index, 9% from the bottom and the school has a 94% attendance rate (ACARA, 2014a). These teachers were mindful that while reading may have been supported in the homes of some students, this was not necessarily the case for all. One participant observed, "...there are kids who are already motivated readers, and reading for them is never an issue, their access to a wide variety of books is never an issue but there are kids who have no exposure to reading unless it is time that is allocated to them within school". The use of the word "allocated" by the participant is an interesting choice, connotating a sense of fairness or equity in the decision to grant reading time within class time. By emphasising the distinction between student home lives and the



role of this school in overcoming reading disadvantage, this participant reveals the significance of time itself as a reading resource for students.

In order to compensate for reading differences across student home environments the English faculty has prioritised a sustained silent reading program in all 7-10 English classes for the past six years. The sustained silent reading program, called “wide reading” by participants, is structured with the tacit support of parents, in that parent permission is sought annually via permission notes, and it runs in the first ten to fifteen minutes of most English lessons. During sustained silent reading time, students can read any text of their choosing. While three Site A teachers were aware of many engaged student-readers in their community, they also noted the reluctance of some students to read for pleasure or even for their English requirements at all. One reflected, “I notice there are always the kids that don’t bring in a book or...pick up a different book each week...(or) have a dictionary in front of them so they have a book... and you know, I don’t want to judge but a Year 8 student who doesn’t like reading is probably not engaging in that”. Two site A teachers commented on observing student reluctance to engage as directed with mandated reading time. Their experience and responses to differing reading behaviours of students is reported further at 4.2.2.

The teachers and librarian at Site B, the selective girls school, reflected on the readership behaviour of their students. These educators were attuned to the complicit reading behaviour of most, if not all, of their students within the formalised curriculum but differences in observations arose between the teachers and the librarian when speaking on student reading behaviour when reading for pleasure. Although it might have been expected, none of the participants drew correlations or causality between wide reading practices and the socio-economic or cultural circumstances of students. 85% of Site B students come from the top socio-economic index and the school has a 98% attendance

rate (ACARA, 2014b). Wide reading of texts was encouraged through particular English curriculum programs like class Literature Circles and initiatives like Book Club, an extracurricular program administered by the teacher-librarian at lunchtime.

The teacher-librarian had more contact with students and their personal reading choices and was able to offer more detailed accounts of student reading behaviour outside of the set English curriculum. The librarian observed, “we have girls who are just avid readers. They read an incredibly large volume of books”. She also used the terms “discriminating”; “consciousness” and described students as having the capacity to make a “distinction” in their reading choices. In recounting the way senior students prioritise assessments and study by writing lists of books they’d like to read after their Higher School Certificate exams, we get a sense from the librarian’s description of student discipline in their reading choices: “Year 12, if they’ve been the ones to use the library a lot and they were always reading fiction, they’ll keep a running list of everything that’s new that they haven’t got the time to read”. These positively connotated terms give a sense of student agency, capability and discipline in their reading choices, reflecting the ways in which students are perceived by the librarian.

While students could nominally pick texts of their own reading preferences during wide reading activities within English, such choices were made under the umbrella of thematic or topical units of study and were guided by recommended reading lists or genre boundaries. One of the Site B teachers explained the process as involving: “...beyond the set text, students hav[e] to read a book from a particular genre: biography for example in Year 9 or Year 10, and at the end of that term writ[e] a personal response to the text they read and hand that into the teacher”. The wide reading program involves students reading texts inside and outside of school hours with firm expectations, evident in the verb choices “have”, “write”, “hand”, that students will continue to read and complete associated learning activities at home.

Two of the English teachers seemed to interpret student reading behaviour as far less agentic in text choices and both discussed how the English curriculum was used to shape student text choices and reading behaviour. In situating reading culture and the types of texts recommended for students, one participant explained that wide reading is “built into a lot of the programs” and that they “assess” and set expectations for reading by having students “demonstrate their wide reading in an assessment type of form in creative ways”. Similarly, her colleague described the wide reading program as something the faculty has “instilled” and that they were “pedantic” in ensuring teachers can “guide the reading”. The sense of control and oversight that these words connote establish a different characterisation of students as readers from that expressed by the librarian.

From these accountability measures of watching, controlling and assessing student text choices, we may perceive that some of the English teachers appear to be unsettled by the decisions students have made in their reading. Despite the English curriculum having the power to shape student reading choices through learning and assessment activities one teacher still expressed concern over student reading behaviour, “I’m not sure that students are actually reading as much as they should be. As avidly beyond what they have to read for school”. In the way the teachers describe their role in guiding student reading, implicit in their role as mentors is a perception of students as vulnerable to making wrong or less-advantageous reading choices. Within this view, it is the teacher and formal curriculum that offer protection to students, supervises their selections and directs their reading behaviour.

#### **4.2.1 Teacher attitudes towards students as readers**

All teachers across both sites agreed that it is important students read for pleasure and for academic requirements. There was agreement amongst the English teachers and librarians that students should be active readers in order to better their literacy capabilities and to deepen their general knowledge and understanding of the world around them. For example, one participant identified reading as having benefits for students' "cognitive function...increasing the ability to concentrate, the ability to empathise," honing their "ability to go out and seek knowledge". Another participant observed that "when the kids really read widely and deeply, then that improves their...understand(ing) (of) the way language is used as a communication tool, how it can be manipulated by the composer in order to make an individual feel or think or act in a certain way". The views expressed by participants here are similar to those reflected within the research literature which holds that reading is beneficial for students' academic performance, literacy and vocabulary acquisition, general knowledge attainment and empathy development (Birmingham, 2006; Lin, Choo & Pandian, 2012; Morrow, 2003; Stairs & Burgos, 2010).

Despite the difference in student cohorts, with one school educating comprehensive students and the other academically selective students, teachers in both sites identified similar types of texts that they had observed students choosing to read for pleasure. The genres of fantasy, dystopian, drama and romance were recalled by teachers from both sites. The author John Green was so popular that four participants identified him for his popularity by name rather than by the titles of his books. Across both sites, all teachers and librarians were also able to identify that there were students in their school that liked to read manga and/or view anime texts.

In discussing student choice of texts, all teachers believed that texts should be challenging for students and that even when reading for pleasure, within class time, students should choose texts that make them ‘work’ as readers, evoking an expectation of intellectual labour within student reading activities. That these teachers believe their students need to work or be challenged in their reading is evident in the repetition of verb choices they used when describing their pedagogical strategies for student reading. The verbs that occurred most frequently around teacher influence on student reading choices were “engage”, used by six participants and “encourage”, used by four participants. This is in contrast to only one reference by a participant of changing student reading behaviour as something that a teacher can “make them” do. The connotated differences between the verb choices of “encourage”, “engage” versus “make” suggest that most participants believe that changing student reading behaviour requires motivational support from their teacher.

There are differences in the way these English teachers and librarians see their roles in motivating students in their reading and the work that is required of both teacher and students in the reading process. For one participant “being proactive and having the expectation that students will read an extra book” was important. For another participant, “...in order to engage students and get them reading more. You have to read things that they enjoy”. In these two perspectives we can see how the first has directions for reading, the participant using the nouns “proactive” and “expectations” to describe their verbal directions to students but there is also a distance created between the teacher and the student. The onus in this first example is on the student to perform the desired behaviour, to “read an extra book”, because the teacher has told them to do so. The second participant closes the distance between teacher and student by facilitating a reading relationship that is guided by student reading choices. The use of the second person pronoun “You” to describe teachers and “they” to identify students outlines that there is still a distance between the teacher and students both in the professional relationship and their reading

preferences. Yet, in speaking with high modality the second participant conveys how she closes the gap between verbal expectations of the teacher and evoking the desired behaviour from students by becoming involved in the reading experience herself. While the participants presented differing processes to “engage” and “encourage” their students in their reading, there was alignment in teacher attitudes from both sites that students need to read more and in particular, they need to read more challenging texts.

