

Introduction

During the middle years of schooling (Years 5–8), students encounter early adolescence and the attendant rapid changes in personal and social development. They are growing towards independence of thought and action, developing a stronger sense of personal and social identity and facing the challenges to self-confidence and security which that process entails. At the same time they are increasingly encountering both the demands and the opportunities of adult life. A rich and relevant curriculum, sensitive to their needs, has an important part to play in their intellectual, social and personal development; it can help them grow and mature into adulthood, with success at school also increasing their self-confidence.

These years of schooling have been the focus of much recent attention. During the past decade, governments at both commonwealth and state levels have supported research into learning during the middle years. Examples of this research are the federally-funded project *From alienation to engagement* (1996), the South Australian government's *Report of the junior secondary review* (1992) and the ongoing work of the National Schools Network.

The title, "From alienation to engagement", suggests the focus for that particular project: to provide conditions at school which respond to students' widely varying needs and circumstances during adolescence; to provide a sense of belonging and security; and to engage students' undiminished capacity for learning in ways which make sense to schools, teachers and the students themselves.

Students need a continuing sense of personal progress and authentic success. Academic success is the distinctive work of schools; underpinning academic success is the continuing development of literacy skills, knowledge and understandings.

Using this document

Continuity of literacy development in Years 5–8 is a product of one component of the NSW State Literacy Strategy, aimed at mitigating the negative impact on students of the process of transition from Years 6 to 7. Ways are examined of aligning more closely the teaching and learning practices of primary and secondary schools, and of ensuring that the tools of literacy which are required for learning and success, both in and out of school, are made available to all students.

Chapter 1 presents research findings on the impact on students of moving from primary to secondary education. Chapter 2 follows up on this research by suggesting ways for primary and secondary schools to work together to continue students' literacy development. This collaboration should result in secondary schools knowing more about the incoming students and both primary and secondary teachers knowing more about each other and how they operate; with this information in hand, both groups of teachers can consider ways of easing the move from Year 6 to Year 7. The State Literacy Strategy, with its K–12 focus, is one important way of providing continuity.

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Chapter 3 explains the pedagogy underpinning the State Literacy Strategy, while Chapter 4 explains the social view of language on which literacy teaching is based in primary and secondary schools in all key learning areas. In these chapters, teachers in all key learning areas are offered valuable advice about how to teach literacy in the context of their subject areas.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 contain practical strategies for teaching reading and writing in Year 7, including teaching research skills and assisting students in expanding their reading and writing skills, knowledge and understandings in response to the expanding demands made on students' literacy skills through the transition years.

Overheads and handouts

Finally, a set of overheads and handouts can be found at the back of the book. These are provided to assist in staff meeting presentations.

The overheads are signalled throughout the book by the graphic:



The handouts are signalled by the graphic:



Chapter 1

The research

Students' needs change as they grow towards adulthood. In order to respond to these changing needs, primary and secondary schools are structurally and culturally different in many ways, including the ways teaching is constructed. These differences, when purposeful and positive, are necessary and to be valued.

The issue for students is how schools can ensure their literacy development while continuing to give them the best of what the primary or secondary school culture has to offer. Teachers of Years 5 to 8 need to be constantly aware that this transition is marked by environmental changes which are more far-reaching and dynamic than a simple shift of location.

The most obvious change is in the way students' work is structured and organised: a shift from having one main generalist teacher and being in a consistent class group in a home room, working from a mainly integrated curriculum, to having several specialist teachers teaching defined areas of the curriculum in a number of rooms each day.

Another change, often less evident, is their position in the hierarchy of the student population. They change from being students at the "top" of a school, the biggest, brightest and best, to finding themselves at the "bottom".

A further change, central to the business of their schooling, is the type of work students engage in, work that makes many new demands on them. One crucial aspect of this is the change that takes place in their literacy learning and in the new demands that are made upon their literacy competencies.

As noted in *Focus on literacy: A position paper on the teaching of literacy* (NSW Department of School Education, 1997):

The upper years of primary school and the early years of secondary school, the middle years, are characterised by the separation of areas of knowledge into school subjects which make distinctive reading and writing demands upon students. Each subject uses specific text types with particular written, spoken and symbolic forms to present its knowledge.

In the secondary school, students continue to need assistance in gaining control over the kinds of literacy demands they meet. All subjects have literacy demands that are specific to the reading and writing needed by students to participate in that subject.

