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# LITERACY AND LEARNING IN THE MIDDLE YEARS

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## Major Report on the Middle Years Literacy Research Project

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April 2001

Undertaken for Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs through the Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria as part of the *Successful Interventions: A Secondary Literacy and Numeracy Initiative*.

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- This major report for the Middle Years Literacy Research Project, follows a series of progress reports generated over the life of the project. It draws together the approaches taken in the research and the rationale for these, and details the impact and outcomes of the research, in particular in the case study schools. This, together with a literature review, forms the basis for a series of recommendations.
- The recommendations have been designed to provide the three educational sectors within Victoria, with appropriate information to use as a basis for the advice they will develop on the policies, practices, resources and support required at a system and school level for the implementation of effective literacy education in the middle years.
- To ensure that the advice is most effectively developed and implemented, the report has been constructed to complement the current directions for middle years of schooling and in particular the current documents available to schools to guide them in middle years reform. In particular is *'The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action Years 5-9'* which was developed by the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET 1999) and was distributed to all Victorian government schools in 2000. To emphasise the links between Middle Years reform and Middle Years *Literacy* reform, the six 'Strategic Intentions' used in the DEET document to guide schools in their middle years planning, have been given a literacy focus, and used as a framework for the recommendations in the final section of this report.
- Within each of these Literacy Strategic Intentions are the pertinent recommendations, together with more details on the rationale behind them, what is required to implement them and the likely impact of their implementation. To provide a more practical focus for each recommendation and to highlight the scope for implementing them in a range of ways to suit the specific needs and context of different schools, 'Research Snapshots' are provided. These are mainly drawn from the case study schools involved in the research, but also include information from the literature review and information gathered from a range of other sources.
- The final recommendation in this report, links literacy to the *General Design for a Whole-School Approach to Effective Schooling* (Hill & Crévola 1997). a model for school improvement, which is detailed in a table on page 20 of *The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5-9*. The link has been achieved through the addition of a middle years literacy focus and essential literacy features, which are matched to each of the design elements to highlight the way each element can enable best practice in literacy education.
- While specific aspects and outcomes of the research in the case study schools are highlighted in the snapshots, a more detailed account of the context and experiences of these schools, as well as some of the specific strategies trialed, are included in the full case studies attached to the report.
- An Executive Summary of the full report is located at the beginning of this document.

# LITERACY AND LEARNING IN THE MIDDLE YEARS

## Executive Summary

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### Literacy in the Middle Years of Schooling

Over the past decade, there has been a growing awareness of the specific learning needs of students in the middle years of schooling, generated as a result of significant research activity both in Australia and overseas.

The challenge of engaging students in learning is equally important for effective literacy education for students in the middle years. If students are alienated rather than engaged in learning, then it is likely that they are similarly alienated in developing the literacy knowledge, skills and capabilities required for meaningful participation in academic, social and community life.

Schooling in the middle years challenges students to develop control of the literacy demands and learning expectations of increasingly sophisticated and specialised areas of knowledge represented in the curriculum. As knowledge becomes more specialised within these areas, so too the literacies associated with the ways this knowledge is constructed and represented becomes more complex.

### Context for the Project

It is within this context of meeting the literacy and learning needs of students in early adolescence that the Middle Years Literacy Research Project was initiated. Through Commonwealth DETYA funding, the Consultancy and Development Unit (CDU) within the Faculty of Education at Deakin University has completed this project, under the management of the Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria (DEET) the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) and the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria (AISV).

This research represents the third phase of *Successful Interventions: A Secondary Literacy and Numeracy Initiative*. The prior phases consisted of:

- an environmental scan which aimed to identify the type and range of literacy intervention programs currently in place in secondary schools. (Victorian Association for the Teaching of English)
- *Successful Interventions Literacy Research Project* the evaluation of forty-four literacy intervention programs and strategies and broader school literacy initiatives (Australian Council for Educational Research)

This final phase focuses on literacy education in mainstream classroom practice in Years 5 to 9. It aims to provide the educational sectors within Victoria with information and recommendations which will form the basis for advice to schools on the implementation of effective literacy education in the middle years.