#### **4.2.2 Convergence/Divergence: Teacher Attitudes towards Students as Readers**

Three distinctive interpretations of students as readers were apparent in the data and are worth exploring in closer detail for the complexities in teacher decision making when it comes to permitting student text choices within classroom spaces. All three teachers want to change the way their students read and think about texts. A factor of influence within each interpretation is the way in which each teacher defines a text and the term literature. As a point of comparison, the new NSW K-10 English syllabus defines each as follows: A text is “Communications of meaning produced in any media that incorporates language” (BOS NSW, 2012a). Literature “Literally means anything written, but the term is generally associated with works of imagination, fictional and non-fictional. It is often used to mean texts that are highly regarded examples of their forms and media (BOS NSW, 2012a). The first two perspectives, Lane and Frank, come from Site A, the third, Catherine, is from Site B.

4.2.2.1 Lane, an English teacher from Site A, has been teaching since 2009 with a break in service for maternity leave. She describes herself as a teacher with five years of experience, all within comprehensive girls’ schools. She laughingly recounts that even her

practicum was at a comprehensive girls' school. Lane has her own classroom and she has stocked her class library with a range of novels, including some graphic novels, for students in Stages 4, 5 and 6 English.

Lane's perspective on student reading choices provides some insight into the way that teachers can view popular culture texts like manga and anime as gateway texts; texts which lure students into more positive engagement with more traditional English reading habitus. This perspective, despite acknowledgement from Lane for "a little less snobbery" from English teachers towards text hierarchies, reveals how embedded canonical hierarchies are in the English schema, even for teachers who consciously try to teach beyond them:

I think we need to broaden the scope of what we consider reading for pleasure. I think there obviously has to be an understanding of the changing importance of text types to students and I think we need to make sure we're not bogged down in reading for pleasure strictly having to be books from the canon. I think there needs to be a little less snobbery involved in teaching what's an acceptable text type for a student to read. And I say that because I know I do that myself. I know I value certain texts over other texts but I think we need to move away from that in order to engage students and get them reading more. You have to read things that they enjoy and when you do that then you can lead them into areas.

Lane reflects a professional self-awareness of the challenges in engaging students as readers both as a broad group and individually within the teaching of English. Note, through her statement, "...there needs to be a little less snobbery involved in teaching what's an acceptable text type for a student" her awareness is of the teacher as the authority figure in the classroom who establishes for students what texts are permitted, and conversely, what texts are inappropriate. Through her use of the verb "teaching", we can see Lane acknowledge that inculcating reading culture with students can involve transmission of values of worthiness and quality. However, Lane's use of the term "snobbery" reveals her awareness of contestations within the definitions of text and literature - contestations that have real significance given the consequences on student learning dynamics and their reading behaviour.

With experience teaching girls in two different comprehensive single-sex school environments, Lane's perspective on "snobbery" culture and "acceptable" texts reflects her sensitivity to the differing aspects of student home and life circumstances which can manifest in varying learning needs within the English classroom. Lane's personal reading choices, and the books of her childhood and adolescence, lent more to the English or Western canon, albeit one with deliberately feminist intent. As a middle-class child of Anglo-Australian parents she identified Enid Blyton's works, *Anne of Green Gables* and *Little Women*, "all those kind of traditionally Western pro-female kind of stories", as the texts which formed her home library. Yet, Lane has gone out of her way to buy books for her students that appeal to them, even when they did not appeal to her own reading tastes. She explained, "Originally...it was teenage fiction. I would...get advice from the kids and feedback as to what they're reading and interested in". Lane recognises that individually, students need to read more challenging texts in order to develop their capacity for nuance, analysis and deeper comprehension. However, after teaching students with a broad range of reading levels and from diverse backgrounds, Lane has become more conscious that a teacher's perception of a challenging text can be context dependent on their own reading interests and life experiences.

From Lane's experience with comprehensive school students, low levels of student engagement in texts leads to low levels of reading. Her strategy to overcome this disconnect between teacher aspirations for student reading choices and student reading behaviour has been to reformulate her own assumptions about texts and textual value. This may not have been an easy change to make. In reconceiving textual worth through the eyes of her students, Lane is challenging the values and attitudes that place canonical texts as sole texts of value within the English classroom. However, it is important to observe that despite Lane's reflexivity over her own values, she still places weight on canonical texts as being of greater significance in the English classroom than non-canonical texts. In



developing her class library, alongside teen fiction and graphic novels, Lane has purchased texts that are “...more intellectual - for want of a better word - to guide their reading and understanding, to develop that really in depth way of understanding”. Note the way Lane perceives an “intellectual” distinction within text choices, assigning some texts a greater value than others in their capacity to influence and educate students to a deeper level.

Lane engages, reads and interact with adolescent reading choices. She buys books out of her own money for her classroom library. But she does so for a purpose - to lead students closer to her understanding of a more worthy experience of reading, one that is characterised by familiarity with canonical texts in order to access those deeper areas of “understanding” and analysis. Lane engages in processes to reach students at the level they are currently at but is ever mindful of where she wants the student to be in the future as readers and students of English.

4.2.2.2 Frank, an English teacher from Site A, is in his first year of teaching. One of his practicums was at his current school, the other was at a comprehensive coeducational school in north-west Sydney. Frank’s personal reading choices as an adolescent and as an adult included comics and graphic novels. He explained during his interview that he used comics and graphic novels as related materials in English when he sat his Higher School Certificate, an act in itself which hints at Frank’s broadly encompassing view of text and literature, particularly in comparison to Lane and Catherine’s perspectives.

Despite his limited experience in the classroom, Frank’s observation of student reading behaviour parallels what Lane has recognised: the disjunction, even within one class, of student reading engagement. However, Frank seems more conscious of the cultural and social class differences between students that manifest through reading time behaviour. It’s not just that some students have less time for reading outside of school or fewer books in

their homes than others. Frank recognises that some students would not read a book at all if it was not supported through “allocated” class time and their own free choice of a text to read:

...there are kids who are already motivated readers, and reading for them is never an issue, their access to a wide variety of books is never an issue but there are kids who have no exposure to reading unless it is time that is allocated to them within school. Even from my two terms here so far I’ve been able to notice that there are girls who wouldn’t read, that would even bring a book to school and would sit there and not read it, who now every lesson have their book out and I have to coax them to put it away when they don’t. I’m beginning to see a much wider variety of texts being read within the classroom and a lot of it is library resource material and there is a bigger component of manga-like fiction rather than traditional prose fiction...

At the start of the year with Frank as a new teacher, some Year 8 students appeared as disengaged reluctant readers as they resumed the sustained silent reading program that has been part of their experience of the English classroom at this school. They performed to a certain extent the reading role expected of them: they brought a book to class and sat quietly with it in front of them but they didn’t read. Yet, Frank’s description of these students indicates a change in classroom behaviour has occurred at some point over the first two terms of the year: as the resistant students realised they had permission to read whatever text they wanted and that their teacher would support their choice of texts, they started to actively read. From Frank’s use of the verb “coax” to describe his interaction with students at the end of reading time, we can infer that the students who once resisted reading began to demonstrate behaviours that showed enjoyment of reading.

Consequently, Frank began to “see a much wider variety of texts being read...” Frank phrases these texts as “library resource material...and manga-like fiction rather than traditional prose fiction”. When asked to elaborate, Frank identified the types of texts students were reading in more detail and much of what he discussed were media tie-ins. Titles included *The Maze Runner*, the *Divergent* series, the *Harry Potter* series and books by John Green. These titles form much of the popular culture landscape of the young adult

and children's book market. Yet, in distinguishing student choice of texts as rather than traditional prose fiction, Frank reveals he too struggles to shake off the tendency to place texts on a hierarchy.

Like Lane, Frank's teaching strategy for encouraging students as readers has an element of luring students towards a change. However, for Frank, less importance is placed on the students being able to distinguish the 'worthiness' of a text. Rather, Frank wants to change the way his students feel and think about texts by building up enthusiasm for reading alongside student confidence in their own text choices. He explains that popular culture texts can be:

just that hook that will get them into the whole unit and maybe get them to consider a form that they read for fun for more of an academic standpoint and perhaps enrich their own experiences of that text type in the future.

From Frank's metaphor of a "hook" and his emphasis on helping students find the "fun" in reading we can infer his teaching philosophy is accommodating of student differences and that he is open to a breadth of text choices. Yet, it is clear that Frank has high expectations for student learning, hoping to change the way his students engage intellectually within English. He aims to inculcate an "academic standpoint", or way of thinking, about texts. From this, we can see that while reading for pleasure is a goal, so too is changing the way students think about texts.