Primary and secondary schools share responsibility for preparing students for the new learning challenges they meet during the transition years. Some initiatives, including exchanging relevant information between schools, are straightforward and readily achievable. Others take longer and require greater will, effort and time, and are essential if students are to make a successful transition from Year 6 to Year 7.

The State Literacy Strategy offers ways of teaching and of teaching literacy that have equal relevance for both primary and secondary schools. When teachers incorporate these philosophies and strategies, they enrich their students' learning in the key learning areas, and they also ease students' transition from primary to secondary education.

Variations in literacy teaching and learning

Variations in literacy demands and related literacy teaching and learning practices throughout the final years of primary schooling and the early years of secondary schooling have been described in several Australian studies.

Literacy in transition (Cairney et al., 1994) examined literacy activities in a number of NSW secondary schools and their associated feeder primary schools. An earlier Tasmanian study by Horner and Moore (1981) was conducted into reading across this transitional phase. This latter study investigated the reading activities of Year 6 students in a range of primary schools in 1980 and tracked those students into Year 7 to determine any variation in the reading demands placed on them. A study (Keford, 1981) of the writing demands of Year 6 and Year 7 students in NSW occurred at the same time as Horner and Moore's study.

Even though drawn from evidence separated in time by more than a decade, the summary findings of these studies are generally consistent. Following are some of the most salient of the findings.

Reading



1.1

- In Year 6, reading for research was the most prevalent form of observed reading, representing one-third of all observed reading. In contrast, in Year 7 reading for research purposes occupied only one-eighth of observed reading. (Cairney et al, 1994).
- Year 7 students were commonly required to use unsuitable (inaccessible) reference texts. Horner and Moore noted that "many more children than we realise experience great difficulty in making their own information gathered from text or reference books." (Horner & Moore, 1981; Keford, 1981)
- In Year 6, oral reading was most often in small groups from literary texts; in Year 7, oral reading was most often in whole-class situations from factual material, such as text books or blackline masters, and from the board. (Cairney et al, 1994)
- Year 7 students' ability to read literary texts did not predict their ability to read and write factual texts which were technical and expository based. (Horner & Moore, 1981)
- Students' ability to read aloud fluently did not necessarily indicate their ability to comprehend or make meaning out of the text. (Horner & Moore, 1981)

Writing



1.2

- Year 7 students were expected to work more independently than Year 6 students. They undertook fewer projects but were given less support and guidance in completing them. (Cairney et al, 1994)
- Year 6 writing generally went through a process of drafting and editing before completion. About 30% of Year 7 teachers usually expected students to produce their extended written work without this process. (Cairney et al, 1994; Keford's study also notes this difference.)

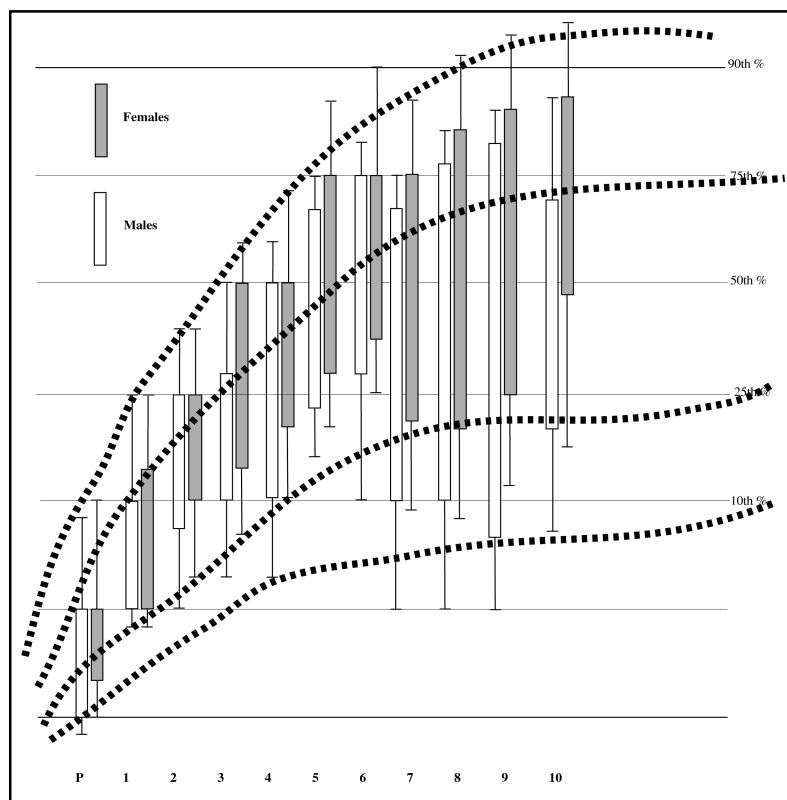
- Year 6 students wrote more pieces of extended discourse than did Year 7 students; around 40% of all observed writing in primary schools was extended discourse compared with just under 30% in secondary schools. Extended discourse in both Year 6 and Year 7 tended to be narrative or recount. (Cairney et al, 1994)
- Year 7 students wrote more “shot answer pieces” (45%) than did Year 6 (33%). This writing mainly involved the production of lists of spelling words or definitions, literal comprehension exercises and notes, or as part of an assessment process. (Cairney et al, 1994)

