

Extract from

**Literacy in Transition: An evaluation of literacy practices in
upper primary and junior secondary schools.**

T.H. Cairney. K. Lowe & E. Sproats
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Volume 2 Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this chapter we will provide a summary of the major findings from Stages 1 and 2, the conclusions that we draw as a result of these findings and our recommendations for further action.

The topic of this research was chosen by the Department of Employment, Education and Training as one of three deemed worthy of special research in 1993. This reflected a concern for the potentially differing demands of literacy across the primary to secondary school boundary, which some have criticised as artificial and disruptive of learning .

Not surprisingly, the transition from primary to secondary school has been a cause of concern for educators in all countries where this artificial boundary exists. This concern is not surprising given the common link that has been made between the transition from primary to high school and trauma and academic failure in children. As we outlined in Chapter 2, chronologically and developmentally, there is little difference between students in upper primary and lower secondary classes. However, the educational contexts appear to vary greatly.

The literature that we reviewed in Chapter 2 indicated that the impact of the transition from primary to secondary has a varied impact for different students. As well, some studies suggested that there may be discontinuities in curricula and teaching methods which cause difficulties for some students when adjusting to learning in secondary schools. Many of these studies made specific recommendations concerning transition program initiatives.

However, in spite of considerable interest in the transition, relatively little is still known about the nature of the literacy practices that students need to acquire in upper primary and lower secondary. Even less seems to be known about the mismatches across the transition years in literacy practices and the support strategies that are used by teachers to aid literacy learning. As a result, the purpose of this research project was to explore the transition in depth. Chapters 3 and 4 provide a detailed description of both the literacy practices and support strategies that we observed in 13 primary and 4 secondary schools over an 18 month period. What these chapters do not report are the 35 individual case studies conducted from May 1993 to October 1994. These case studies are presented in unabridged form in volume three which accompanies this volume of the research report.

The purpose of the case studies was to provide a more personal view of the impact of the transition years on specific learners. Originally, it had been our intention to include a separate summary chapter which described the major findings of the case studies. However, due to the relative consistency of findings from the case studies compared with data from Stage 1 and 2 classroom observations we decided to integrate our findings from the case studies with our summary of findings from Stages 1 and 2.

In essence, what follows is a summary of our findings from a number of sources including: our detailed observations of 13 primary and 4 secondary schools; our 35 case studies; and finally, interviews and surveys of teachers, students, parents and administrators. We have summarised our findings under four headings:

- * The transition process.
- * The literacy practices of students in Years 6 and
- * Supporting literacy.
- * Literacy and target groups.

At the conclusion of each section key findings are highlighted. Finally, we discuss our conclusions in the light of previous research, and our recommendations for future action.

The transition process

Students' responses to the transition

Our data from Stages 1 and 2 and the in depth case studies confirmed that Year 6 students generally looked forward to secondary school. However, some expressed concerns. These included apprehensiveness about possible 'initiation' processes that they believed would occur, and concerns that the work would be harder - especially the reading and writing demanded. As part of case study interviews some students suggested that they believed they would not be able to choose their own books, that books would be very 'thick', and that they would have to do more writing than in Year 6. They also thought they would have to write very "long stories", "do a lot of copying from the board", "take down notes" and "do lots of assignments".

In addition, many of the case study students expressed the belief that they would "have a lot of homework, "no contract work", "difficulties changing classes", "harder maths and spelling and the possibility of making lots of new friends."

On the positive side, students were looking forward to having lots of teachers, the facilities of the high school, and in some cases the new subjects such as metalwork and woodwork.

Our case studies (see Volume 3) confirmed that in virtually all cases the student apprehensiveness was found to be unjustified and that transition was easier than expected. All students, except for two, responded positively to the move into secondary school, stating that it was "good" or "OK" and over half claimed it was "heaps better than primary". They all enjoyed having different teachers. Many felt that Year 7 was easier than Year 6. Over 70% said it was not what they expected and that it was easier than envisaged. Making new friends was regarded by most as a positive aspect of the transition process.

Interestingly, while there were two students who found high school difficult (especially at first), there were others who actually appeared to benefit from the move to high school. In fact, three lower ability students surprised themselves and their parents with the ease with which they moved to the high school.

In the case of one student who was placed in the lowest streamed class, he appeared to improve throughout the year as he discovered work that he could do and new subjects that he enjoyed. One interesting finding was that while a number of case study students were concerned about the possible literacy demands of Year 7 prior to the transition, more than half indicated that reading and writing in Year 7 was similar to that which they had experienced in Year 6. A small number (9%) thought that writing was easier than Year 6 and 14% thought it was harder.

Some specific differences in literacy practices were cited by students. First, approximately one third of the case study students (31%) commented on the large amount of copying from the board and textbooks that they had to do in Year 7. Second, their expectations were not met in reading with most finding that it was the "same" or even "easier than in Year 6". Only one student found that (consistent with his Year 6 expectations) it was more difficult. Third, students commented on the increased amount of homework, most of which required the use of literacy. Finally, almost all students who were readers in Year 6 commented that they no longer had as many opportunities to read for pleasure.

In relation to the support of learners one consistent finding from the case studies was that teachers were highly supportive of student learning. Most students commented on the helpful individual assistance that most teachers offered in Year 7, and teachers were frequently observed moving around the classroom from student to student giving help and advice.

Parents' responses to the transition

The Stage 1 findings indicate that parents were not confident that their children would be able to cope with Year 7. Most felt that they would need help, would have trouble working on their own, and would need very explicit instructions to be able to learn.

However, as the Stage 2 data show, having made the transition, the majority of parents (80%) felt that Primary School had prepared their children well for high school. Most found the transition relatively easy, but that the work was harder, and there was more homework.

Teachers' responses to the transition

Interviews with Year 6 teachers in Stage 1 indicated that most believed that their students would cope well with secondary school because they had been well prepared in Year 6. Only a few teachers thought there might be some students who would have difficulties adjusting or that the less able students would not get the necessary support. One teacher expressed concern that some students would have trouble reading the text books, while another felt that the students would have real trouble coping with all the different teachers. On the whole, our data suggested that Year 6 teachers believed that there was a "huge gap between the expectations of primary and secondary school".

The majority of primary teachers also thought that secondary school teachers expected Year 7 students to read independently; to be familiar with a variety of writing genres; to use appropriate vocabulary and spelling; and to have good comprehension skills. More specifically, some suggested that students would be expected to know how to construct essays, write without a draft, take notes, complete summaries and have dictionary skills.

When the Year 7 teachers were asked how the students could be better prepared for Year 7 their responses included: more use of rote learning; better handwriting skills; more remedial programs; encouraging reading for pleasure; more practice in reading; learning research skills; better grasp of language; better note taking skills; staying at primary until they can read and write; and being more independent learners.

In summary, most primary teachers believed that Year 7 would pose special challenges for their students but that they would cope because they were well prepared.

Schools' responses to the transition

One of the things that became obvious to our research team both in Stage 1 and 2 was that considerable efforts were made to ensure a smooth transition for all students. All schools had some strategies, and as our Stage 1 and 2 data show some had an extensive range of strategies. The most common transition practices were: visits to the primary school by secondary teachers; organised visits by students to the secondary school for orientation day; lessons taught in Year 6 by Year 7 teachers; mentoring programs - camps for Year 7 and Year 11; Peer Support Programs; liaison between Year 6 and Year 7 teachers; and meetings between primary and secondary to discuss programs.

It would appear that in 1994 all schools took positive steps to make the transition easier. This is an interesting finding because it shows that there has been considerable progress in this area in the past 20 years and that many of the recommendations of earlier reports (eg. Plowden, 1967; Whitta, 1975; Beazley, 1984; Eltis et al, 1987) have been implemented by schools.

Key Findings

From the data collected, it appears that students do not have difficulty with the transition either from the perspective of the work required, the literacy demands, or the adjustment to a new and different learning environment.

The transition process is generally enjoyed by the students.

Parents and students generally expected more problems in the transition years than were ultimately experienced.