Frank focuses on changing students' ways of thinking about texts, rather than changing their choice of texts. Frank's perspective on student reading choices provides an understanding of how a more flexible interpretation of textual worth from a teacher can encourage students to change their reading behaviour in the classroom. Perhaps part of the reading choices demonstrated by Frank's students come from his willingness to accept the wide ranging choice of texts that the students in his classes want to read.

4.2.2.3 Catherine, an English teacher from Site B, is in her third year of teaching. She is a mature aged new teacher, having pursued two different career paths to teaching earlier in her life. Catherine worked as a casual teacher for six months prior to her appointment at Site B.

Like Lane and Frank, Catherine perceives the educative benefit of reading for students. However, while Frank holds broader conceptions of text validity and worth within a more encompassing definition of literature, and Lane is willing to traverse the distance between her own values and those of her students, Catherine's views appear to reflect a narrower Leavisite (1930) model. F.R. Leavis helped conceptualise studies of English and ways of thinking about texts in a way that promulgated cultural hierarchy. While his ideas did much to raise the standing and esteem of the study of English in the United Kingdom, his work in framing debates around textual validity helped to polarise conceptions of high and low culture. In exploring Catherine's views it seems that she values, as Leavis did, those works which have an historical or moral alignment within the Western tradition of literature more so than works which are popular with adolescents. The consequence of this is that Catherine wants to see her students, who were noted by the school librarian as avid readers, change their reading behaviour by choosing to read more canonical texts rather than young adult fiction.

That Catherine's philosophy of teaching may be framed by the Leavisite tradition can be inferred from her response to a question on the importance of reading for pleasure. The question asked was: "Looking now at your work in English and thinking about your role as an English teacher, how important do you think it is that students read for pleasure?" While she immediately responded that reading itself is "valuable", Catherine then redefined the parameters of the question. Rather than respond to the keyword of "pleasure"

Catherine's response focused on explaining the significance of "quality literature" and that students should read material that is "more substantial":

every piece of reading students do - if it's quality literature - it's going to build on a knowledge base, build on that vocabulary, build on understanding ways in which writers create texts and I think it's extremely important. It's actually in the age group of students we have, say (Grades) 7-10, I think some of them have difficulties selecting appropriate literature. I think there's still a tendency perhaps to focus on young adult fiction when the students quite clearly have the capacity to read something more substantial...I think I recognise the importance of it, I think parents do but I'm not sure that students are actually reading as much as they should be. As avidly beyond what they have to read for school.

Catherine's attitude towards her students as readers is interesting because the school's 2014 performance in reading in NAPLAN indicates that students at the school are highly proficient readers, performing substantially above all schools and statistically similar schools within Australia (ACARA, 2014b). Yet, through the high modality of "extremely important", Catherine's response conveys a sense of urgency in her role as the teacher to disseminate a sense of textual distinction in reading choices to her students. The use of the discerning terms "quality", "appropriate", and "substantial" seem to suggest Catherine frames texts within a particular way and that the high culture Leavisite model holds sway in the way she perceives texts within English. She explains that is through "quality literature" that students will develop skills and competencies of "knowledge", vocabulary" and "understanding". These skills and competencies are no different that those expressed by Lane and Frank when discussing the importance of reading for their students. However, Catherine is firm in her perception that these skills and competencies may only be refined through engagement with particular kinds of texts - those which can be defined as "quality literature".

Catherine's preferential attitude towards student text choices may reflect the orientation of some parents within the Sydney school sector who choose to augment their child's experience of schooling by engaging private tutors to make them more competitive against

their peers (see, for example: Sriprakash, Proctor & Hu, 2015). Her values may reflect the perspective of policymakers who hold fast to authoritative interpretations of curriculum, believing that such authority provides certainty and (moral) significance for individuals and broader society (McKew, 2014). Yet, despite the congruence between parents, policy makers, and Catherine's expressed pedagogical philosophy, there is something at odds between her attitude towards student text choices and the broader holistic student-centred goals of the NSW K-10 English Syllabus.

Catherine's distinction between the books students choose to read and her desire that they read "more substantial" texts reveals a different tension or concern over student reading choices from that expressed by Lane and Frank from their different school context. In distinguishing the teaching philosophy underlying Catherine's values, her attitude towards student reading choices and texts appears to be pragmatically focused on maximising the performance of her highly capable students who will ultimately compete for high stakes in their Higher School Certificate performance. Catherine concurs with the other teachers that reading is important but her reasoning echoes a competitive framework which draws power from traditional textual hierarchies.

#### **4.3 Pedagogical decision-making: choosing and using manga and anime texts in English**

Given the relative freedom for the classroom teacher to choose texts set for study within Stage 4 and 5 English, the nine participants were asked about their views on the particular popular culture forms of manga and anime. The teachers offered a range of responses from highly enthusiastic as to the inclusion of manga and anime texts within English to cautiously circumspect as to suitability and appropriateness.

### **4.3.1 Cautiously favourable: Teacher attitudes to manga and anime texts**

With seven English teachers and 2 librarians providing their responses, this study reveals teacher attitudes to be cautiously favourable to manga and anime texts in the New South Wales secondary English classroom. Anime seems to be more accessible than manga for teachers unfamiliar with the multimodal medium. All participants supported the use of anime within secondary English classroom programs. In contrast, while all participants noted the interest of some students in reading manga for wide reading or as personal reading choices, only one participant spoke about the significance of particular manga titles within classroom programming. Further discussion of teacher attitudes to manga and students as readers of manga can be found later in this chapter after the following report on perceptions about anime texts.

#### **4.3.1.1 Anime in the English curriculum**

All of the interviewed teachers agreed that certain texts selected from the anime medium can be suitable and are appropriate for use in the Stage 4 or Stage 5 English classroom to meet the requirements of the new NSW K-10 English syllabus.

At Site A, the anime film texts chosen by the school include *My Neighbor Totoro* (Dir. Hayao Miyazaki), *Grave of the Fireflies* (Dir. Hayao Miyazaki) and *Kiki's Delivery Service* (Dir. Hayao Miyazaki). They showed extracts from series anime available on Youtube including *Astro Boy*, *Sailor Moon* and *CardCaptors*. Site B utilised select anime films. The texts chosen by the school are *Grave of the Fireflies* (Dir. Isao Takahata) and

*Howl's Moving Castle* (Dir. Hayao Miyazaki). The films chosen by both sites come from Japan's preeminent anime production house: Studio Ghibli.

The choice of particular texts for study reflects an interesting intersection of opportunity, collegial validation and personal knowledge ownership best expressed by one participant as, "I suppose because none of myself or my colleagues are real 'experts' in anime we're showing films that we value ourselves, that we have on the shelf". To "value" a text requires the teacher making the evaluation of the text to draw upon professional and personal schemas of knowledge. Yet, this participant, like six other participants, refers to her non-expert status even as she draws upon her identity as an English teacher to make a professional judgement. Relevant to this understanding is the role of the collegial faculty team and how the non-expert can situate themselves as part of this more knowledgeable team. Note the use of inclusive language within the teacher's discourse, "...we're showing films that we value ourselves, that we have on the shelf". This framing of a collegial identity suggests a level of trust or respect and the collaborative practices that are extended within the faculty circle when considering texts for study within English. Concurrently, this judgement on text appropriateness is also influenced by text availability and location - the chosen texts are part of the faculty text collection. As another participant phrased it, "Maybe it was accessible. It was there". Therefore, ease of access and positioning as English resources makes these anime films appropriate texts for study because someone else, likely a colleague or head teacher, has determined them to be appropriate and left them within the faculty collection.



