

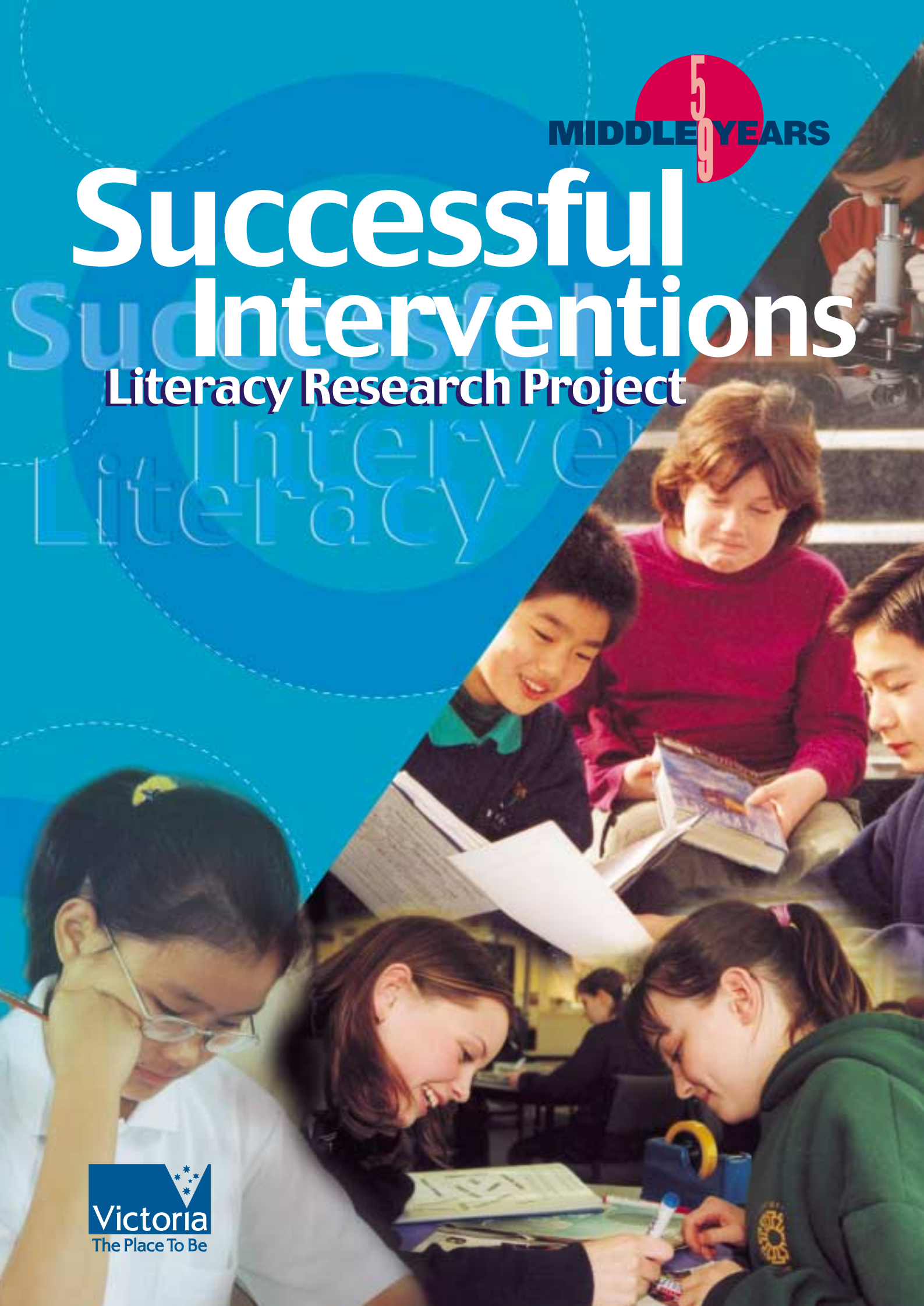
MIDDLE YEARS

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# Successful Interventions

Literacy Research Project

Successful  
Interventions  
Literacy





### **Successful Interventions Literacy Research Project**

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## Context and purposes of the study



This report describes the conduct and outcomes of an observational, analytical study of literacy intervention strategies and programs used in Year 7 classes in forty-four Victorian secondary schools during 1999. The investigation was undertaken within the three-phase major project, *Successful Interventions: A Secondary Literacy and Numeracy Initiative*, conducted by the Victorian Department of Education Employment and Training in partnership with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria.