Each of these studies commented on the variation in the specific literacy practices in the adjoining years of education, noted the significantly changing demands from Year 6 to Year 7, and affirmed the value and importance of explicit teaching of the acquired skills, including teaching literacy for learning in both primary and secondary schools.

The impact of transition on students' literacy development

Two recent major studies have tracked progress in literacy development across the primary and secondary years. The Victorian Quality Schools Project (Hill, Holmes-Smith and Rowe, 1993) and the Hundred Schools Project: Literacy Programs Study (Rowe, 1995) both provide clear evidence of a significant discontinuity of progress in literacy development as a result of students' transition from primary to secondary school.

Rowe's results with relation to reading achievement, drawn from 5092 students attending 92 schools, appear in the following figure. This figure uses a “box and whisker” method to present data. The boxes show the performance of the middle 50 % of male and female students; the top “whisker” is where the average performance of the top 10 % falls, the bottom “whisker”, the average performance of the bottom 10 %. The dotted line reflects the trend of student performance according to their end of Year “P” assessment.



The development of reading skills in Years P (for "Preparatory", equivalent to the Kindergarten Year in NSW) to Year 10 in a sample of Victorian Schools. Source: Rowe, 1995

The study indicates that:



1.4

- there is consistent growth in reading achievement until Year 5. Rowe suggests that this growth coincides with the period during which students are being explicitly taught basic literacy skills
- those students who are in the lowest 10% of reading achievement make minimal progress between Year 4 and Year 9
- there is an actual decline in the levels of reading achievement for a substantial proportion of students during Year 7 and Year 8.

The findings from the earlier Victorian Quality Schools Project, with a larger sample of nearly 14,000 students, reiterate these findings.

The evidence shows that it is essential that students in the middle years continue to be explicitly taught literacy skills, knowledge and understandings. It is equally essential that teachers know and value students' prior learning and experiences, and provide a challenging curriculum which moves students purposefully along the learning continuum.

References

- Cairney, T. 1994, *Literacy in transition: An evaluation of literacy practices in upper primary and junior secondary schools*, University of Western Sydney Nepean.
- Hill, P., Holmes-Smith, and Rowe, K. 1993, *School and teacher effectiveness in Victoria: Key findings from phase 1 of the Victorian Quality Schools Project*, Melbourne: Centre for Applied Educational Research, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, Victoria.
- Homer, J., and Moore, F. 1981, Research into reading: A study of reading in the transition between primary and secondary schools in Tasmania, *English in Australia*, 58, December
- Kefford, R. 1981, From narratives to note-taking: Differential demands in writing tasks Year 6 to Year 7. *English in Australia*, 58, December
- NSW Department of School Education 1997, *Focus on literacy: A position paper on the teaching of literacy*, Sydney
- Rowe, K. 1995, *Factors affecting students' progress in reading: Key findings from a longitudinal study* ("100 Schools project: Literacy programs study"). Melbourne: Centre for Applied Educational Research, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, Victoria.

Chapter 2

Sharing information

Well-organised and purposeful sharing of information between primary teachers and their secondary colleagues is one way of easing students' transition from primary school to secondary school, and avoiding the types of discontinuity described in the previous chapter. The more that primary and secondary teachers know and understand about each other's work, the more effective each group's teaching will become.

There are many ways for schools to share information. Sharing is easiest where there is an established and positive "feeder" relationship, where the number of primary schools feeding to the secondary school is relatively small, and where staff relationships are well established.

The following list contains suggestions of ways schools can organise themselves to share information about their transition students.