#### 4.3.1.2 Teaching anime: film analysis and visual literacy

In describing ways of using anime in the classroom, all seven of the English teachers saw the texts as effective and appropriate choices for teaching film analysis and visual literacy skills. As a point of clarification, the new NSW K-10 English syllabus defines visual literacy as:

The ability to decode, interpret, create, question, challenge and evaluate texts that communicate with visual images as well as, or rather than, words. Visually literate people can read the intended meaning...interpret the purpose and intended meaning, and evaluate the form, structure and features of the text....  
(NSW K-10 English Syllabus: Glossary, BOS, 2012)

Catherine explained that in using *Grave of the Fireflies* she was able to teach students film analysis skills because there's "a kind of clarity in it, in those films which make it easy to explain to students sometimes and it's transferable to watching a more, perhaps, mainstream film". Participants used filmic terms such as "conventions", "art-style", "features", "distinctly anime features", "shots", "small-mouths-big-eyes" to identify the types of visual terms they used with students. This suggests that these teachers were able to transfer their own skills in film analysis and understanding of visual literacy to prepare and teach with anime texts.

Four participants explained that within their teaching, they were drawing students to do more than identify stylistic features; that they were hoping to advance student competencies through a synthesis of skills, knowledge and understanding. They used terms like "depth", "meaning", "conceptual", "broaden thinking" to convey that their pedagogical intentions for students were richer than just an ability to identify techniques. Catherine explained that students need to be "discerning and pick out distinctly anime features of what they're watching...not just picking out literal things...they're picking out conceptual things as well as more literal things". The responses by these teachers seems to

suggest that they see anime as appropriate texts for use as studied texts because they enable students to access a “conceptual” level of analysis that goes beyond “...literal things”. In articulating what they meant by the terms “conceptual” and “depth”, Catherine and Frank specifically identified “values”. Two other participants identified “themes”, “representations” and “perspectives”. The terms “values”, “themes”, “perspectives”, “representations” come from the NSW K-10 English syllabus and would be familiar and accessible concepts for English teachers to engage with.

In using anime texts to teach film analysis and visual literacy skills the participants were able to draw on their own professional competencies in analysing film and they were able to transfer their processes of analysis to the anime medium. This may be why the teachers seemed more receptive to anime texts than they were to manga texts, which proved to be more challenging for them as readers and responders.

#### **4.3.1.3 Teaching manga**

While both school sites nominally included manga within their studied programs, most of the teachers spoke of manga in general phrases rather than referencing specific titles as they did when discussing anime texts. Five of the Site A participants used the terms “storytelling” or “stories” in explaining that manga was useful to help students explore how different cultures tell stories. Two of the Site B participants made the same observation. This suggests that there was agreement that manga texts may be useful as examples of ways that cultures other than Australian, in this case - Japanese - compose, shape and create stories. However, in not being able to identify particular manga titles,

there is scope to consider that most of the teachers hesitated or struggled to read these texts beyond a surface level reading encounter.

All teachers observed that they knew of students who were interested in reading manga texts, however Site A teachers spoke to the specific appropriateness of manga text use from their experiences within the English programs or as wide reading choices. Site A teachers used manga texts within their Stage 4 program but most of the teachers used them as supplementary material within pre-planned programmed activities. They were reliant on supporting resources such as prepacked book boxes, worksheets and handouts. As Lane explained, "...with this particular unit, the resources provided were very effective and designed for teachers who had no idea what they were doing so in that respect it was great". In using such an emotive phrase, "teachers who had no idea what they were doing," Lane conveys the vulnerability she felt in teaching with texts she was unfamiliar with. However, her use of positive evaluative terms "effective" and "great" suggests that with appropriate resources, she was able to fulfill the program requirements even though she herself was not that engaged with the manga texts. The combination of professional support and provided resources facilitated Lane's positive experience of teaching with these new types of texts.

In discussing manga, only one of the Site A teachers was able to discuss their use of specific manga titles within the class program and also identify specific titles that students had brought to class for wide reading purposes. Frank observed, "I've seen *Attack on Titan* being read...*Death Note*...*Fairy Tale*...*Madoka Magika*...very mature titles". Frank's familiarity with manga and comic book culture gave him an insider knowledge that the other teachers lacked. He was able to explain that the "very mature titles" students were bringing for wide reading were very different from the ones that had been purchased for the English program. He explained:

...our program is pretty inclusive. It has within a very wide range of texts but tends to focus more on literary or day-to-day type of fiction rather than action or violence-oriented. So we've got *Chi's Sweet Home* which is quite a young demographic, targeted to a young demographic, as is *Cross Game*, which is excellent...We've also got some of the more clichéd titles and some of which would be more accessible to kids who don't have an exposure to manga such as *Sailor Moon*, *Pokemon* um, what's that other name...those female protagonist type, young female characters.

The evaluative terms used within Frank's discourse to describe the teaching program and chosen texts, "very wide range", "inclusive", "excellent", "clichéd", "accessible", demonstrate the more in-depth knowledge of the manga medium that Frank possesses. Based on his reading of some of the titles and experience discussing titles with students, Frank is able to identify particular texts and make an evaluation of why certain texts are effective and appropriate within the program and why others, for instance the more violent, mature readers titles, are better as wide reading choices. However, even Frank is limited by his own reading and viewing subjectivities, in that he forgets the name of a title and then essentialises all female titles as "those female protagonist type, young female characters".

In contrast to Frank, who was far more comfortable in reading and analysing graphic texts, six of the other participants spoke of their own difficulties in reading manga. Two of the teachers commented on the struggle of "reading backwards" as the panels in most translated manga titles flow right-to-left as they would in their original Japanese publications.

Debra, an English teacher of thirty-three years experience from Site B, explained that it is the multimodal medium itself that presents challenges, "It's a different way of reading which is probably why I'm a bit resistant to reading manga texts because they are so visual...I just want to read the words and then I miss half of it because I have to look at the pictures as well". Through Debra's use of descriptors "different" and "so visual", we can

infer that she finds the experience of reading manga somewhat overwhelming, particularly in contrast to the familiar ease with which she reads prose texts. She states she knows she is “a bit resistant to reading manga texts” using the type of terminology that teachers use to describe students who struggle with reading in the classroom. This suggests a level of reflexivity in the way Debra reflects upon her own reading and how her reading experiences influence the way she views and values texts for the English program. At the same time, Debra stated that when programming, “the texts need to come out of the interests of the students”. The directness within this statement suggests the importance to Debra of prioritising student interests when making text choices for English programs, even when the texts themselves present challenges for teachers.

Manga texts appear to be more challenging and present more difficulties than anime films for teachers to read and use in English because of the multimodal challenges of reading graphic texts. The added difficulty of adapting to manga’s right-to-left reading sequence may have been another hurdle. Yet, these teachers are aware of manga’s appeal to students and have tried to accommodate student interest in them through programming choices. To a certain extent, this provides a reflection on the comfort and professional confidence of teaching familiar texts and the sense of risk and discomfort that accompanies new and distinct text choices in English classroom spaces.

#### **4.4 Teacher perception of students as readers and viewers of manga and anime**

In speaking of their experiences observing students and interacting with them within school spaces, participants provided insight into ways of perceiving students as readers and viewers of manga and anime.

#### 4.4.1 'Big fans'

All participants discussed their awareness of student interest in manga and anime texts. Students were described as “big fans” with a “very very high...level of enthusiasm”. In characterising the intensity of student interest one participant said, “When you love it, you love it. It becomes almost a way of life”. In total, three participants used the term “love” to describe student responses to manga and anime texts. One participant colloquially captured student enthusiasm as, “a lot of them say if they’re really into anime, they’re really into it and they do watch and read”. The expression “into it”, like “love” and “a way of life”, conveys a significant and emotive level of engagement, suggesting that students who enjoy reading manga and watching anime immerse themselves within the reading and viewing subculture.

Within participant observation of students, differences arose in determining the depth that manga and anime interest had penetrated. Frank observed that while not all students in his two Year 8 classes were interested in learning about manga or were familiar with the textual medium, there were many who were. He noted, “there were a large proportion of kids in both classes...that were big fans of manga and anime already”. The phrasing “large proportion” suggests that Frank perceives the number of interested students as quite high. His observation of student interest levels is offset by Lane’s account that, “I don’t know that I’d go so far to say that it’s a majority of students but it’s certainly equivalent to the students reading any other text type...there would at least be two or three in every classroom - in every English class, if not more”. With average class sizes of 30 students, Lane’s attempt to quantify student interest suggests around ten percent of students within every class demonstrate interest in manga and anime texts. While Lane’s suggestion of ten percent seems far lower than Frank’s observation of a “large proportion”, Lane does

suggest she might not have captured all interested students within her estimation through her hedging qualifier, “if not more”.