The aim of the project was to:

1. make comparative observations of a range of literacy intervention programs and strategies as a research basis for providing advice on existing literacy intervention programs
2. make recommendations for the further development of literacy intervention strategies at the secondary school level.

This is consistent with the national commitment to improved literacy and numeracy learning espoused in the

National Literacy and Numeracy Plan and detailed in *Literacy for All* (DEETYA, 1998).

The specific aims of the project were to:

1. investigate a range of literacy intervention programs and strategies used with students in Year 7 in 1999
2. monitor the progress of individuals and groups identified at Year 7 as being at educational risk because of low literacy achievement
3. analyse the performance of all participating students on a common assessment instrument in the early and concluding phases of the study
4. analyse both quantitative and qualitative data relating to literacy intervention programs and strategies
5. evaluate the effectiveness of the literacy intervention programs
6. make appropriate recommendations about a number of intervention approaches against a set of agreed criteria.

## Definition of intervention

The definition of 'intervention' used by the researchers was broad. It included any specific support provided to students to help overcome poor literacy performance, and ranged from out-of-class strategies such as *Making a Difference* to whole in-class programs such as *WA First Steps*. A complicating factor noted was that most schools were implementing mixtures of various strategies.

A broad view of 'literacy interventions' was deliberately used within the project, which focused on programs and strategies based on the expectation that all students can be successful given appropriate teaching and learning opportunities. The programs and strategies investigated included those designed to improve literacy learning for all students.

The outcomes of this research continue the work commenced in Phase 1 of the major project, which was an environmental scan of literacy programs and strategies conducted in 1998 by the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE).

School selection in Phase 2 was based on information derived from the VATE environmental scan and additional information provided by the three education systems. Large and small schools were among those selected. The selection of schools was such that a wide range of programs and strategies was included in the project. The selection of schools also made it possible to investigate the operation of some of the same programs in different contexts. All programs and strategies were already planned or in place in the schools selected.

Schools were provided with small research grants to enable them to implement the programs and strategies as planned. The Department of Employment, Education and Training managed the allocation of these grants.

Specific selection criteria for participating schools included:

- ◆ current use of an intervention program or programs in the school;
- ◆ the currency of a literacy policy and the position of a literacy coordinator in the school; and
- ◆ a school population including one or more of the groups identified in the *1996 National School English Literacy Survey* (Masters and Forster 1997) on the basis of socio economic background, gender, indigenous background, and language background other than English.

## Data collection

### Quantitative Data

The *Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers* (DART) was selected to provide measures of students' literacy achievement in this project. The DART materials were used in 1996 for the National Schools English Literacy Survey (NSELS). All students in the study were assessed at the beginning and end of Year 7.

The research practice underpinning this design combined quantitative and qualitative data providing a broad base for evaluating the effectiveness of a range of literacy intervention programs and strategies.

The qualitative data was derived from a number of perspectives, including teachers' reports and reflections, site visits and observations of the enacted curriculum of the literacy programs and strategies, and individual student case studies.

A rigorous literacy assessment process using the ACER DART materials (Forster et al. 1994) provided quantitative data on background variables and growth in literacy across a whole school year for students involved in special intervention programs. This provided clear information about students' levels of performance in the context of the various literacy programs and strategies. Other quantitative data included information about schools and student background variables.

Two sets of quantitative data were collected:

- 1 Background variable data on all participating Year 7 students included gender, whether English was the first or a later language; whether the student was of indigenous background, and the occupations of parents.
- 2 In addition to DART Year 7 data collected at the beginning and end of the study, DART assessment in reading was also conducted at the beginning and end of the Monash summer school with students involved in the intensive tutorial sessions incorporated in the course for teachers.

### **Qualitative data**

Three sets of qualitative data were collected:

- 1 Observations and anecdotal comments were collected in logbooks kept in Semester 1 and Semester 2 by all teachers involved.
- 2 Observations of the intervention programs in twenty of the schools focused on the operation of the intervention program within the structures and resources of the school's curriculum and organisational structures.
- 3 A fine-grained case study was made of a Year 7 student in ten of the participating schools.