- Arrange for information to be brought or sent to school with the students when they enrol; this information should outline their progress towards the outcomes of their stage, and give some indication of their past learning experiences.
- Ensure that a representative member of the secondary staff has some informal contact with representatives of the majority of feeder schools.
- Establish a transition meeting for representatives of the schools concerned.
- Set time aside for joint meetings of upper primary and lower secondary teachers with a clear agenda and plenty of professional interaction.
- Facilitate short-term teacher exchange, in which primary and secondary teachers visit each other's classrooms, have brief periods of work shadowing, attend staff meetings, conduct a combined program, and teach classes in the other location.
- Conduct action research in teams across schools and act on the findings.
- Form a cross-school team responsible for the improvement of literacy across Years 5–8.

The following questions about curriculum can help schools in their information sharing during the transition process. The questions are also useful focus questions for meetings of Years 7 & 8 teachers and Years 5 & 6 teachers in feeder schools.

In Years 5 & 6 ...

- How discretely organised is the teaching of the KLAs in practice? How much work is deliberately integrated? How fluid is the blending of student work across different KLAs?
- Are there any differences in the emphasis on, and time spent on, the different KLAs?
- How is the teaching of literacy built into the work in the various KLAs?

In Years 7 & 8 ...

- What subjects are taught?
- How long are the lesson periods? Is there any deliberate timetabling of “doubles” or longer teaching times? If so, how are those longer periods used?
- Is there any interaction in the planning and organisation of subjects?
- Are any teachers responsible for overseeing the relationship between subjects or the overall year level program?
- Which teachers have prime responsibility for students’ pastoral care during Year 7 and Year 8? What do those responsibilities entail?
- How is literacy teaching built into the work in the KLAs?

A question for both groups

- Should the structural organisation of primary and secondary schools be made more similar? If so, how? If not, what aspects of the differences are positive?

Sharing information about the structure of the curriculum

The table below describes how the curriculum is organised into key learning areas in Stage 3 (Year 5 and Year 6), and into key learning areas and subjects in Stage 4 (Year 7 and Year 8).



2.2

STAGE 3 Years 5 and 6	STAGE 4 Years 7 and 8	
Key learning area	Key learning area	Subject
English	English	English
Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics
Science & Technology	Science Technological & Applied Studies	Science Design & technology
Personal Development Health & Physical Education	Personal Development Health & Physical Education	Personal development Health Physical education
Human Society and Its Environment	Human Society and Its Environment Languages Other Than English	History Geography Languages
Creative & Practical Arts	Creative Arts	Dance Drama Music Visual Arts

The information in this table is a useful starting point for discussion of the curriculum structure at the upper end of primary schooling and the beginning of the secondary years, and helps to identify the nature and extent of students' prior literacy learning experiences. Where individual schools show variations from the information in the table, teachers should discuss these differences in terms of how they impact on the transition process.

Sharing information about programs

The easiest way to share information about programs is through a direct exchange of documents; the best way to share information about programs is for colleagues in secondary and feeder primary schools to talk to each other. Such discussion produces a more detailed understanding in primary schools of what happens in the secondary schools and vice versa.

The following questions are useful discussion starters for both groups of teachers.

Program planning

- What are the key source documents used for constructing programs: official documents, for instance, syllabuses and subject guides, and unofficial documents, such as key text books and programs from other sources?
- How does planning happen? Do teachers of classes at the same level or of the same subject work together? At what level of detail do they plan? Is there a strong effort to generate consistency in content or is it assumed that there will be significant variation among the class or subject teachers?



Program content

- What are the main topics covered?
- What key texts are used?
- What skills, knowledge and understandings are taught most intensively?
- Which reading strategies are used?
- Which types of texts are students most likely to become familiar with?

Program procedures

- How is students' work organised? Are collaborative ways of working, for example, small groups the norm? Do students negotiate tasks? Are students expected to work independently?
- What sources are students expected to use for information collection: for example, the various sections of a library, the Internet, CD-ROMs, other computer-based programs, print media, interviews, community resources such as art galleries and museums?
- What forms of presentation of their work are students familiar with: for example, project reports, oral presentation, poster displays, role-play?
- Are drafting, editing, improvement and revision standard practices in preparing written tasks? What role does the teacher play?

Assessment

- What criteria are used for assessing students' work?
- What assessment procedures and instruments are used?
- What roles are students expected to play in assessment procedures?
- How is assessment reported to students, to parents and to other teachers?
- What actions, if any, are expected of students following assessment?
- What actions, if any, do teachers take following a review of the information provided by assessment?