The evidence from both school librarians supports teacher observation that there are students at each school site who are enthusiastic readers and viewers of manga and anime. One librarian from Site A observed, “there is a core group of students who engage with the manga selections that we have...who are very very interested in manga”. The repetition in the phrasing “very very interested” mirrors Frank’s observation of “very very high” levels of student interest. Yet, the collective “core group” suggests, as Lane identified, that the extent of student interest at Site A may circulate around a subcultural group of student readers and viewers who really enjoy the medium. This may be the case at Site B too.

#### **4.4.2 ‘Pop-Asian’ kids**

In exploring teacher perceptions of student readers and viewers of manga and anime, there was the suggestion that these texts appealed to students with heritage or ethnic links to the cultures or countries of Asia. Three participants pointed to the globalised spread of anime and the confluence of adolescents with links to Asia as a possible factor for student interest. That some teachers correlated student interest in manga and anime with their cultural heritage or ethnicity was evident in teacher reflections which used emphasis, distance and terminology to identify and locate students within cultural or identifiable groups. “Particularly with our population, a lot of the girls are really into manga,” said one participant. Students could access anime content in their “their own home language, their family’s language,” said another. One librarian explained, “If I see students watching anime on their devices, it is generally the international students....I imagine it must be really easy for them to find websites that show anime and have it dubbed in Mandarin or

have Han Chinese characters down the bottom”. The librarian also recalled his experiences teaching at “a selective boys school with a very high percentage of students from a non-English background...Those boys were quite interested and engaged by manga and anime...” This focus on “language” or cultural specificity suggests that some teachers may view student interest in these texts as arising from desires for cultural familiarity and from viewing experiences shared within family, peer or cultural circles rather than more deeply reflecting upon the proliferation of manga and anime influences within Australian adolescent pop culture.

#### **4.4.3 ‘Experts’ and Allies**

There was recognition by four of the teachers that the way they approached teaching with manga and anime texts could encourage student affirmation and validation as specialised readers and viewers. These participants referred to students’ knowledge and were willing to collaborate with these students to better their own understanding of the medium or to aid the understanding of other students in their own distinct ways. “I think it’s really empowering to say to students, ‘You probably know more about this than I do. We can do this together. Let’s explore this together,’” said one participant, revealing through the repetition of inclusive language “we” and the term “together” a willingness to share the learning space. “I rely on their recommendations,” said another, in response to resourcing appropriate manga texts for the library collection, conveying through the connotation of “rely” a deep level of trust in student judgement.

Lane also demonstrated a deep level of trust in students and their knowledge and understanding of manga and anime texts. She explained, “there were kids in the classroom who knew manga and anime better than I would ever hope to know it and they were very



happy to guide the lessons...utilising their expertise seemed the right thing to do”. Lane’s identification of student knowledge and understanding through the term “expertise” in relation to curriculum content, rather than a term like ‘enthusiasm’, reveals a significant evaluative judgement of students and their knowledge and understanding. Her statement above, which ends in such a direct assessment of her pedagogical choices, conveys a willingness to share the teaching platform and intellectual authority in regards to manga and anime texts, with her students.

Frank, whose knowledge of manga and anime might have positioned him as a greater authority within the classroom, also engaged students as learning allies. In reflecting on class discussions, he evoked memories of learning collaboration with students stating that “we’re able to engage in half a lesson on a discussion around different ways that Japan might represent things...What are we starting to see as priority values or priority virtues...” His repetition of inclusive language, “we’re”, “we” suggests his willingness to teach with, not just to, his students.

While not all teachers were willing to share the position of authority within the classroom environment, these four participants revealed that acknowledging student knowledge and ‘expertise’ can have benefits for the individual student, the teacher and the others in the class.

#### **4.4.4 “Insular”, “Resistant” and in need of a “Challenge”**

Despite teacher awareness of students who were very enthusiastic readers and viewers of manga and anime, five of these educators were also aware of students who did not enjoy the medium and who were “resistant” to engaging with English activities that utilised these

texts. They used the terms “completely resistant”, “uncomfortable”, “out of their comfort zone”, and “insular”, “weren’t keen” and commented on student “reluctance” to read or view these texts. The connotations of these terms suggest that teachers perceived students as unwilling to read or view manga and anime because of cultural, stylistic or technical impediments. However, all five of these educators spoke to the importance of “challenging” students in their reading and viewing choices through the teaching of anime and/or manga texts.

While part of this priority of challenging students as readers and viewers had a focus on teaching visual literacy and film analysis skills (as discussed at 4.3.1.2), there was also the intention of widening student knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Four out of five Site A participants saw this as a particular focus for their school because the student population was largely Anglo-Australian, with only 26 percent of students identifying as a language background other than English (ACARA, 2014a). These four participants commented on the student population as being “monocultural”, “frankly, Anglo...”, “well, very quite insular” and that “the exposure to multiculturalism...By comparison to the rest of Sydney we’re not really...” This awareness of culture and race, expressed through racial identifiers like “Anglo” and “monocultural”, may suggest that these teachers are sensitive to wider issues of race and racism and see the teaching of manga and anime texts as a way of helping students overcome their resistance to differences in cultural expression while dissolving the barriers of geographical insularity.

The interpretation of students as “insular”, “resistant” and in need of a “challenge” came from two perspectives. The first prioritised manga and anime texts for the reading and viewing challenges inherent to the medium. The second valued manga and anime texts for their ability to confront students and the ways they perceived the world around them.

#### **4.4.5 “the girls”**

None of the teachers or librarians in this study identified gender as a factor for student interest or receptivity to manga and anime texts. Teacher awareness of student gender was self-evident through the fourteen references to “the girls” made by five of the participants and over fifty uses of the plural noun “girls” as an alternate to “students” used by eight of the participants. One participant alone only used the plural noun “students” as an identifier throughout their interview. Despite the use of a feminine identifier by most of the participants, the use was for collective intent rather than as a way to interrogate girls’ interests or ‘girlhood’ as something specific. None of the participants correlated student interest in manga or anime as something that was identified by specific gender qualities.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

The ways in which these teachers and the librarians perceive their students as readers revealed significant interpretative differences, with teacher understandings often influenced quite strongly by their own values towards textual quality and worth in texts. The pedagogical beliefs, approaches and curriculum values of each participant also shaped the manner in which they conceived of their students. However, the belief that students as a whole need to read more, and to read more challenging texts, was a dominant message from all participants.

In discussing their engagement with manga and anime texts, all of the teachers revealed themselves to be active professional educators, thoughtfully navigating expectations for student learning, their knowledge of students as readers, their awareness of syllabus

requirements, and their own knowledge and understanding of these types of texts. While the participants differed in pedagogical approaches, their focus on deepening their students' experience of English through the teaching of manga and anime texts was evident. Manga and anime texts appear to provide opportunities for teachers and students to learn with and from each other within the formal English curriculum.

## **DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Overview**

This study on teacher attitudes to manga and anime texts develops new insights into teacher values and text choices. Research undertaken at the last major revision of the NSW English curriculum in 2003 indicated that though teachers may say they will change their pedagogy and curriculum in support of new syllabi directives their actions reveal a resistance and unwillingness to deeply engage in processes of change (O’Sullivan, 2005). However, the teachers involved in this study have demonstrated a willingness to be discomforted by the challenges of new curriculum priorities and new texts in order to develop an enriching experience of English for their students.

These participants can not be seen as an homogenous group; within their discourse it became evident that individual teachers are influenced by quite different pedagogical theories and ways of thinking about texts. However, their choice to teach texts from the popular culture medium; to use anime film within the classroom and to permit the entry of manga texts within student reading culture, is distinctive. Their choices reveal that there has been some movement within the culture of these English teachers in widening understandings of textual appropriateness. Even though some participants in this study continue to rationalise their text choices within a Leavisite lens, all participants have been engaged in something quite radical - they have been teaching popular culture texts.

In teaching with manga and anime texts, these teachers have validated and legitimated student reading interests and their forms of knowledge. This raises the tantalising prospect

that the new NSW K-10 English syllabus (2012) may well be a syllabus for 21st Century learners in that the potential for accommodating student diversity and differences by prioritising the interests of students is embedded within it alongside the goal of pursuing “equity and excellence” (p.4). These drivers, of diversity and difference, of equity and excellence, have proven to be of concern to the teachers in this study. It is significant that anime and manga texts have been chosen as appropriate vehicles in attempts to resolve these issues.