The range of qualitative data provided insights from a range of key perspectives. It also reflected attitudinal changes in students' approaches to literacy that would not have been evident in the achievement data.

In general, students whose achievement was low on the first DART assessment showed improvement in the second assessment.

Trends in achievement were calculated for each participating school, allowing for differences in background and student starting points.

The intervention programs operating in those schools that showed better than expected performance were further analysed to identify the features that may account for this. One common feature was the explicit connection in each of these schools between the mainstream program and the intervention strategy. It was possible to identify broad features of the programs and combinations of programs in these schools that tallied with the observations and reports in the qualitative data.

## Main findings, recommendations and implications for further research



### **Whole school policies and practices**

The whole school policies and practices that supported successful interventions included:

- ◆ the use early in Year 7 of transition information from primary schools, testing and teacher observation and judgement to identify students with low levels of literacy achievement
  - ◆ the targeting and monitoring of individual students identified as requiring literacy support
  - ◆ the provision of support, in appropriate contexts, that explicitly addresses the particular literacy learning needs of individual students
  - ◆ explicit and ongoing professional development providing knowledge of literacy and language development and a broad repertoire of literacy teaching strategies for teachers in all key learning areas (KLAs)
- 
- ◆ leadership, professional support and coordination provided by a school literacy coordinator with significant experience and knowledge of literacy education
  - ◆ staffing and organisational structures and timetabling that allow for flexible and varied groupings of students.

### **Classroom practices and strategies in all key learning areas**

Classroom practices and policies that effectively supported students' literacy learning included:

- ◆ sustained teaching of the full range of reading and writing skills specified in the English Curriculum and Standards Framework
- ◆ explicit teaching of the curriculum literacies of each KLA

- ◆ programs and strategies, in appropriate contexts, that address the particular literacy learning needs of individual students
- ◆ classroom practices inclusive of all students
- ◆ opportunities for students to receive one-to-one support from teachers and teaching aides in the classroom context
- ◆ reading materials and purposeful writing activities that engage students' interest
- ◆ regular, planned opportunities for students to engage in sustained reading and writing activities, in a variety of contexts
- ◆ regular and detailed monitoring of students' progress in literacy using a variety of observation and assessment strategies together with regular and frequent feedback to students
- ◆ clear lines of communication established and maintained between all KLA teachers of each class at the year level
- ◆ information communication technologies used to provide students with fresh opportunities to develop and demonstrate literacy skills
- ◆ acknowledgment of the diversity of interests and literacy practices that engage students at home and in other settings beyond the school
- ◆ opportunities for students to work in a variety of whole class and small group settings in teaching spaces appropriate to the activities.

### **Policies and practices for specific interventions**

Students with particular literacy learning difficulties benefited from intensive focused teaching and support provided on a short-term or longer basis through specific interventions. Key features of interventions that enabled them to improve their achievement levels in literacy included:

- ◆ identifying the specific literacy learning needs of the students and then drawing on a wide repertoire of teaching strategies to match support specifically to those needs
- ◆ providing structured, sequenced sessions in one-to-one or small group settings so students have regular opportunities to work on specific literacy needs over time
- ◆ maximising opportunities, in individual or small group contexts, for students to practise reading a range of texts, silently and aloud, and to practise writing both short and sustained texts
- ◆ creating opportunities for students to work regularly over time with a teacher or tutor with whom they can establish an effective working relationship
- ◆ recognising the importance of fostering students' confidence and self-esteem
- ◆ assisting students to develop more effective organisational skills
- ◆ linking the support provided in out-of-class settings with the work of the regular classroom
- ◆ acknowledging and celebrating students' progress in literacy

- ◆ constantly monitoring students' work in intervention programs and in regular classes, and adjusting programs and strategies to target identified needs
- ◆ providing intensive support for a short period, or sustained support over a longer period, as required
- ◆ where intervention programs involve withdrawal from regular classes, ensuring that all the teachers of a particular student are aware of the purpose and nature of the intervention program, and that they are frequently consulted regarding observed improvements or changes in the quality of the student's work
- ◆ establishing effective links between home and school, and maintaining regular communication with parents.

Observations and teacher reports indicated that all intervention programs and strategies resulted in increased student confidence and self-esteem.

A variety of contextual factors influence the capacity of schools to support students who are experiencing difficulty in literacy. These include funding, timetabling, expertise and continuity of staffing.