Teachers from Years 6 and 7 agreed that there is a need to implement a variety of strategies to improve the transition process, including:

- * greater liaison and exchange of information between primary and secondary;
- * greater use of National Statement and Profiles;
- * fewer teachers in Years 7 and 8 and a variety of specialist teachers in Year 6.

Year 6 teachers identified several strategies that they felt could improve the transition process, including:

· a basic checklist from Year 7 teachers identifying what was expected; · more consultation with primary teachers concerning English and literacy; · higher work expectations from Year 7 teachers.

Year 7 teachers also raised a number of specific issues, including the need for:

· Year 7 teachers to be aware of the books read in Year 6 so as to avoid repetition; · greater awareness of the 'language' of writing relating to specific genres ensuring a common usage of language across Year 6 and 7; · Year 6 teachers to teach listening skills; · students to practice writing without the need for a draft; · the need to improve proof reading skills.

The literacy practices of students in Years 6 and 7

The Stage 1 and 2 data and the 35 individual case studies indicated a number of interesting findings in relation to the specific literacy practices of Year 6 and 7. These will be described under a number of sub-headings which relate to broad aspects of literacy. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 outline the proportion of time devoted to specific literacy practices. This will be discussed in more detail later.

Table 5.1 Proportion of time devoted to specific literacy practices in all primary schools observed.

All figures represent % of total class time observed

	Inner City (High NESB)				Urban 'disadvantaged'					Urban Middle Class				Rural				
Primary	A1	A2	A3	Ave	B1	B2	B3	B4	Ave	C1	C2	C3	Ave	D1	D2	D2	Ave	Total
Reading	23	29	20	24.2	28	27	26	29	27.5	24	41	46	37.4	16	34	20	23.4	28
Writing	25	34	28	29	38	37	36	21	33	26	30	25	26.6	23	30	35	30.1	30
Oral Genre	41	25	27	31	20	19	28	24	22.8	37	18	8	21	25	17	20	20.7	27
Other related literacy	11	2	12	8.2	4	5	2	13	6	3	10	13	8.4	15	14	6	11.4	8
Other	10	11	12	7.6	9	11	12	11	10.7	10	2	8	6.6	20	4	19	14.4	10

Table 5.2 Proportion of time devoted to specific literacy practices in all high schools observed.

All figures represent % of total class time observed

Secondary Schools	A-Inner City (High NESB)	B-Urban Disadvantaged	C-Urban Middle Class	D-Rural	Average
Reading	13.6	20.8	22.9	22.6	20
Writing	28	26.8	20.1	24.4	25
Oral Genre	39.6	27.6	27.3	25.5	30
Other Related Literacy	8	11.6	15.3	13.3	12
Other	10.8	13.2	14.5	14.2	13

Attitudinal differences

The case studies as well as the Stage 1 and 2 data confirmed that there existed a considerable difference in students' attitudes to reading from Year 6 to Year 7. In Year 6, 50% of the case study students claimed to enjoy reading and to read often. They enjoyed DEAR especially the free choice of reading material. Many students were observed in Stage 1 completely absorbed in their reading during DEAR time. Year 6 students were encouraged to read from a range of texts and make choices about what they read. During DEAR time the students brought their own books or borrowed from the class library. While there was a diverse range of material read literature written by Roald Dahl and Paul Jennings was common.

Year 7 students on the other hand did not appear to enjoy DEAR time. Only 4 students actually referred to it, and when observed in Stage 2, they seemed to be reading textbooks and magazines. Very few students in any of the classes were observed reading novels. One of the four secondary schools did not have DEAR and another had just abandoned it because students failed to bring books to read. In each school DEAR was run in roll call classes and was generally inadequately introduced. Teachers lacked background knowledge and some failed to see the importance of daily reading. Many students used this time to do homework and read school texts, defeating its purpose.

Another difference in the attitude to reading was that in Year 7, 31% of students claimed that they did not have time to read anything other than the prescribed texts and novels and complete their homework. However, in Year 6, 91% claimed to read at home for pleasure.

In both Years 6 and 7 girls tended to read more than boys. In Year 6, 94% of girls claimed to read outside the compulsory reading set by the school, whereas 83% of the boys claimed to do so. In Year 7, the percentage of boys who read outside of the prescribed school reading decreased to 56%. Most girls (88%) continued to read, but it would seem that even in their case they read far less often.

Key findings

Students have far fewer opportunities to read for pleasure in secondary school, and there is less attention given to encourage this type of reading.

Students appeared to have more direct classroom access to a greater variety of texts in Year 6 and appeared to make good use of these resources. In secondary, there were few texts available for borrowing in classrooms, and students were rarely observed borrowing books for personal reading from the library.

Generally, girls tended to read more than boys and on entering secondary school the amount of reading by boys decreased considerably.

Research related reading

Our observations in Year 6 classrooms indicated that research tasks (albeit frequently in the name of "projects") were frequently set. As Table 5.3 indicates, research related reading accounted for 33% of all time devoted to reading in Year 6. Most classes went to the library to research a topic or had a class library from which to borrow. More than half the Year 6 teachers said that they set research topics on a weekly basis. Many of the Year 6 teachers and librarians (75%) claimed to teach library and research skills.

Table 5.3 Proportion of time used for specific reading events observed in Year 6 classrooms

Reading Practices	Proportion of Time used
Research related reading	33%
Silent reading	29%
Oral reading	20%
Reading comprehension and response	18%

In all secondary schools library skills were taught, usually for a short time at the beginning of the year. Our observations of case study students in Year 7 confirmed that students used the library facilities.

Although research activities were observed in three of the four high schools, the setting of research tasks did not appear as frequently as in Year 6. In fact, this accounted for only 12.9% of observed reading time (see Table 5.4). Interestingly, there were no observations of books being brought to classrooms from the library. The students in Year 7 were also observed at times having trouble using the research facilities of the library. Even though teachers in Year 6 talked specifically about research and library skills, none of the students mentioned using the library for research compared to almost 50% in Year 7 almost half the students talked about this.

Table 5.4: Proportion of time used for specific reading practices

	Percentage
Research Related Reading	12.9
Silent Reading	44.2
Oral Reading	23.6
Comprehension and response	19.3

It would seem that the pattern in Year 6 was for research work to be conducted both in the classroom and at home utilising varied resources from the classroom, home, public library and sometimes school library. Research related reading occupied 33% of all reading time. In contrast, in Year 7 this occupied only 12.9% of reading time and students were more likely to do this type of reading in the library and at home, but less often in the classroom.

Key findings

Students in Year 6 appeared to have been given good preparation in primary school for the research tasks required in secondary school. However, the expectations in relation to carrying out research were found to vary from Year 6 to Year 7. In Year 6 students were expected to complete many and varied projects. In Year 7, there were fewer projects being undertaken and less follow up support and guidance in completing them.

The library skills taught in Year 6 did not seem to support students in accessing information in Year 7, and as a consequence some struggled at first when attempting to use a larger and more diverse library.

Reading practices

Our observations in Stage 1 indicated that Year 6 students read a variety of books as part of DEAR, and whole class and group lessons in a variety of oral and silent reading activities. While almost half the Year 6 classes had set novels to read students were able to choose individual titles for personal reading during lesson time. In one school the teacher took some of the students with her to the book room to help in the choice. In Year 7 DEAR only occurred as part of school-based initiatives and as we have indicated above this was rarely effective. Novels were also set for English, and these were usually selected by the teacher.

Interestingly, the proportion of time devoted to silent reading was slightly higher in Year 7 (44.2%) than in Year 6 (29%), but this is more likely to be related to content area textbooks, blackline masters or blackboard work than in primary where the reading of literature was more common (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2). Nevertheless, the overall proportion of time devoted to reading was lower in Year 7 (20% compared with 28%) than in Year 6.

Our case study students all talked about the novels they were reading for English in Year 7. However, for more than half the case study students, set novels were the only complete texts read during the year. Students in Year 7 claimed to read magazines at home. Interestingly, their favourite author was still Paul Jennings. This suggested that little growth had occurred in this aspect of literacy from Year 6 to 7. Authors and serial publications, introduced in Year 6, were still being enjoyed in Year 7 including books by Enid Blyton, and Roald Dahl, as well as series books, eg. Nancy Drew, The Hardy Boys, Goosebumps. Other choices included authors like Tolkien and Stephen King, and series such as Dr Who.