## **5.2 Discussion**

It is through the concept of teacher wisdom explored by Biesta (2005, 2013, 2015) that we can better understand the curriculum decisions teachers make. Biesta determined that the practical wisdom of educators is derived from their ability to evaluate student needs through a triumvirate of concerns. These three aspects involve teacher evaluation of their students through awareness of: i) qualifications, skills and competencies; ii) socialisation goals; and iii) subjectification processes (Biesta, 2015). The teachers in this study demonstrate a clear affinity with Biesta’s conception of the professional educator in that they are concerned with student skill levels, they are mindful of how their relationship with students can encourage and motivate, and they incorporate processes and strategies to effect change upon students.

However, while Biesta persuasively presents the image of the wise educator, guided by a certain benevolence towards students and their interests, it is important to remind ourselves that all curriculum are inherently political (Apple, 1986; Bourdieu, 1986; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991) as are curriculum acts. The NSW K-10 English syllabus is no exception to this, especially as it shares many of the criticised elements of the Australian Curriculum for

English (see for example, Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014). There are political elements which shape the priorities of the teachers in this study and political intentions within their work with students. However, there is also a sense of Biesta's benevolence demonstrated by the willingness of many in this study to draw closer to students and the texts that matter to them - an act that in itself, is also political.

### **5.2.1 Working it: Cultural Capital and Students as Readers**

The importance of reading was unquestioned and irrevocable to these teachers and to the two librarians. They all uphold the model and stereotype of the educator who values reading as an act of personal enlightenment with coexisting benefits for knowledge and vocabulary development. Within the described pedagogical processes and curriculum decisions, the teachers in this study reveal two divergent paths for encouraging students as readers.

The first path, from a more critical pedagogy approach, brings the curriculum to students by responding to their reading interests and varied socio-cultural needs within the school environment. The second path brings students to the curriculum by prioritising a more authoritative, Leavisite model of teacher-student interaction, particularly in regards to student reading choices. The contextual factors of each school site may have been influential upon these theoretical and practical adoptions. The students at Site A were noted to be "resistant" to reading; therefore, the application of a critical pedagogy approach may be more suitable for these students who may have resisted authoritative pedagogical styles. The students at Site B were observed to be "avid" readers - to a certain extent, the students are far more observant of teacher intentions than the students at Site A,

which is why an authoritative approach may be effective in guiding their reading choices. Yet, despite these differences in approaches, with Site A utilising an internal wide reading program and Site B assigning recommended reading lists to particular units of study, these teachers shared the goal of encouraging and motivating students to read, and to read more challenging texts.

While the desire for students to read more, and to read more challenging texts can seem appropriate and necessary within the teaching of English, there are concerning elements within this expectation. The standardisation of quality and worth within text choices, visible in the manner in which some texts are deemed appropriate and others are not, prescribes and reinscribes particular values. Within subject English, the standardisation of textual worth “always represents a particular ordering and rendering of knowledge selected from the wider society...it functions to name and privilege particular histories...[it] reinforces social inequality” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991, p.96). These arguments have relevance within Australia’s multicultural society, especially given the equity extremes between students of high and low socioeconomic circumstances. As Teese (2013) and Jogie (2015) have argued, standardisation of text choices to authoritative content and canonical texts, have served to exacerbate disadvantage and academic outcomes in Australian schools. Even when students maintain a level of academic performance within external examinations, there may well be disadvantages and marginalisation that come from text choices that are more relevant to others than one’s own identity.

From this study, we can see that all teachers wanted to increase the amount of material students read and/or deepen the complexity of chosen texts but this goal was deemed more important by the English teachers than the librarians. It is worth considering to what extent the discourse of a crisis in Australian literacy standards (see for example, Brabazon, 2006; Lingard, Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013; Little, 2004; Thomson, 2013) and the extolled



pursuit of excellence as a national priority has been consequential upon the ways in which teachers perceive the urgency of changing student reading behaviour. Within a dominant rhetoric of a crisis in Australian literacy achievement, it is also important to reflect upon the desired normativity embedded within the act of reading and consider the similarities and differences between the student populations at Site A and B to better understand the reasoning within teachers' responses.

For Site A, which had a more mixed socio-economic student population, the emphasis was on sowing the seeds of embodied reading capital (Bourdieu, 1986) even if not all students have the knowledge or capacity to take it up as fully as their teachers would like, to better prepare students for the challenges of the English curriculum. For Site B, which draws students from the top socio-economic group, there was a disjunction between pride and delight in student reading competencies and text choices, particularly expressed by the school librarian, and the contrary attitude that these competencies and choices are not good enough to meet the challenges of the English curriculum.

At the closure of this study, there remains an amorphous quality to the ways teachers understand and perceive the term "challenge". While the impact of the more prescribed and competitive Stage 6 English curriculum was alluded to by participants, it remains unclear as to the extent that the Stage 6 examinations may influence the ways in which teachers perceive the relevance and importance of aspects within the Stage 4 and 5 English syllabus. The nature of the relationship is not obvious. Is it important to embed a culture of reading because the act has personal benefits for the individual student or do teachers pay lip service to reading for pleasure while trying to orient their students to read for competitive academic purposes? It will be interesting to explore in further detail what the challenges of the new NSW K-10 English curriculum are and whether a teacher's perception of challenges is influenced by pressures about student performance in external

tests and examinations, or from other holistic elements in their subjectification plans for students.

The teachers at these schools have responded to the imperative of enhancing student involvement with reading in their own distinct ways by prioritising strategies that work best for them. The teachers both within the library and the English team have drawn upon their practical wisdom in making these choices. However, the internalisation of this desire for students to demonstrate greater diligence in their reading behaviour across both school sites requires further research into the reasons why teachers may hold this view and the consequence of their views on student reading behaviour and perceptions of subject English.

### 5.2.2 Curriculum Pollination

Within these two sites, teacher awareness of student interest in manga and anime texts arose from an overlap between the informal and formal English curriculum. At Site A, students chose manga texts for the wide reading program in English. At Site B, students appropriated manga art conventions for representation tasks in English. At both sites, students requested titles within the respective libraries and engaged in informal conversations about these texts with their teachers and librarians. By responding to student interest, teachers became more conscious of manga and anime texts and students became more overt in exhibiting their interest within those overlapping opportunities between the formal and informal English curriculum.

For teachers at Site A and B, manga and anime texts are chosen to develop competency or skills in visual literacy and to meet syllabus requirements but the choice of these texts also have a deeper educative purpose, reflecting the layers within teacher decision making. While both schools picked anime texts from the Studio Ghibli studio the titles they chose and the pedagogical approach within the programs are indicative of the socialisation and subjectification projects at hand.

Site A screened *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Grave of the Fireflies* with individual teachers making the choice as to which film text would best suit their class. The manga texts used within classes were purchased specifically for the program of study and are a mix of popular shojo (for girls) and shonen (for boys) titles. Manga and anime texts were perceived by the teachers as meeting some essential literacy skills and they were effective to hook student attention and to develop their competencies in visual and film analysis while also consolidating their knowledge and consideration of Japanese culture.

Within the aim of socialisation, teachers at Site A chose to include manga and anime texts as a way of affirming and legitimising student reading and viewing interests. The wide reading program brought manga texts within the purview of teacher awareness but in shifting these texts into the school's formal English curriculum, teachers have gone further than merely indicating acceptance of student interest. By teaching with manga and anime, the teachers have at times become the student of their students, listening and collaborating alongside them in their study.

Furthermore, for Site A, the holistic aim, or subjectification project, is about increasing student knowledge and understanding of Japanese culture as a way of enriching student empathy and ability to conceive of the Other without fear or prejudice. This aim can be seen reflected in teacher discussions around the ethnic mix of the student population and the way teachers valued the integration of the general capability *Intercultural Understanding* and cross-curriculum priority *Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia* within the manga and anime unit.