## Methodology

This project was designed to identify, trial and analyse best practice in literacy education.

The methodology involved a number of key elements including:

- working closely with 12 case study schools
- the selection and use of suitable assessment instruments
- conducting a literature review
- investigating Victorian research projects and strategies with specific relevance to this project.
- linking with international and national groups and individuals with relevant experience and expertise
- consulting with a wide range of groups including regional personnel, additional schools and networks and special needs groups.

In the field of educational research, this research was a qualitative study which belongs in the interpretive research tradition.

## Key Learnings from the Case Study Schools

The research methodology used in working with the case study schools was designed to enact sound principles in educational research in general and in literacy research in particular. The aim was to maximise involvement in and ownership of the research by the participating schools, and to ensure that the work undertaken through the research could be sustained beyond the completion of the project. Key principles of the design are outlined below.

The case study schools highlighted a number of factors, which were seen as critical to the gains made through their involvement in the research. These factors are pertinent to the implementation of any framework for middle years literacy education in schools and can be grouped into two main categories: key learnings about literacy in the context of the whole school and key learnings about literacy in the context of the mainstream classroom.

### Key learnings about literacy in the context of the whole school

These included the importance of:

- raising the profile and status of literacy in the school
- recognising the vital role played by effective leadership, support and co-ordination
- providing opportunities for staff to discuss literacy in general but also literacy in relation to their particular key learning area and their specific context
- understanding the need to make structural, organisational and curriculum changes in order to successfully implement significant changes to literacy pedagogy
- developing a long term plan for the implementation of improved literacy education
- allowing time to plan, implement and evaluate outcomes
- being involved in quality professional development which involves teams of teachers and which provides opportunities to understand and work through issues in relation to the specific context of the school and its community
- establishing ongoing support structures for teachers within the school, especially for teachers from key learning areas other than English – and the role of the literacy coordinator in achieving this

- involving middle years students in the decisions and the discussions related to the curriculum restructure and the impact of changing the way literacy is approached
- promoting continuity of literacy education across the primary to secondary transition and bringing primary and secondary schooling cultures into closer alignment.

### **Key learnings about literacy in the context of the mainstream classroom**

These included the importance of:

- enabling authentic purposes or ‘world connected’ learning which combines learning-rich tasks with opportunities for ‘targeted teaching’ of specific literacy knowledge, skills and capabilities in response to student needs and interests
- developing literacy-focused teaching within an overall learning context that promotes choice, flexibility and independent learning
- creating structured opportunities for metacognition, reflection, and self-assessment of literacy and learning development within the curriculum
- having a common language for talking about literacy development and a unified approach to literacy teaching and learning in curriculum areas
- providing scaffolding for students to assist them in their literacy development across all key learning areas
- using learning technologies for engaging student motivation and interest and for developing new literacies
- using developmental literacy assessment instruments linked to the mainstream curriculum.

### **The Assessment Instrument**

The project brief required assessment of a cohort of students from across the twelve case study schools. *The Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART)* was selected as the most appropriate instrument for the pre assessment, conducted in March 2000 and the post assessment conducted in November 2000.

The research focussed not only on the results of the *DART* assessment but evaluated the structures, processes and content of the *DART*, and its suitability as a literacy assessment instrument.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

The key findings of the research, along with a series of recommendations, have been framed within the Strategic Intentions, identified in *The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5–9* (DEET 1999) as giving a ‘future orientation’ and ‘a sense of unity and common purpose in middle school change’. These are:

- Securing the Curriculum Essentials
- Managing the Transitions
- Creating a New Model of Provision
- Transforming Teaching and Learning
- Creating Outward Looking Communities
- Tooling Up for Reform