In Stage 1 we observed that reading aloud by the students, was a common feature of the primary classroom. Students were observed reading around the class, with a partner, with the teacher and in small groups. Oral reading also occurred regularly in Year 7. Students read around the class and read with a partner. However, this practice was much more common in the rural high school (School D) than the other three high schools.

However, while oral reading was seemingly equally as prevalent in Year 7 (23.6% of the reading time) as in Year 6 (20% of time), Stage 1 and 2 data revealed that there was a significant difference in the type of material Year 6 and Year 7 students were requested to read aloud. In the primary school most of the oral reading was from novels the class was studying or selected books (from the classroom library). Very few blackline masters

or overheads were read aloud. While there was some reading from novels and plays observed in Schools A and D, in Year 7 most of the oral reading was from textbooks (such as maths exercises), the board, worksheets, and overheads. Reading with a partner was observed only once, and this was in a peer tutoring situation.

Interestingly, over a third of the Year 6 students claimed not to enjoy reading aloud and more than half stated that they were not good readers. In Year 7, this seemed to be less of a concern and most students read out loud readily when asked. This may have reflected the type of material read and the nature of the oral reading task. This in part was supported by the comments of students from the support class in School B, who claimed that they were more comfortable reading in their English classes than in some of the other classes.

Traditional comprehension activities were observed in both Years 6 and 7. Similar activities were conducted and included answering set questions, cloze exercises and responding to worksheets. Often questions to recall details and information from novels were set. The only major difference seemed to be that while in Year 6 comprehension appeared to be a strategy to teach generic reading skills, in Year 7 it was used to reinforce subject area content. For example, in Year 6, comprehension work was often a component of a reading scheme such as Eureka or Blue Spectrum.

In Stage 2 comprehension strategies were observed across all Year 7 key learning areas. These activities included traditional comprehension activities such as multiple choice answers (in a Science lesson), complete-a-word (in Geography), find-a-word (in Design and Technology), and the traditional question and answer format which was typically answered either in a separate book or on a worksheet. Such activities when done in English were very similar in Year 7 to Year 6 - for example, circle the word that does not belong, unjumble words, quiz and word find, cracking the code, draw a sign, wonderword. Comprehension activities which might be regarded as "new model comprehension" (Moy and Raleigh, 1984), that is, more conducive to an actively engaged response, included sequencing exercises in English and French and cloze exercises.

The use of reader response strategies also varied across Years 6 and 7. There appeared in Stage 1 to be a more challenging array of response activities offered to students. Even fairly low level cognitive activities such as find-a-word were based on students' own reading. Reading response activities were often in the vein of imaginative recreation (see Stratta, Dixon & Wilkinson, 1973) and were primarily done as part of English. They were also often part of a contract set relating to the selected text. Such activities included: make a book mark, make a book jacket and blurb for the book, story map, wanted poster.

Key findings

Reading in Year 7 was very much oriented to content area learning, whereas in Year 6, it was typically focussed on the teaching of generic reading skills.

However, the range and diversity of activities was not significantly different from Years 6 to 7.

Reading was a critical component of all lessons across the KLA's in both Years 6 and 7.

Overall, the type of reading experiences in Year 7 were slightly narrower and more teacher directed than those of Year 6 where students had more choice in the ways they used literacy.

Writing practices

Our Stage 1 and 2 observations confirmed that writing was a common practice both in Year 6 (24.8% of all class time) and in Year 7 (19.5% of all time). In Year 6, reasonably equal proportions of time were devoted to the three major categories of writing described in the data analysis (see Chapter 4):

Table 5.5 Proportion of time used for specific writing practices observed in Year 6 classroom

Handwriting/transcribing/copying	28%
Short answer pieces	33%
Extended discourse	39%

Although formal handwriting lessons were not a common feature of the Year 6 classroom, students often copied spelling lists, poems or work from the board as a handwriting exercise. Other writing in this category included completing title pages, and headings and the copying of lists of words for spelling or vocabulary.

Short answer pieces consisted of cloze exercises, summaries of plots from novels, answers to comprehension questions, note taking and summarising. Extended discourse in Year 6 frequently involved prose narrative in the form of imaginary-fiction and writing about personal experiences (often in the form of a recount). Other forms of extended discourse were journal writing, descriptions (in such KLAs as science or HSIE), poetry, reports, responding to literature, instructions, and opinions. Students also wrote such things as advertisements, dialogues, plays, and material to be read out at assembly.

Writing was observed a little less frequently in Year 7 (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2), but more significantly, the allocation of time across the three major categories varied significantly.

Table 5.6 Proportion of time used for specific writing practices observed in Year 7 classroom.

Handwriting/transcribing/copying	27%
Short answer pieces	45%
Extended discourse	28%

There were no formal handwriting lessons observed but there were many observations of Year 7. Hence writing in this category consisted of students copying work from the board, textbooks and overhead projector. Short answer pieces made up by far the largest proportion of the writing in Year 7. Worksheets in all Key Learning Areas, comprehension exercises, cloze passages and vocabulary exercises involved short answer responses. Within extended discourse, the most dominant form was prose

narrative. Such responses drew on fantasy, imagination and recreations of literature. However, given the figures above, in absolute terms, narrative writing was observed infrequently. Hence, there was a contrast with Year 6 writing with less extended discourse and more short answer pieces (see Table 5.7).

Table 5.7 Comparison of proportion of time devoted to specific writing practices observed in Year 6 and Year 7 classrooms

	Year 6	Year 7
Handwriting/transcribing/copying	28	27
Short answer pieces	33	45
Extended discourse	39	28

Other forms of extended discourse involved personal experiences written in journals, reports requiring a personal response to literature and on a few occasions students were asked to use higher cognitive skills and draw conclusions.

While the form of writing varied greatly in both Years 6 and 7, it was apparent that typically extended discourse writing was for the teacher as examiner.

Key findings

Writing was a common feature of all classrooms observed and took many varied forms. It accounted for 24.8% of the observed class time in Year 6 and 19.5% in Year 7.

Opportunities for extended discourse - writing which involved the writer's intellectual engagement - were less evident in Year 7. Short answer responses dominated the writing experiences of students in Year 7. In Year 6 students were exposed to a more even spread of experiences in all three categories.

In both Years 6 and 7, the teacher was regarded as the audience and the writing was primarily teacher directed.

Spelling

Our Stage 1 observations confirmed that the teaching of spelling was common. In all but two Year 6 classrooms, spelling was taught formally. Lists of words were assigned on a weekly basis accompanied by word building exercises and rules. Frequently dictation at the end of the week was a component of the spelling program. Dictionaries were used in many classrooms as an aid to spelling.

As well, revision of spelling was common in extended discourse with almost all such work written as a rough copy, and proofread and edited before being published. Throughout the process emphasis was placed on achieving conventional spelling. Nevertheless, in Year 6 more than one third of the case study students stated that they had trouble with spelling and that this in turn affected their writing.

In Year 7, spelling was dealt with incidentally and in a less structured way. Words were taught in context and usually related to the terminology or language specifically associated with the KLA. Conventional spelling patterns were demonstrated or highlighted by the teacher in more than 25% of the lessons observed. Students kept spelling lists in almost all KLA's and on three occasions a spelling test was observed. One interesting observation was that some English lists contained less complex words than those dealt with in Year 6.

There were many more comments on student's spelling in their books in Year 7 than in Year 6. Work in Year 6 tended to be "conferenced" first before being entered into books. Students were expected to correct their spelling in Year 7 and students stated in case studies that the emphasis given to correct spelling was not nearly as great as in Year 6. There was no obvious difference in the emphasis given to tools like dictionaries, with these being evident and used in most Year 6 and 7 classrooms.

Key findings

Responsibility for conventional spelling was given to the students in Year 7 and was discussed in the context of other learning, whereas it tended to be "drilled and skilled" in Year 6 as an English task.