Literacy test results

The Year 5 Basic Skills Test (BST) results and the Year 7 English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) provide valuable diagnostic information about students' reading, language and writing skills at an individual level and in comparison with the state cohort. BST and ELLA results also provide a starting point for planning and programming to meet the needs of individual students or groups of students requiring additional assistance.

Literacy achievement at Stage 3



Year 6 teachers can provide valuable information about students' progress in literacy through profiles identifying the outcomes of the English K-6 syllabus that their students have achieved.

2.1 Students with special needs

Assisting Year 7 students who need additional support: Follow-up to ELLA contains a focused individual assessment, a whole-school planning process and a programming and strategies handbook to help in planning and implementing strategies for students needing additional assistance.

Support teachers learning difficulties (STLDs) can assess students who are experiencing difficulties in literacy and co-ordinate the development of individual literacy plans for targeted students.

English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers can also provide advice about students' levels of achievement using the ESL scales. The ESL scales operate as a supplement to syllabus documents, and to curriculum support material, such as teaching units. The scales enable teachers to recognise their ESL students' literacy progress.

The ESL teachers in the Granville Middle Schools project developed the following form for transferring assessment data about ESL students' levels of achievement.

Information regarding ESL students

To be completed by ESL teacher



2.2

FIRST LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Can the student listen, read and view in L1? Y/N

Can the student speak in L1? Y/N

Can the student write in L1? Y/N

Materials read in first language
 Magazines Books
 Newspapers None

Texts written in first language (e.g. letters, shopping lists) _____

Has the student had interrupted schooling? Y/N

Comment: _____

Is an interpreter required by parents or caregivers? Y/N

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Known years of ESL support: _____

Current mode of ESL support:
 Withdrawal Group teaching Team teaching
 Other (specify) _____

ESL SCALES

Oral interaction	LEVELS							
Communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Language and cultural understanding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Language structures and features	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Strategies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Reading and responding	LEVELS									
Communication	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Language and cultural understanding	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Language structures and features	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strategies	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Writing	LEVELS									
Communication	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Language and cultural understanding	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Language structures and features	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strategies	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Degree of ESL support recommended for Year 7:
 minimal medium high

Specific support needed in the following area/s: (e.g. pronunciation, cohesion in written texts, tenses, grammar, etc.)

Name of ESL teacher (please print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Chapter 3

Teaching in the middle years

High expectations

Recent research has shown a high correlation between teacher expectation and student performance. A related finding is that students come to secondary school assuming that the curriculum will be more difficult and challenging than it was in primary school. This assumption, when linked to teachers' expectation that their new students can and will learn, creates a powerful learning environment.

Presenting students with intellectually challenging tasks and encouraging them to extend themselves is essential. While it is natural and necessary for Year 7 teachers to make assumptions about their incoming students' literacy skills, knowledge and understandings, it is also essential that they make decisions on the basis of solid information about students' literacy achievements. They then observe students' literacy achievements in Year 7 to refine and update their programs. This way teachers can confidently design the curriculum on the basis of demonstrated need rather than on assumed ability.

Year 7 teachers get information about their incoming students from formal records and by talking to teachers in the feeder primary schools. From this starting point they should then talk to their students about their literacy learning and their aspirations, encourage them to take risks, and work from the assumption that their students are willing and able to learn. Students also need to be provided with concrete evidence that effort improves achievement.

The research quoted in Chapter 1 shows examples of low teacher expectations of Year 7 students, for example, the reversion to short-answer writing and the fact that students were doing less extended writing in Year 7 than they had done in Year 6. Teachers communicate their level of expectation of their students in many ways, both direct and subtle, and students are quick to pick up the message. High teacher expectation encourages high student aspiration; low teacher expectation discourages students and lowers their aspirations.

Year 7 students respond positively when teachers indicate that they expect them to succeed, and that they value the learning that their students bring with them from the primary school. The positive impact of high expectations applies as much to literacy development as to learning in all areas of the curriculum.

Explicit and systematic teaching

The terms *explicit* and *systematic* encapsulate the approach to programming and teaching that underpins the State Literacy Strategy. The terms encompass such issues as being clear and purposeful in planning and teaching, building substantial bridges from students' past knowledge and skills to new achievements and, above all, making clear to students the intended outcomes and actively teaching them so that they achieve these outcomes. These matters are fully explored in *Focus on literacy: A position paper on the teaching of literacy* (NSW Department of School Education, 1997).