In knowing their students - who they are in Year 8 and who their teachers want them to become by the end of Yr 12 - the teachers at Site A draw upon their practical wisdom in a curriculum experience which is at times coaxing, at times challenging, at times affirming but which is always relational to the diverse needs of students within a comprehensive school environment.

Site B screened *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Grave of the Fireflies* with individual teachers again, choosing the film for their class to study. The manga texts used within classes are drawn from the library collection and have a supplementary role within the unit as the teaching programme prescribes the graphic novel version of *Fahrenheit 451* as the main text with which to teach the skills of visual literacy.

Within the aim of socialisation, there is some regard paid to student interest in manga and anime texts as Site B teachers reported their awareness of student interest in these texts came through student appropriation of manga and anime art conventions evident within representation tasks. The teachers also engaged in dialogues about these texts with students. There is awareness of using manga and anime texts within class time as a way of legitimising student reading and viewing choices although this is more evident in some teachers than others. Concurrently, some teachers are more willing to engage in collaborative learning with their students but others are less so.

For Site B, the holistic aim, or subjectification project, is focused on drawing student understanding of the human condition and encouraging empathy towards those impacted by war and violence. This aim can be seen reflected in teacher discussions as to the pathos reflected in their chosen texts. Teachers valued the relationship between this unit and syllabus links of *Intercultural Understanding* and *Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia* but this was more important to some teachers than to others. The aim of developing student empathy and awareness of Others travels alongside a more overt goal of developing student capacity to distinguish semiotics of quality in the works of composers and evoke quality within their own written work in response.

Due to limitations in the data for Site B, at this time it is impossible to state conclusively how the relationship between student interest in manga and anime texts led to teacher acceptance of them within the formal English curriculum yet there are important cultural slippages to note. Teachers were aware of student interest in manga and anime texts. The growing collection in the library of deliberately sourced and donated material meant that there were resources to draw upon as the Stage 5 English unit was refined from the old syllabus into the new. The responsiveness of teachers to student engagement with manga

and anime texts heightened their awareness of the medium and in turn, encouraged their acceptance of these texts as appropriate choices for study.

### **5.2.3. Political Acts: Legitimizing Student Knowledge and Text Choices**

Bourdieu's theory of embodied reading capital (1986) helps us recognise that the behaviours of the 'good' reader reinforce and reinscribe the standing and privilege of the most able students within classroom spaces. Students with embodied reading capital choose canonical or 'challenging' texts. They read quietly, fluently, and demonstrate a willingness and enthusiasm for reading and associated activities (Compton-Lilly, 2007). Yet, we know from research that sustained inequalities can occur when only certain texts, certain cultures and certain voices are privileged (see, for example, Apple, 1986; Campbell, 2007; Teese, 2013; Jogie, 2015).

In exploring teacher attitudes towards student reading choices for pleasure it became evident that these teachers are orientating students to engage in a normative reading practice more familiar to middle and upper class families (Bourdieu, 1986). Yet anime and manga texts, which are part of the medium of popular culture, are not the types of texts traditionally associated with normative reading practices or embodied reading knowledge. These teachers, therefore, appear to be engaged in curriculum choices that run counter to what might be expected. In doing so, these teachers could be perceived as democratising their classrooms and changing the more traditional power relations between curriculum knowledge and teacher authority.

Almost ten years ago, Brabazon (2006) argued for the inclusion of popular culture texts as a way of enfranchising students with their own learning. She argued:

The demonisation of popular knowledge has repressed our students for too long. We have continued to isolate schools and universities from the lived experience of the citizens we are meant to be educating. Pop is a medium and method to manage classroom diversity and facilitate a critical interpretation of texts and contexts (p.300).

In this study, we see teachers becoming more accepting of these popular culture forms because their rapport with students helped to reveal the possibilities and the potential of manga and anime texts within English. In hearing from two teachers, one from each school site, we hear an echo of Brabazon's warning of student isolation and disjunction circumvented by teachers who choose to challenge themselves to better understand a popular culture form that resonates with their students. Lane stated, "You have to read things that they enjoy..." while Debra said, "the texts need to come out of the interests of students". Both of these teachers were speaking about the ways in which they bring students closer to the English curriculum by validating student knowledge and curiosity, even when texts, mediums or aspects of knowledge present challenges to themselves. Now, neither Lane nor Debra are calling for all aspects of the English syllabus and all text choices to be given to students to determine but, in their shared respect for students and their interests, we see a curriculum and pedagogical development of teacher-student collaboration which holds significant promise in enabling student learning and engagement.

Within these two school contexts - one comprehensive, the other, academically selective, the choice to teach with manga and anime texts provides a glimpse into the relationship between teacher perceptions of student ability and suitability of text choices. Prior research has addressed the usefulness of graphic novels, manga and anime as hooks and lures for

young children (Lyga, 2006) and reluctant readers (Frey & Fisher, 2004; Griffith, 2010; Hughes et al., 2011). Similarly, teachers at Site A and B expressed the view that manga and graphic novel texts appeal to reluctant readers. However, they also acknowledged the intellectual qualities within the texts, viewing them as appropriate choices for students of all abilities. These teachers explained that their choice to use manga and anime texts in English was to stimulate deeper discussion while enriching student understanding of the ways in which composers create meaning in their works and the ways in which readers can respond. What this research reveals is a validation of teacher choice of these texts not just as lures for resistant readers or for younger children but for the formalised Stage 4 and 5 English curriculum for students within comprehensive and selective school environments.

In looking closer at the contextual similarity of these two sites - single-sex girls' schools, this study posits the efficacy of manga and anime texts for female readers and whether the reading and viewing interests of adolescent girls can be recognised within the formal English curriculum by their teachers. The teachers' representations of students as "loving" the medium or being "into it" were touched with admiration for their enthusiasm. It is interesting that the composers of the anime films selected by the two sites for classroom study are recognised for their depictions of strong, female characters (Bate, 2014). Concurrently, the collection of manga texts at both sites revealed a predilection of shojo (for girls) titles. Paradoxically, these teachers recognise and respect the interests of their students, who are all girls, but they refrained from engaging in specific discussions as to why girlhood may have been a factor in student interest for these texts. It may be that the teachers' single-sex environments have blurred for them what may be distinctive to an outside observer.



### **5.3 Limitations**

A single-sex girls' school environment was purposefully selected for this study in order to explore teacher attitudes to manga and anime texts within the gendered domain of female students. It is relevant to observe that this study, utilising two school sites as case studies, reflects a limited sample, curbing the generalisability of these results to a wider teacher or student population. However, readers may find transferability of the results and discussion to other school contexts, by drawing out matters most salient to their research interests and/or school circumstances.

This study has a noticeable silence from those who have been spoken about and reflected upon in that it does not capture student voice. While we can perceive the ways in which teachers represent and situate their students from their teacher discourse, an investigation that includes student voices should be a priority for future research. A collaborative qualitative project that observes and captures active classroom pedagogy of teachers and students learning with manga and anime texts would deepen our understanding of how teachers and students perceive these texts and would also be of benefit.

### **5.4 Conclusion**

This study on teacher attitudes to text choices within Stage 4 and 5 English has been focused on exploring teacher attitudes to manga and anime texts. What is evident from the data is that when teachers are asked about text choices within the bounds of the English curriculum they think deeply and draw upon what Biesta (2013) describes as their *phronesis*, or their “practical wisdom” (p. 687). This practical wisdom comes from their

daily experience working closely with adolescents within the English classroom or - in the case of the teacher-librarians - within the library.

This study of course can only reveal insights into the practical wisdom and insider perspective of these select participants. Because there is a fluid and ever changing relationship between the participants, the English curriculum, and any texts, teachers and students contribute their own ripples of influence to the lived experience of education. This study does not lay down a definitive characterisation of teacher attitudes to manga and anime texts and nor perhaps could it. However, the conversation between the researcher and each participant has provided a “truly emic, or insider’s, perspective that makes visible the ways that students and teachers construct knowledge and curriculum” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993 p.43).

In sharing an experience of learning with and through anime and manga texts, these teachers and teacher-librarians have reflected on the significance of reading for pleasure, highlighting the act as a significant concern in their work with students. The English teachers identified anime films as appropriate text choices to engage students and to deepen their capacity for understanding and analysis within their subject and Stage areas. These participants demonstrated through their acceptance of manga and anime texts within English and library spaces a willingness to recognise and respect student text choices from the medium of popular culture.