Students efforts were supported differently in Year 7 than Year 6. Students were directly "taught" spelling in Year 6, whereas in Year 7, it was much more closely aligned with the content being taught, and was dealt with incidentally.

It is was interesting that it was in Year 6 that students expressed concerns about their inability to spell and that spelling interfered with their writing. In Year 7, their anxiety was less apparent and spelling tended not to restrict writing to the same degree as teachers focussed more on content.

Vocabulary and grammar

In Year 6, vocabulary and grammar work was often part of contract work. Students were asked to complete exercises such as find-a-word, word definitions, crossword puzzles and synonym and antonym exercises. Teachers drew attention to words in particular contexts and students looked up word meanings in dictionaries. In addition, vocabulary work was done incidentally as the need arose.

In Year 7, content based vocabulary in all subjects was observed to be important and emphasised by the teachers. They explained the vocabulary of their KLA and often responded to students' answers by changing the students' terminology. The focus in Year 7 tended to be on enriching students' vocabulary through introducing and exploring word meanings. On several occasions the origins of words were discussed.

In spite of the varied purposes for vocabulary work from Year 6 to Year 7, the strategies used to reinforce vocabulary knowledge were remarkably similar.

Key findings

Vocabulary is specifically taught in Year 6 and not necessarily connected with the content being covered. Hence, it is less frequently contextualised as part of content area learning.

In Year 7, control of the vocabulary of a particular KLA is deemed by teachers as essential to the mastery of that particular topic. Vocabulary is regarded as being content specific and is taught accordingly.

Teacher reading

In Stage 1 Year 6 teachers were observed frequently reading aloud to students. They read mainly narratives to the class, but were also observed reading poetry, reading from factual texts (e.g. a book of quotes of famous people), and in a few lessons from other KLA reference material. Year 6 teachers felt that reading aloud to the class and sharing novels with them was an important aspect of literacy learning.

In Year 7 teachers read aloud about half as much as the Year 6 teachers. The type of material read also varied considerably. In Year 7 teachers typically read from textbooks, the overhead projector sheet, the blackboard or worksheets. On only two occasions were teachers observed reading aloud the novels the class were studying. Their reasons for reading also appeared to be different. Often they read because there were no student volunteers, or because they wanted to highlight a set of instructions. Lessons where reading was done for pleasure were not observed.

Key findings

The purposes for reading to students varied considerably from Years 6 to Years 7. In Year 7 it was mainly to impart content knowledge or inform students; in Year 6 it was often to instil a love of literature and reading.

Computers

There were very few computers in the Year 6 classrooms observed in Stage 1. Most classrooms were equipped with only one computer. Only less than half, (5) classes out of the 13 used computers regularly to publish the students' work. One school used some literature software, and the students were observed helping each other as they used it. During the case study interviews a number of issues were raised but very few students mentioned computers. Only two students showed an active interest in computers and this was primarily as keen players of computer games.

Year 7 students tended to have greater access to computers and computer rooms, with at least 20 computers in them. However, again very few students spoke about the significance of using computers for learning. A few students were observed using the OASIS in the library and Design and Technology work was completed on the computer. In these isolated cases teachers were involved directly assisting students with their use.

Key findings

The use of computers is not common in either the Year 6 or Year 7 classrooms.

Students in Year 6 have less access to computer resources in schools, particularly hardware.

Assessment

We were surprised to find in Stage 1 that assessment of literacy practices was rarely addressed by Year 6 teachers. When investigating artefacts and asking probing questions it was found that most teachers relied on a range of strategies - informal observations, listening to students read, administering formal and routine tests (such as cloze passages and spelling tests), and by examining work samples. They also observed students writing and conducted conferences. The criteria for assessment varied. Some teachers took an "error-hunt" approach and looked specifically at spelling, grammar, vocabulary and punctuation in writing. Others focussed on content and context and examined writing for aspects such as degree of creativity.

Assessment in Year 7 was more formal. Students were frequently tested at the beginning of Year 7 on their reading ability and were graded accordingly. Throughout lessons, students were often reminded about tests and the importance of assessment, although not surprisingly, this was focussed on assessment of learning not literacy. Special assignments were set as an evaluative measure and formal tests were conducted across all KLA's - most requiring a significant degree of reading. Year 7 students completed half yearly and yearly examinations. Informal assessments were completed using comprehension exercises, writing activities, tasks relating to novels, reading aloud in class, spelling tests, marking of books and homework.

Year 6 parents were informed of their child's progress through interviews, letters, phone calls and written reports. Similarly, in Year 7 reports were sent out twice a year and the schools held regular Parent/Teacher interviews. Contact was made with the parents by phone or letter where necessary.

Year 6 reports tended to detail specific aspects of language and literacy learning including writing, spelling, handwriting, talking, listening, reading (oral) and comprehension. Most schools only gave a grading for performance and effort. Year 7 reports tended to be not so specific in the categories assessed. Comprehension, writing and language, speaking and listening were mentioned in one school, but usually language and literacy was under the heading English. One school identified "ability to read competently", and "ability to write for different audiences" as significant competencies. Marks, class average and position in class were generally reported. Comments were of a general nature and related to student personalities or effort. One school highlighted the students' literacy problems and offered suggestions for remedying them.

Key findings

Assessment in Year 6 tended to be varied and ongoing, although there was little evidence of active assessment observed during our time in classrooms suggesting that it is not closely integrated with teaching and learning. Assessment in Year 7 was more formally carried out in order to evaluate student's knowledge and understanding of

content material. It was dependent primarily on marks for a range of assessment tasks and regular topic tests as well as half yearly and yearly assessments.

Homework

Our Stage 1 observations confirmed that regular homework tasks were set in ten of the thirteen Year 6 classes. Expectations were minimal and the homework involved the learning of tables or a spelling list, looking up the meaning of words, completing projects, or reading a special book for home reading . In a few schools homework sheets were given out on Monday to be completed by Friday. Homework tasks often centred on Maths and English. In one class, daily homework was written on the board and could be done during class time when other work was finished.

During Stage 2 of the project these same students when in Year 7 commented that there was more homework than in Year 6. Homework was set in almost all KLAs across all secondary schools. Homework tasks were often set at the end of the lesson. Students were assigned three main kinds of homework: finishing off work started in class to be ready for the next lesson, specific exercises (especially in Maths) to be done for the next lesson; and assignments set to be completed by a specific date. Novels for English were expected to be read at home, and Maths was cited by students as the KLA with the heaviest homework commitment.

Key findings

It appears that students were assigned far more homework in Year 7 than in Year 6. In Stage 2 many of our case study students commented that this was the main reason that they now had difficulty finding time to read for pleasure.

The homework set was often completing unfinished work and as time consuming as it was, it was frequently 'busy' work and inconsequential. It frequently involved the use of literacy, but the literacy demands were not great.

Talk

Talk is closely related to literacy. It is commonly associated with reading and writing, is evident as students negotiate meaning, and is integral to the support that teachers and peers offer to literacy.

The most common form of talk in Year 6 was discussion or brainstorming, and this occupied over 50% of all classroom sanctioned talk observed. This occurred either as a whole class activity or in small groups which reported back to the whole class. Discussions often focussed on social issues, books read, or involved the sharing of ideas by teachers and students.

During our Stage 1 classroom observations group work and student/student interaction were frequently observed in Year 6. Students were encouraged to consult with each other on literacy matters. In all classes there was some formal group work. Students were often assigned to groups and roles were defined by the teacher, while on other occasions students formed friendship groups. In seven schools, group work occupied a large proportion of the day.

Discussion was also common in Year 7 classes (observed for 42.9% of sanctioned talk time), but class discussion rather than group work, was more common than in Year 6 classes. Where seating allowed, there was some informal discussion during lessons, and in a few lessons, especially practical subjects, students were directed to work together. However, usually in Year 7 classes teachers required students to work on their own and not talk to others. In spite of this, at times students were observed helping each other in literacy related tasks such as assisting one another with spelling, with unfamiliar words when reading, using computer programs, and seeking information in the library.