The decision to use the strategic intentions was based on the importance of providing a link between middle years reform and middle years literacy reform. The recommendations are

supplemented in the body of the report with extensive supporting documentation, which includes the findings from the research and directions for policy and practice in education systems or sectors and schools. Broadly, however, the recommendations are as follows:

### **Recommendation 1**

That, with support from education systems or sectors, schools secure the curriculum essentials for effective middle years literacy education through:

- auditing students' literacy and learning needs and school literacy practices
- establishing shared understandings and a common language for talking about literacy
- emphasising a broad range of literacy capabilities, including literacies related to information and communication technologies
- teaching knowledge about language and curriculum literacies within each key learning area
- defining clear roles, responsibilities and expectations in the teaching of curriculum literacies
- assessing and reporting on curriculum literacies in each key learning area
- increasing structured opportunities for oral language as a bridge into reading and writing in each key learning area
- supporting sustained reading and writing in a variety of genres in curriculum areas
- providing quality support in literacy for underachieving or at risk learners in curriculum areas.

### **Recommendation 2**

That, with support from education systems or sectors, schools manage effective transition in middle years literacy education through:

- planning collaboratively for continuity of literacy education between associate schools
- developing common strategies and instruments for communicating school and student literacy information
- using common approaches and strategies, including consensus moderation, for assessing literacy progress and achievement.

### **Recommendation 3**

That, with support from education systems or sectors, schools create a new model of provision for effective middle years literacy education through:

- creating a middle years mindset and model for supporting literacy education
- establishing literacy-focused professional learning teams
- maximising potential for literacy education through school and class restructure

### **Recommendation 4**

That, with support from education systems or sectors, schools transform teaching and learning for effective middle years literacy education through

- planning for a diversity of literacy teaching and learning needs
- using a shared model or framework to inform planning for literacy and learning

- using core teaching practices and strategies to support literacy and learning in each key learning area
- using learning technologies to enhance literacy and learning
- planning for authentic purposes and autonomy in literacy and learning
- including metacognition, reflection and self-assessment in literacy and learning.

### **Recommendation 5**

That, with support from education systems or sectors, schools create outward looking learning communities that promote effective middle years literacy education through:

- communicating about literacy education between home and school
- valuing and building on literacy practices beyond school
- connecting school literacy and learning to the wider community
- pursuing productive partnerships to enrich literacy and learning.

### **Recommendation 6**

That education systems or sectors and schools tool up for reform in middle years literacy education through:

- raising the profile and status of literacy education
- providing ongoing quality professional development and support in literacy education
- securing leadership, co-ordination and succession planning in literacy education
- designing policies and structures to sustain reforms in literacy education
- developing school literacy plans informed by an understanding of change processes and a design for effective schooling.



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## SECTION 1: CONTEXT FOR THE RESEARCH

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### 1.1 LITERACY IN A CHANGING WORLD

*'Literacy is the ability to read and use written information and to write appropriately in a range of contexts. It also involves the integration of speaking, listening, viewing and critical thinking with reading and writing and includes the cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different social situations.'*

This definition of Literacy, developed in 1997 by the Ministerial Council on Education Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), was reiterated in *Literacy for All: the Challenge for Australian Schools* (DETYA 1998). The change to a broader definition of literacy has led to a recognition that literacy education should be more than the simple mastery of a set of basic functions or skills to do with the mechanics of reading, writing and spelling. Rather, it should be guided by an emphasis on literacy as a social and critical practice that involves the development of foundational skills and a broad repertoire of literacy capabilities within the context of lifelong learning.

The multiple knowledges, skills and capabilities required for literate practice in 'the new world of literacy'— a world characterised by globalisation, cultural diversity, mass communications and digital technologies – has led increasingly to talk of 'literacies' and 'multiliteracies'. These terms acknowledge the multiple dimensions of literacy (such as the visual, spatial and digital dimensions) which, along with linguistic elements, design meaning in texts (New London Group 1996). In education and schooling, this plurality is increasingly recognised in the use of terms such as 'literacy in the key learning areas', 'curriculum literacies' or 'subject-specific literacies'.