Teacher access to professional development which increases knowledge of literacy learning and teaching strategies for supporting low-achieving students is generally limited, although the repertoire of approaches in use across the forty-four schools was extensive and varied.

Time is required for the implementation of literacy initiatives. Schools frequently report the need for considerable time to allow for familiarisation and adjustments to a program.

## Recommendations

A review of all project data identified five key aspects in improving literacy learning in secondary schools:

1. Linking support for low-achieving students to teaching and learning in all KLAs.
2. Monitoring and collecting evidence of improved literacy learning.
3. Increasing students' self-esteem, confidence and motivation.
4. Changing attitudes and beliefs about responsibility for literacy learning in secondary schools.
5. Developing teacher knowledge about literacy learning and expanding teaching repertoires.

These key aspects were tabled for discussion at the end-of-year meeting attended by teachers from all schools involved in the project. Discussion groups at the meeting confirmed the centrality of these issues. It is, therefore, recommended that these five aspects be considered in future planning to enhance literacy learning in secondary schools.

## Implications for further research



Further research is needed in relation to:

- ◆ ways of providing teachers in all KLAs with professional development in approaches to literacy teaching in secondary schools and strategies for use with students needing additional support
- ◆ the development of programs with a clear structure and specific content for teachers and students
- ◆ the significance of the support of the school administration in all literacy initiatives
- ◆ the significance of the role of literacy coordinator
- ◆ ways of changing teacher beliefs and understandings in relation to the importance of explicit attention to literacy in all KLAs
- ◆ the nature and range of texts used in intervention programs
- ◆ ways of acknowledging and using the diversity of students' everyday literacy practices in classroom teaching programs and literacy intervention programs
- ◆ the effect of homework on literacy achievement, particularly the approaches to homework and the influence of parent involvement.

# Successful Interventions

Successful Intervention is part of the Commonwealth Secondary School Literacy and Numeracy Initiative to establish cross-sectoral projects focused on improving the development of literacy and numeracy of low-achieving secondary students. It was undertaken for the Department of Education, Employment and Training in partnership with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

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Research fellow (ACER)

Andrew Stephanou

Wendy Body

Lynne Darkin

Prue Anderson

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Many people contributed to the work of the *Successful Interventions Literacy Research Project*.