In both Year 6 and Year 7 classes almost half of all classroom talk was from the teacher. However, there was variation in the type of teacher talk from Year 6 to Year 7. In Year 6 classes directive/disciplinary talk (correcting, warning, threatening etc) occurred for 22.8% of all classroom talk time. In Year 7 this rose to 33.3% overall and was as high as 63.1% at the inner city high NESB school (see Table 5.8).

Table 5.8 Comparison of proportion of time devoted to specific oral genres for primary and secondary schools by community groups.

All figures represent % of time observed

	Schools									
	Inner City High NESB		Urban Disadv.		Urban Mid.Class		Rural		Total Average	
	Prim.	Sec	Prim	Sec	Prim	Sec	Prim	Sec	Prim	Sec
Directive/Discipline	21	63.1	25	27.6	22.6	9.6	21.6	22.5	22.8	33.3
Explanation	26.7	10.1	29.5	29.6	20	24.7	29.6	30.7	26.7	23.8
Question/Answer	15.7	13.7	11.75	24.5	19.3	23.4	18	20	15.8	20.4
Brainstorming	36.6	13.1	33.75	18.1	38	32	30.6	26.5	34.7	22.5

One of the consequences of the dominance of this type of talk was that the amount of teacher talk devoted to explanations or the offering of information was more limited in primary (23.8% overall compared to 26.7% in Year 6). However, the contrast was even more marked in School A with this type of instructional talk only accounting for 10.1% of all talk time. This was associated with serious discipline problems which frequently meant that learning was disrupted. As reported in the case studies, this became frustrating for some students. It appeared to be difficult to conduct class discussions in some Year 7 classes because of the behaviour problems and disruptive nature of some students. Class discussions that were held centred on an idea, concepts or revision of content. It appeared that classroom organisation (for example, the arrangement of furniture), often impinged upon the type of talk that occurred. Another interesting finding was that Year 6 teachers allowed more interaction between students. Teacher/student interaction involved the whole class and often students sat together on the floor and "talked" with the teacher. Praise and encouragement by the teacher was evident and

freely given on an individual and class basis. Teachers were often seen talking to small groups or individuals, while the class was working.

Year 7 teachers tended to offer students individual support as they walked around the room supervising work. Advice was offered and individual students were praised and encouraged. No informal whole class "chats" were observed. Some attempts were made but quickly abandoned when behavioural problems erupted.

In summary, teacher directed, question and answer type lessons were predominant in Year 7. Year 7 teachers spoke more than the Year 6 teachers and were observed giving directions, disciplining students or explaining content to be covered. In Year 6 the emphasis seemed to be on teacher and student sharing together.

Key findings

It appears from our observations and the case studies conducted that it is necessary for students to respond to two different sets of teacher expectations relating to talk. In Year 6 students are expected to participate and interact with one another. In Year 7, students more likely to be expected to answer the teacher's question and complete their work with as little interruption to other students as possible.

The amount of teacher vs student talk varied considerably. The Year 7 teachers would frequently talk at the class and respond to students on an individual basis. The Year 6 teachers tended to discuss and negotiate more with students.

Supporting literacy

As well as describing the literacy practices encountered in Year 6 and 7 classes our project was concerned with the description of the forms of support that teachers offer students as they read and write. Our concern was with the role of the teacher, the responsibilities expected of students to support each other, and the resources used to support literacy and its use for learning.

The role of the teacher

Our observations of Year 6 classrooms and our detailed case studies confirmed that Year 6 teachers tended to fill the role of facilitator far more often than explicit teacher. They were not seen by students as offering as much direct support as were their Year 7 counterparts, who taught content more directly. In Year 7, students regarded teachers as the experts in their particular content areas and most students felt they were well supported by their teachers.

Year 6 students were encouraged to seek support from their peers and they frequently worked in groups and shared their knowledge. Across the thirteen Year 6 classes, teaching styles varied considerably. In six classes, teachers directed the work 40% of the time. In the other classrooms, work was teacher directed approximately 20% of the time. In Years 6 and 7, teaching styles did not tend to reflect the needs of the students but was more a reflection of the teachers' personality and individual style.

Observations revealed that time was not a crucial factor in the organisation of the learning experiences of the Year 6 students. Lessons seemed not to be constrained by time and they proceeded until finished. However, most teachers expressed concern that there did not seem to be enough time to meet all the literacy needs of the students. In the Year 7 classrooms, teachers were often heard reminding students of the need to get on with their work because the period was almost over. Time tended to be an important consideration, affecting what happened in the classroom.

In four Year 6 classrooms, teachers worked collaboratively for some lessons. Students with specific needs were often observed receiving additional support from the Support Teachers or the ESL teachers. In Year 7, there was some collaborative teaching but it was only in special classes designed for students with special needs, usually in literacy.

Key findings

It appears that there is a different set of beliefs underpinning the relationships between teachers, students and learning in Years 6 and 7. Year 6 teachers tend to be less focussed on content and more on the processes involved in learning. They seemed to appreciate the importance of social interaction as crucial to learning and utilised more group activities compared to Year 7.

Year 7 teachers appeared to be focussed on content and ensuring students complete the prescribed curriculum. They were more constrained by their classroom environment, the school routine and timetable.

In terms of the Barnes-Shemilt (1974) Transmission-Interpretation model of teaching, it is clear that the Year 6 teachers fall towards the "Interpretation" end of the spectrum. That is, they tend to define learning as a process of assimilating and accommodating to new information and experiences. Year 7 teachers, on the other hand, fall towards the "Transmission" end, interpreting teaching as instruction, and learning as the acquisition of (usually) decontextualised skills. This finding is consistent with Barnes' and Shemilt's original 1974 findings concerning secondary schools.

Student responsibility

A comparison of Stage 1 and 2 data and the tracking of case study students indicated that Year 6 students appeared to have more choice in their literacy work, and seemed to take a more active role in the ownership and selection of what they read and wrote. Responsibility extended into aspects of their schooling including running the student council, conducting school assemblies and being valued decision makers in relation to school life. Almost all the schools had some form of Peer Support or Peer Tutoring and the Year 6 students played a critical role in the success of the programs.

In Year 7 there seemed to be fewer opportunities for students to be responsible for their own learning or to be seen as decision makers in what happens in the school. They tended to work alone and carry out the instructions set by the teacher.

In Year 7, students generally did not have the opportunity to select their reading material. In only two classes, were the students given a choice of what they might read

for English. The work in Year 7 in some subjects seemed to be much the same as work completed in Year 6. Some students commented that "the work was not as hard" as they thought it would be, that it was "the same as they had done last Year" , that they had "read the book in Year 6", or that "it was easy". One of the Year 7 teachers commented that he felt they were "treating the Year 7's like babies, giving them too many worksheets, wonderwords ...".

Key finding

There appears to be a reduction in opportunities for many students to take responsibility for learning and the content covered as they move from Year 6 to Year 7.

Library facilities

The library is a common site for the use of literacy. Library lessons were held every week in all primary schools. The librarian was often the Release from Face to Face Teacher as well, and so taught library and research skills to Year 6 students during that time. During library lessons students were involved in research, they were read to, and they borrowed books.

Over half the Year 6 students (57%) stated that they borrowed books from the school library. Almost all of these students borrowed novels. In Year 6 there was no mention of borrowing factual texts. Some students claimed not to borrow because they had a lot of books at home.

One secondary school had weekly library lessons. All schools had a few lessons at the beginning of the year to inform students about the library resources and how to access information. Primary teachers would often take students to the library for research and reading lessons. The librarian was not always involved. The library was used by some students during lunchtime, students were involved in playing video games, chess and reading magazines. Boys tended to be involved more in these pursuits while the girls tended to borrow books. There was a significant decrease in the number of students borrowing books in Year 7, only 38% compared to 57% in Year 6. This may simply reflect the more limited opportunities that high school students have because of the lack of weekly library lessons. Almost half these students (48%) borrowed factual texts to assist with their research. The library had become far more of a place to access information and students also sought information via computers. All the students who did not borrow stated that they did not have time to read.