These insider perspectives from the two school sites may prove useful to others considering distinctive text choices in the secondary English classroom. The discourse of these teachers and their pedagogical acts, such as responding to student interests, and collaborating alongside students as co-constructors of learning, may be perceived as transgressing traditional power relations between curriculum knowledge and teacher

authority. Such transgressions bring discomfort, evident in the way some participants rationalise their text decisions through a Leavisite lens, incorporating the popular culture form of manga and anime into their own authoritative version of curriculum. Yet, from discomfort and unease, from the challenges of reading, of being outsiders to a knowledge or culture not of one's own, comes a rich experience of English for students and teachers alike.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Ethics Approval

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR  
(RESEARCH)  
Research Office  
CSC East Research HUB, Level 3



14 May 2015

Dr Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan  
School of Education  
Faculty of Human Sciences  
Macquarie University NSW 2109

Reference: 5201500315(M)

Dear Dr O'Sullivan,

### FINAL APPROVAL

**Title of project: Learning Past the Pictures in the Panels: Teacher Attitudes to Manga and Anime Texts**

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Faculty of Human Sciences Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee. Approval of the above application is granted, **effective 5<sup>th</sup> May 2015** and you may now commence your research.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:

<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/book/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research>

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Chief Investigator: Dr Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan  
Co-Investigator: Ms Kelly Cheung

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 5<sup>th</sup> May 2016  
Progress Report 2 Due: 5<sup>th</sup> May 2017  
Progress Report 3 Due: 5<sup>th</sup> May 2018  
Progress Report 4 Due: 5<sup>th</sup> May 2019  
Final Report Due: 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020

NB. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current\\_research\\_staff/human\\_research\\_ethics/application\\_resources](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current_research_staff/human_research_ethics/application_resources)

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current\\_research\\_staff/human\\_research\\_ethics/application\\_resources](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current_research_staff/human_research_ethics/application_resources)

5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/>

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how\\_to\\_obtain\\_ethics\\_approval/human\\_research\\_ethics/policy](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy)

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide Macquarie University's Research Grants Officer with a copy of this letter as soon as possible. The Research Grants Officer will not inform external funding agencies that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Officer has received a copy of this final approval letter.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Anthony Miller**  
Chair  
Faculty of Human Sciences Ethics Review Sub-Committee  
Human Research Ethics Committee

## Appendix 2A: Letter of Consent (principal)



Department of Human Sciences  
School of Education  
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

Phone: +61 (0) 2 9850 8702  
Email: [kerryann.osullivan@mq.edu.au](mailto:kerryann.osullivan@mq.edu.au)  
[kelly.foulstone@students.mq.edu.au](mailto:kelly.foulstone@students.mq.edu.au)

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Name & Title: Dr. Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan

### Seeking Permission for Research Participation

Name of Project:

**Learning Past the Pictures in the Panels:  
Teacher Attitudes to Manga and Anime Texts**

Dear Principal,

Your school is invited to participate in a study of teacher attitudes towards manga and anime texts within the Stage 4 English classroom. The purpose of the study is explore teacher attitudes towards manga and anime texts, and in regards to student reading choices more generally. It is also to explore how teachers are responding to the general capability of *Intercultural Understanding* and the cross-curriculum priority of *Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia* within the Stage 4 English classroom.

The study is being conducted by research student Kelly Cheung to meet the requirements of the Master of Research program under the supervision of Dr Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan, (02) 9850 8702; [kerryann.osullivan@mq.edu.au](mailto:kerryann.osullivan@mq.edu.au), of the Department of Human Sciences, School of Education, Macquarie University.

If you give permission for a member of the English staff and your school's teacher-librarian to participate the following would be required of them. These teachers would be asked to participate separately in a 30-40 minute semi-structured interview. This interview would be audio-recorded. The interview would take place at your school site, Macquarie University or another mutually agreeable public place.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential, except as required by law. No individual or school will be identified in any publication of the results. Only Kelly Cheung and Dr. Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan will have access to the interview transcripts. All those with access to the transcripts are clear that they are not to pass the material on without written permission of the participants. A one-page summary of the results of the data will be made available to participants upon the conclusion of the study.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: your school is not obliged to participate and if your teachers decide to participate, they are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

Principal Information and Consent Form  
[Version no.]/[Date]

1

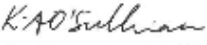
If you do grant permission would you please complete the attached Principal's Consent Form (below) and return to the researchers in the reply paid envelope. Upon receipt of your permission, we will make contact with your school's English staff and the teacher-librarian with further detail.

If you would like to discuss this research further or have any questions, please feel free to contact either of the researchers.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Kind regards,

  
Kelly Cheung

  
Dr. Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan

I, *(Principal's name)* have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to my school and staff participating in this research, knowing that we can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Principal's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Block letters)

Principal's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics & Integrity (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email [ethics@mq.edu.au](mailto:ethics@mq.edu.au)). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

**(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PRINCIPAL'S] COPY)**



## Appendix 2B: Letter of Consent (participant)



Faculty of Human Sciences  
School of Education  
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

Phone: +61 (0) 2 9850 8702  
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[kelly.foulstone@students.mq.edu.au](mailto:kelly.foulstone@students.mq.edu.au)

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Name & Title: Dr. Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan

### Participant Information and Consent Form

Name of Project:

#### **Learning Past the Pictures in the Panels: Teacher Attitudes to Manga and Anime Texts**

You are invited to participate in a study of teacher and teacher-librarian attitudes towards manga and anime texts within the Stage 4 English classroom. The purpose of the study is explore teacher attitudes towards manga and anime texts, and in regards to student reading choices more generally. It is also to explore how teachers and teacher-librarians are responding to the general capability of *Intercultural Understanding* and the cross-curriculum priority of *Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia* within the Stage 4 English classroom.

The study is being conducted by research student Kelly Cheung to meet the requirements of the Master of Research program under the supervision of Dr Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan, (02) 9850 8702; [kerryann.osullivan@mq.edu.au](mailto:kerryann.osullivan@mq.edu.au), of the School of Education, Faculty of Human Sciences, Macquarie University.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in one 30-40 minute semi-structured interview. The interview will be audio-recorded. If you agree the interview will take place at your workplace, Macquarie University or another location agreeable to you.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential, except as required by law. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Pseudonyms will be used for all individual participants and their schools. Only Kelly Cheung and Dr. Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan will have access to the interview transcripts. All those with access to the transcripts are clear that they are not to pass the material on without your written permission. A one-page summary of the results of the data will be made available to you after submission and final examination of the thesis has occurred.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

I, *(participant's name)* have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_  
(Block letters)

Participant's Signature:                      Date: \_\_\_\_

Investigator's Name: \_\_\_\_  
(Block letters)

Investigator's Signature:                      Date: \_\_\_\_

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics & Integrity (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email [ethics@mq.edu.au](mailto:ethics@mq.edu.au)). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

**(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)**

## Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview questions

### RESEARCH QUESTION

***What are teachers' attitudes towards manga and anime texts for the Stage 4/5 English classroom?***

In exploring teacher attitudes to manga and anime texts, I will be exploring teacher knowledge and perceptions of manga and anime texts as well as more broadly exploring teacher attitudes to student reading choices and specific curriculum imperatives within the Stage 4/5 English syllabus.

### ***Semi-structured interview questions***

#### AREA ONE:

Focus of investigation: Reading for pleasure and student choice of texts

- How important do you think it is that students read for pleasure?

Probe: Tell me about wide reading - is it part of your school's culture? How do you get your students to read? What type of books do you see your students reading for pleasure?

#### AREA TWO:

Focus of investigation: Manga and Anime texts

- What has been your experience with manga and anime texts?

Probe: Are you familiar with them? Do your students read or view these texts or bring them into school spaces? Do you cater for these types of texts within your school community?

#### AREA THREE:

Focus of investigation: School culture

- How has your school responded to the cross curriculum priority of Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia and the general capability of Intercultural Understanding in the new Stage 4 English syllabus?

Probe: Have you brought in any new texts or new curriculum approaches to meet these elements? In your practice, what do you do about these two curriculum elements? Do you think they're important? Why?