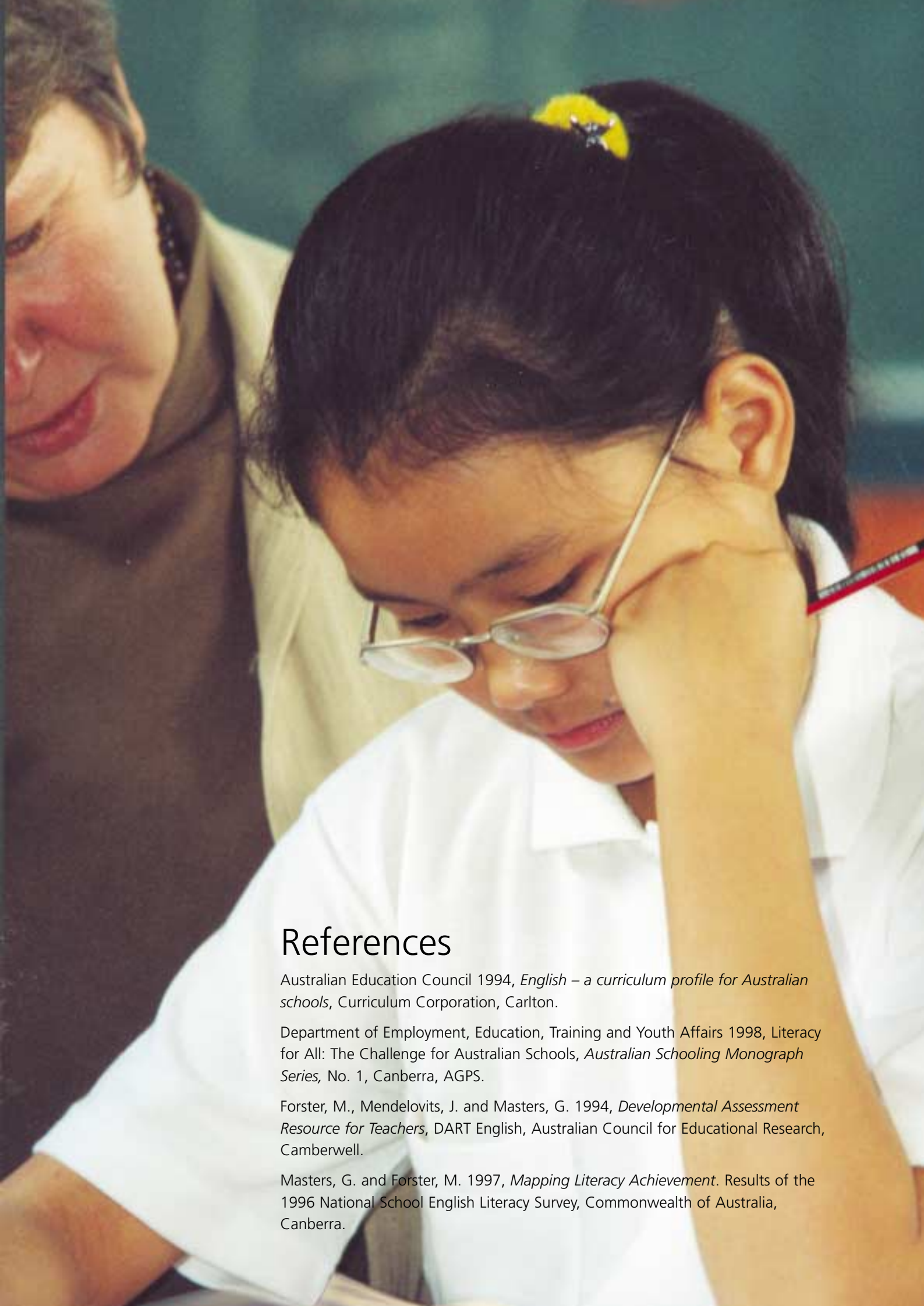
Special thanks are due to the students, teachers and principals in the forty-four project schools listed below. Throughout 1999 they willingly provided a wide range of data on the literacy programs and strategies in their schools. Literacy coordinators, who in many cases also coordinated the project, facilitated the data collection and liaised with ACER, played a key role in the project. Their work is acknowledged with many thanks.

The research team visited twenty of the schools on at least two occasions. Particular thanks are extended to the schools for their welcome and for the opportunity to conduct observational studies and data collection in their classrooms.

Special thanks are also due to Ms Sally Milburn who was Literacy Project Officer Years 5–10 from 1998–99 and worked closely with the ACER research team.

## Schools

Bairnsdale Secondary College, Bayview College Portland, Beechworth Secondary College, Broadmeadows Secondary College, Brunswick Secondary College, Catholic Ladies College Eltham, Catholic Regional College Melton, Collingwood College, Covenant College, Deer Park Secondary College, Dromana Secondary College, Eaglehawk Secondary College, Epping Secondary College, Essendon Keilor District Secondary College, Eumemmerring Secondary College (Fountain Gate Campus), FJC College Benalla, Frankston High School, Heatherhill Secondary College, Highview College Maryborough, Kurnai College (Morwell Campus), Lyndale Secondary College, MacKillop College, Marian College Sunshine, McGuire College, Monbulk College, Murtoa Secondary College, Newcomb Secondary College, Oakleigh Greek Orthodox College, Orbost Secondary College, Ovens Secondary College, Padua College Mornington, Presentation College Moe, Princes Hill Secondary College, Robinvale Secondary College, Simonds College West Melbourne, St John's Regional College Dandenong, St Paul's College Altona, Tallangatta Secondary College, Tyrrell College, Upper Yarra Secondary College, Werribee Secondary College, Wheelers Hill Secondary College, Wodonga West Secondary College.



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Strong literacy skills are the foundation of the pathway to success that allows children to participate fully in all spheres of life.

The Successful Interventions Secondary Research Project aims to assist schools and teachers in the delivery of literacy intervention programs that effectively improve literacy outcomes of students who have not achieved appropriate literacy skills.

An investigation of literacy intervention programs and strategies was carried out in forty-four Victorian schools.

The full report, including the research approach, literacy programs, DART assessments, and Volume 2, *Case Studies*, is available on the Middle Years Website at: [www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys](http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys)



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