Key findings

The borrowing habits of students varied from Years 6 to 7. Students tended to borrow more fictional texts in Year 6 and factual texts in Year 7.

Overall library borrowing rates declined in Year 7.

Resources

Year 6 classrooms were well equipped with a variety of texts. Students had access to non-factual texts during DEAR and extensive collections of children's literature were found in most classrooms. Teachers bulk-borrowed from the library, they shared their personal collections, or made available a class library. Collections ranged from 60 books to over 300 per room. More than half the classrooms had dictionaries, encyclopedias and factual texts. Some had atlases and thesauruses as well. Reading schemes were used by eleven of the thirteen schools.

The walls of the primary classrooms were covered with students' work and commercial posters. Displays included stories, poems, TV surveys, photos of events and excursions, theme work and art work. There were also copies of school and class rules, merit charts and checklists for process writing.

Interestingly, the blackboard in Year 6 was not utilised a great deal (certainly compared with Year 7). Teachers wrote spelling lists, work to be copied and, in four classrooms, the work for the day was written on the board. There was very little use of the blackboard as an explanatory tool.

The Year 7 classrooms were fairly devoid of resources. Many different teachers and different classes used the same room, so teachers brought their resources with them. Commercial charts and rules for behaviour, use of machines etc, were displayed in some rooms. Very little student work was displayed. Novels were displayed at the back of one room where DEAR occurred, but many of the books were old and not borrowed by students. In rooms where practical subjects were taught, the teachers displayed work and charts relevant to their subject area.

In Year 7, the teacher relied a lot on the use of the blackboard or whiteboard. Notes for students to copy were written on it, points were illustrated, and problems explained.

Textbooks were frequently used in Year 7. Almost all subjects used worksheets as a way of presenting work to the students. Textbooks were also part of virtually every subject, which was in stark contrast to Year 6 classes which did not appear to use them at all. Instead, there was extensive use of worksheets and workcards.

Parents were a vital resource in some of the primary schools especially the country schools. In six schools, parents came to the Year 6 classroom to assist with a variety of tasks, for example, conferencing, computers, reading assistance. Two schools implemented the Talk To A Literacy Learner (TTALL) program (Cairney & Munsie, 1992), where parents are taught to assist their child's literacy and learning. This however, did not involve the parents of Year 6 students. In eight of the thirteen classes, students commented that their parents helped them with their homework and project work.

Parental support was utilised in only one secondary school. They did not directly work with Year 7 students but attended computer workshops. Parents claimed they assisted their children at home with research projects, locating information, and checking school work. One parent typed her son's assignments and one stated that she corrected her son's spelling.

Key findings

There is a dramatic difference in the classroom environment from Year 6 to Year 7. Whereas in the primary classrooms student work was displayed and the room made to look inviting, secondary classrooms were generally barren. It would appear that students moving from room to room and the problems with vandalism make it difficult to display students' work and resources. Unfortunately, this does little to enhance the nature of the learning environment.

The use of textbooks and basic aids like the blackboard vary from Year 6 to Year 7. Whereas secondary teachers use textbooks constantly and make use of the blackboard in almost every lesson, this was not the case in the Year 6 classes observed. Worksheets were used extensively in both primary and secondary.

Year 6 teachers were more inclined to use parents to assist in classrooms, perhaps because they had the opportunity of getting to know the parents over an extended period of time. However, there also appeared to be a perception that the parents of secondary students were not interested in involvement in high school, nor were their children keen to see them there.

Literacy and target groups

The provision of support to students from specific target groups was one of the concerns of this project. However, this has been a constant source of anxiety for the research team. This reason has been relatively simple, throughout the project the specific target groups have been relatively 'invisible' and special provisions for them far from obvious. A reading of our report could suggest that we have not focussed attention on NESB, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, South Pacific Islander, isolated communities and children with disabilities. However, this was not the case. At every stage of our research we have attempted to both observe students from specific target groups (note the diversity represented in the case studies) and the support strategies used by teachers to assist their literacy and learning. Evidence of differences compared with 'mainstream' students has been difficult to find. Our discussion of differences in literacy and support follows.

The needs of *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders* students were addressed in 3 of the 13 Primary Schools by the Aboriginal Student Support and Parents Association (ASSPA). This program is funded by DEET and involves parents and Aboriginal aides, and provides homework centres. Even though there were Aboriginal students in four of the schools in which we observed, there were no Aboriginal students in any of the Year 6 classes. Due to the limited number of Year 6 classes this could not be rectified. While no attempt was made to exclude this target group funding was not provided by DEET to explore the needs of this group. As a result, we did not include the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as a selection criteria. One secondary school had an Aboriginal Officer and the students met with her on a one to one basis whenever needed. However, the number of Aboriginal students represented in Year 7 classes was relatively low and there was no apparent difference in the treatment or programs they received compared to other students.

One group that obviously did gain special support as a consequence of schooling was *that of students from isolated and rural communities*. School D provided them with access to resources not available at home (or even near to home) and individual attention, especially in the small primary schools. However, it is fair to say that the treatment they received was no different than that available to other students. It needs to be noted that one disadvantage faced by small rural primary schools was the lack of Support Teachers. There were no Support Teachers in the rural schools we visited, with the exception that one had a special Moderately Intellectually Disabled (IM) class for students with learning difficulties. Library facilities and supplies were up to date and well stocked. The Small Schools Travelling Library supplied additional books. One secondary school in particular was involved in two major literacy programs, "Literacy and Learning" and "Frameworks". Peer tutoring and Remedial Classes were established in this school.

Attempts were made in a number of schools to meet the needs of *economically disadvantaged students*. Seven of the 13 primary schools received Disadvantaged Schools Component (formerly DSP) funding in 1993. Most of their submissions for funding had a literacy component. The programs included: Empowering through literacy (narrative and report writing), writing skills improvement in variety of genres used, functional literacy, early intervention, reading and genre writing, action resource program in Kindergarten, and English for Everyone. Most of these programs were designed for all students within the school, and so did not focus specifically on the needs of Year 6 or transition. One added advantage for DSP schools was that they received substantial grants for the purchase of additional books and resources.

In catering for the needs of *students with learning difficulties*, Support Teachers were employed in all schools except those in the rural areas. Many were employed on a part-time basis, although in some large schools were employed full-time. Support Teachers carried out their duties in a variety of ways - withdrawing groups of students for special classes, assisting in classrooms, advising teachers. In some schools they organised specific programs which included:

- * a support tuition program linking in with Home Help;
- * a peer Tutoring Program (involving Year 6 students reading to Kindergarten);
- * support of Reading Recovery Program.

Teachers also said they utilised the school counsellor and other teachers to assist students with difficulties. Year 6 students also offered peer support to students with specific needs.

In all secondary schools there was support for students with learning difficulties. Three of the schools had Support Teachers who worked alongside the class teacher. In one school the focus appeared to be on helping discipline students rather than learning.

Special programs and classes were evident, including:

- * a peer tutoring program for reading;
- * a special reading class;
- * a class for behavioural problems (this involved 2 teachers and 9 students);
- * remedial classes for students in the lowest strand (involving reduced student numbers and fewer subject teachers).

The diversity of needs was not as obviously catered for in Year 7 classes. Within classrooms, there was little distinction made between students and their ability or capacity to carry out the prescribed tasks. Little group work was observed. If students had problems the only form of specific assistance was withdrawal from the mainstream. In such classes learning was usually well controlled with little choice of reading material or writing tasks. In most classes students read the same book irrespective of reading ability, background, special needs or interest.

Students from non-English speaking backgrounds were catered for in seven of the 13 primary schools with ESL teachers. However, few adjustments were made to the teaching/learning style of the Year 6 teachers to accommodate the language and cultural diversity of the students within the classroom. The ESL teachers were used in a variety of ways. Mostly they were employed to assist new arrivals and children in the early years. The role of the ESL teacher varied from school to school. Some were involved in team teaching, others withdrew students for language lessons.

The ESL teacher was only observed helping the NESB students in three classrooms. In one classroom, NESB students acted as interpreters and explained activities to other students. A Community Language Teacher was attached to three schools and helped with interpretation work for parents, teachers and students.

Two schools had books in other languages in the library. In one school Arabic was offered to all students in the school with the intention of raising cultural awareness.

Two secondary schools had ESL teachers. In one school, the teacher was new and worked with Year 7 students helping a teacher with Maths, English and Science while he got to know the students. In the other school, the ESL teacher worked with the English teacher and a special withdrawal group of students in English.

Only one observation was made of NESB students receiving specific instructions in addition to those given to the whole class. On this occasion the teacher took her time in a French lesson to explain the meaning of the words in English first before translating them into French. The teacher claimed that "many NESB students do not understand the English meaning of some words, let alone translate them into French".

What was overwhelmingly obvious from our observations and the experiences of our case study students is that few adjustments are made for NESB students. The school with the greatest discipline problems was school A which has 85% NESB students representing a variety of first languages with Arabic dominating (41% of these students). In spite of this diverse population, little was done which was different from other schools with far more homogeneous populations. Not surprisingly, much of classroom time was devoted to discipline. As the results outlined above show, at School A teachers talked more often and used more disciplinary language (63.1% of all teacher talk) and less explanation (10.1%) than at any other school (see Table 5.9). Such a pattern can only serve to disadvantage students more who are already at a disadvantage because they are using English as a second language. While it needs to be stressed that many of the teachers in this school would see themselves as powerless to address what they see as a situation caused by the behaviour of difficult students, this cycle needs to be broken. A telling piece of evidence is that the teacher talk of the primary feeder schools for this high school was consistent with that at other schools. In fact, one school actually had a lower proportion of teacher disciplinary talk than any other primary school (see Table

5.9). This indicates that the language used by these students' primary teachers was quite different from that experienced in high school. This suggests that the problems being experienced in Year 7 may well be reflective of a school system and teaching styles that simply do not address the specific needs of NESB students.

Table 5.9 Comparison of proportion of time devoted to oral genres per primary class observed.

All figures represent the proportion (%) of total class time observed.

Inner City	Schools														Ave
	Urban High NESB		Urban Disadvantaged				Rural Middle Class				Total				
	A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	B3	B4	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3		
Directive/Discipline	7	24	32	20	16	36	28	40	16	12	27	17	21	22	
Explanation	30	30	20	35	30	37	16	21	18	21	33	26	30	26	
Question/Answer	15	12	20	10	17	12	8	16	8	34	21	29	4	15	
Brainstorming	48	34	28	35	37	15	48	23	58	33	19	28	45	34	

Key findings

While additional assistance existed in most schools to cater for specific target groups, little evidence was found of adjustments being made within Year 6 and 7 classes to reflect the special needs of these students. Extra support was usually provided through withdrawal or the provision of specialist staff. This was particularly marked in the secondary school due to the greater use of whole class lessons and teacher directed discussion.

The targeted groups were observed to "fit" within the classroom routine and very few measures appeared to be taken by class teachers which recognised the specific needs of these students.

At one high school the failure to address the needs of NESB students was particularly marked. This was associated with significant and debilitating discipline problems. Teachers used far more discipline related language and spent less time explaining and assisting learning. While it is difficult to establish to what extent the behavioural problems reflected or caused this situation, it was obvious that change was needed in the way learning was structured and supported in this school.

Conclusions and recommendations

One of the clearest (and in some senses surprising) conclusions that we can draw from our study is that the transition from primary to secondary school did not cause major problems for the vast majority of students observed in this study. One of the possible reasons for this is that in all schools in which we worked active efforts were made to ease students across the primary/secondary school barrier. It would seem that schools and school systems have taken note of earlier reports which suggested a range of

specific actions to improve the transition process. While the structural changes suggested by reports like the Plowden report (1967) such as creating middle schools have not been introduced, most of the other recommendations of this and other reports (e.g. Whitta, 1975; Eltis et al, 1987) have been implemented. For example, most schools now conduct orientation programs, use peer support, transfer information from primary to secondary (and vice versa), and use a variety of cross school visitation programs for staff and students in Years 6 and 7.

Our findings are remarkably consistent with those of Power and Cotterell (1979) which found differences in student perceptions of the environments from primary to secondary school, and Eltis et al (1987) which found that the transition was a positive experience for most students.

Like Power and Cotterell we also found little evidence of perceived difficulty in adjusting to this different environment. Similarly, students in our study arrived in secondary school expecting it to be more difficult and challenging than primary. What we were unable to do in this study was to test whether student satisfaction declined over time as Power and Cotterell suggested occurred later in year. There was no evidence to suggest that this was the case over the period of our visitations, but further interviewing in late Year 7 and early Year 8 would have been interesting if time had permitted.

Recommendation 1

Schools should be encouraged to continue the use of a variety of transition programs, the most effective of which would appear to be:

- * the exchange of information between primary and secondary schools concerning curriculum, literacy expectations, resources used, and special programs for students in various target groups;
- * short term staff exchange between primary and high schools (e.g. visits to the primary school by specialist teachers to offer regular enrichment programs in late primary; Year 6 class visits to high school to use specialist facilities and experience secondary classes);
- * alterations in program and organisational procedures in late primary to prepare students for high school, such as the use of specialist teachers, team teaching, movement to and from different classrooms for specialist lessons, use of computer rooms etc;
- * organised information sessions for parents and students in late primary concerning curriculum, organisation, teacher expectations, and teaching style;
- * the provision of peer support programs in Year 7;
- * opportunities for student involvement in a range of extra curricular activities in Year 7;
- * visits by secondary students back to their former primary schools to talk with Year 6 students;

- * Year 7 orientation camps;
- * meetings of primary and secondary teachers to discuss common concerns.

A second significant finding in our study was that literacy is a dominant practice in both Year 6 and 7 classes. In fact, students spent 58% of their class time engaged in literacy in Year 6 and 45% of their time in Year 7. This represented more time than for any other school practice.

However, while there was a similar high volume of literacy across the transition years we found that there was variation in the specific literacy practices in each year. For example, students in Year 6 wrote far more pieces of extended discourse than in Year 7 (39% compared to 28% of all writing), while Year 7 was characterised by more short answer pieces (45% compared to 33% in Year 6). Interestingly, this was far higher than that observed in the Writing and Reading Assessment Program (WRAP) conducted in South Australia (Education Department of South Australia, 1992).

There was also considerable variation in the type of reading across the grades. In Year 6 research related reading was the most prevalent form of reading (33%), whereas in Year 7 this represented only 12.9% of all observed reading. There were similar amounts of oral reading and comprehension, but as the above description of findings details this varied in form from Year 6 to 7. In Year 6 oral reading was often from literary texts in group situations, whereas in Year 7 it was often from textbooks or the board as part of the whole class. An interesting contrast occurred in silent reading. This was more common in Year 7 (44.2% of all reading time) compared to Year 6 (29%) but it was more likely to be from textbooks in Year 7 and literature in Year 6.

Another overriding difference across the transition period was that literacy was taught far more in Year 6 as a skill in its own right, whereas in Year 7 it was more often used as a vehicle for learning. For example, comprehension sheets and cloze exercises were equally prevalent in both years, but in Year 6 they were often literacy instructional tools, while in Year 7 they were used to reinforce learning in specific KLAs. The latter finding is also consistent with previous work that has suggested that all secondary subject teachers must also be teachers of literacy (e.g. Irvin & Connors, 1989). While there is evidence that some attention is paid to spelling, vocabulary and grammar, much more needs to be done. Above all students need specific support as they grapple with a variety of written genres as they engage in extended discourse in a range of Key Learning Areas.

Recommendation 2

There is obviously a need for professional development in literacy for both primary and secondary teachers. Some of the existing programs such as LLIMY (South Australia) Frameworks (Cambourne & Turbill) and Content Area Literacy Learning (Curriculum Corporation) may have a role to play for secondary teachers, while a large number of relevant programs exist for primary school teachers. However, there may be a need for a new kind of course for primary teachers that places more stress on the use of literacy for

learning, rather than simply the learning of literacy. The following specific issues need to be addressed:

- * primary teachers need to look more closely at literacy's role as a vehicle for learning;
- * secondary teachers on the other hand need to consider whether additional attention needs to be given to instructional support for specific literacy practices.
- * both primary and secondary teachers need new strategies to assess literacy practices as part of the teaching and learning processes, including a range of interactive strategies that are more sensitive to the complexities of literacy.
- * secondary teachers need to be more aware of primary literacy practices so that students have opportunities that go beyond Year 6 experiences.

Another significant finding from our work is the failure to observe many compensatory measures being taken by classroom teachers to acknowledge or meet the needs of specific target groups. This suggests that teachers still teach primarily to the 'middle' of their classes. This was particularly marked in the inner city high school which had over 85% NESB students (School A). McGee's (1989) finding that lower socio-economic students take longer to adjust to secondary school than those from middle class backgrounds may be relevant here. Certainly, there were far more problems in this high school than occurred in its primary feeder schools the year before, and the only two students who actually experienced problems transferring to secondary were in School A.

There is also evidence to suggest that students who have specific learning styles may be more successful than others at making the transition from Year 6 to 7 (Ward et al, 1982). The finding that generally students were treated the same in our study, irrespective of special needs, raises the concern that some students might be destined to have difficulties purely because of their specific differences. This is supported in the literature by the finding that students of lower ability make slower progress when they enter high school (Paredes, 1990), although it needs to be said that we saw little difference based simply on ability in the case study students that we followed. The failure of teachers to make adjustments for NESB students (and indeed other target groups) may also reflect factors as diverse as the failure of teacher education programs to address the specific needs of various target groups, or simply the constraints of the curriculum to teach content within set timeframes. There has been progress in relation to teacher education in some states. For example, in NSW no teacher will be employed from 1996 who has not done at least one core special education subject as part of their training. As well, there have been a number of significant professional development programs developed to focus on target groups (e.g. "ESL in the Mainstream" program for mainstream teachers in NSW). More recently, the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia has been attempting to negotiate the introduction of a common post graduate diploma in language education and applied linguistics across Australia's universities. This is seen as a major professional development opportunity for teachers. The development and implementation of the ESL Scales nationally may also have an impact in this area.

Recommendation 3

Universities and employing authorities in Australia should be encouraged to negotiate the development of a plan for the preservice and ongoing professional development of teachers in the following areas:

- * understanding of the need to develop sound partnerships between the school and community and the skills to be able to establish such a relationship.
- * understanding of the needs of NESB students, students with disabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- * the ability to structure learning environments that meet the needs of the above target groups;
- * knowledge of the cultural diversity of school communities and the skills to be able to respond to and acknowledge this diversity.

Another finding which concerned our research team was the repeated suggestion by our case study students that the work load in secondary was such that they no longer had time to read literature for pleasure. While this is only one form of literacy it is an important literacy practice which should be encouraged. It would appear that the use of DEAR in the secondary school is largely ineffective. It is our belief that schools need to give more attention to this important literacy practice. It is dependent on teachers understanding the value and purpose of such a program. It also needs a commitment from staff and availability of resources if it is to be implemented effectively.

This is consistent with the findings of Bintz (1993) whose work was motivated by the claims of some that reading interests decline in the high school years (Farr, Fay, Myers & Ginsberg, 1987; Paris, Lipson & Wixson, 1983). The concept of "resistance" that he developed is of interest to our findings. Like Bintz we found that students appeared to be losing much of their "appetite for reading." (Bintz, 1993, p.606). His three portraits of student readers (avid, passive and reluctant) were also found to be identifiable in our study. Like the teachers in the Bintz study, many of the secondary teachers that we observed appeared to believe "that the problem of reading and reading failure was caused by students' low interest in school reading [and] that tightening classroom control over reading, forcing them to read, and holding them accountable are necessary to solve the problem (p. 612)."

Bintz argues that it does little good to force students to read materials that they have no voice in selecting. If this is done school reading becomes an imposition, and students begin to use shortcuts as a form of active resistance to avoid specific types of literacy. Most of these behaviours were identifiable in the students from High School A.

Recommendation 4

Secondary schools should attempt to address the falling away of student interest in reading for pleasure. This might be addressed by:

- * recognising the material that students read outside school as legitimate;
- * building a component of literature sharing into Year 7 English classes;
- * creating class libraries in English 'home' classrooms and other Key Learning Area rooms;
- * encouraging secondary KLA teachers to read with and to their students;
- * encouraging secondary English teachers to recommend books to their students;
- * introducing (or giving more attention to) wide reading programs as part of the English syllabus and other Key Learning Areas.
- * ensuring that books chosen for use in Year 7 have not been read in Year 6.

A further finding from our case studies was that the literacy demands of secondary school were in many cases less demanding than those in the primary school. While this may be an advantage for those students who experienced difficulty in primary (and there is some case study evidence to support this), for many students this must inevitably have the tendency to hold them back, not allowing them to be pushed into what Vygotsky (1978) calls the Zone of Proximal Development. This may in part explain the 'flattening' of student literacy growth that Hill, Holmes-Smith and Rowe (1993) found in their study in Victoria. Rather than growth being slowed because literacy demands are too high, growth may be slowed because students essentially experience the same type (and difficulty) of literacy practices in Year 7 as they did in Year 6. This finding is consistent with those of the WRAP report in South Australia and requires further investigation.

Recommendation 5

Year 7 teachers should be encouraged to conduct detailed analyses of the literacy practices of their Year 6 feeder schools and their new Year 7 students. This should include:

- * readability of text and reference books used;
- * literature used in English;
- * the types of literacy tasks assigned across the curriculum;
- * student independent reading lists;
- * reading and writing expectations of Year 6 teachers;

- * student literacy standards, using measures sensitive to the complexity of reading practices;
- * the variety of written genres used in Year 6;
- * the use of literacy in Year 6 homework tasks.

A surprising finding was that computers are rarely used in Year 6 classrooms. While usage is still relatively limited in Year 7, greater opportunities are provided. It would appear that students are simply not being given the opportunity to use computers in the primary school for much more than games. In Year 6 classroom it was rare to find more than one computer in each classroom, and this was not used frequently or for a range of purposes. In secondary schools more computers were found but these were usually in laboratories and were only available for limited numbers of periods in Design and Technology subjects.

Recommendation 6

There should be an increased emphasis given to the use of technology in classrooms. This could be achieved through strategies which include:

- * encouraging university faculties of education and educational employing authorities to jointly review the preservice and inservice technology needs of teachers and implement a cohesive plan for increasing teacher computer literacy;
- * the allocation of additional computer resources must be provided as a matter of some urgency for all primary schools. As a minimum requirement this should consist of permanent access to computers in all classrooms, a ratio of no less than one computer to 10 students, a software library, and access to the electronic 'super highway' for each primary and secondary school;
- * funding should be provided to fund several pilot program development projects which link preservice and inservice teacher education with the ongoing computer literacy needs of students in primary classrooms.

Conclusion

Our study has shown that literacy is a dominant part of classroom activities in both Year 6 and 7. Literacy is quite pervasive and is integral to learning across the curriculum. What was apparent from our work was that it varies from Year 6 to 7. The literacy practices across the transition period have commonalities, but there are also distinct differences.

Surprisingly, these differences did not seem to cause significant problems for most students in terms of their adjustment to high school. However, our results do raise a number of concerns in relation to the many specific target groups who traditionally have experienced difficulty with school learning, including literacy. Our work has indicated that

few adjustments are made in literacy for students with specific needs. This issue alone is worthy of further study. Little appeared to be done to promote literacy and reading for pleasure. Resources were found to be minimal and did not instil a desire to read, but rather a need to read to access specific content information.

On a positive note, the ease with which students make the transition to high school appears to be testimony to the many excellent transition strategies that have been implemented in Australia in response to a range of reports on this topic in the last two decades. It is obvious that great progress has been made in this area and hence schools and teachers are to be commended for this progress. Nevertheless, further professional development is needed. In Volume 1 of this report, we outline some strategies for using our findings which hopefully will assist schools to address transition from primary to secondary school.