The authors of *Australian Literacies* (Lo Bianco & Freebody 1997) state that, contrary to the views frequently dominant in media and public debate about literacy standards, there is no general literacy crisis in Australia. However, they acknowledge national concern for the 'systematic underperformance' in English literacy among some groups and many individuals. Literacy is itself a moving target, and the literacy competencies required for successful participation in education, employment and in social and community life are increasingly complex and sophisticated.

Education systems and schools are being urged to respond to the challenges of the changing nature of literacy (Christie 1990; Lankshear 1997) and the need for all students to develop a broad repertoire of literacy knowledge, skills and capabilities (Cope & Kalantzis 2000), and at the same time to meet the specific needs of a diverse range of individuals and groups who may be 'educationally disadvantaged' or 'at risk' of not achieving minimal literacy standards (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997).

### 1.2 LITERACY IN THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

Over the past decade, there has been a growing awareness of the specific learning needs of students in the middle years of schooling, generated as a result of significant research activity both in Australia and overseas.

Learners in early adolescence have different developmental, social and cognitive needs from students in other phases of schooling. Recent research into student attitudes and performance

is indicative of significant levels of disenchantment and alienation among adolescent learners (Cormack 1996; Fuller 1998). Therefore, the need to engage students in learning is a key recommendation emerging from major research into middle years reform.

The challenge of engaging students in learning is equally important for effective literacy education for students in the middle years. If students are alienated rather than engaged in learning, then it is likely that they are similarly alienated in developing the literacy knowledge, skills and capabilities required for meaningful participation in academic, social and community life.

There are inherent characteristics that distinguish the middle years from other phases of schooling, such as the early years. Students in the middle years of schooling bring a wider range of developmental levels and literacy capacities and needs than in any other phase of schooling. The greater range of texts students encounter in adolescence, the increasing importance of issues of identity, power and difference, the changing nature of adult-child – and consequently teacher-student – relationships are all elements contributing to the need for education systems and schools to reject formulaic or ‘one size fits all’ approaches to middle years literacy education in favour of models which are developed through local consultation and negotiation to meet local needs, informed by state and national contexts and research.

Schooling in the middle years challenges students to develop control of the literacy demands and learning expectations of increasingly sophisticated and specialised areas of knowledge represented in the curriculum. As knowledge becomes more specialised within these areas, so too the literacies associated with the ways this knowledge is constructed and represented becomes more complex.

### 1.3 THE MIDDLE YEARS LITERACY RESEARCH PROJECT

It is within this context of meeting the literacy and learning needs of students in late childhood and early adolescence that the *Middle Years Literacy Research Project* was initiated. Through Commonwealth DETYA funding, the Consultancy and Development Unit (CDU) within the Faculty of Education at Deakin University has completed this project, under the management of the Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria (DEET) the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) and the Association of Independent Schools, Victoria (AISV).

This research represents the third and final phase of *Successful Interventions: A Secondary Literacy and Numeracy Initiative*. The first phase of this research, carried out by the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE), was an environmental scan which aimed to identify the type and range of literacy intervention programs currently in place in secondary schools. The second phase, completed earlier this year by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), evaluated forty-four literacy intervention programs and strategies and broader school literacy initiatives. In this third and final phase, the *Middle Years Literacy Research Project* focuses on literacy education in mainstream classroom practice in Years 5 to 9. (DEET 2001). This third and final phase, the *Middle Years Literacy Research Project*, draws on earlier phases of the research, but focuses attention on effective literacy education in the mainstream classroom context in Years 5 to 9.

## SECTION 2: APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH

### 2.1 FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the project was to provide coherent advice on middle years literacy practice for systems and schools. The focus was primarily on identifying ways to maximise the effectiveness of literacy education in mainstream classroom practice. This focus on classroom practice was, however, embedded in the broader context of effective teaching and learning, which is itself situated within the all-encompassing context of effective schooling. (See Figure 1).

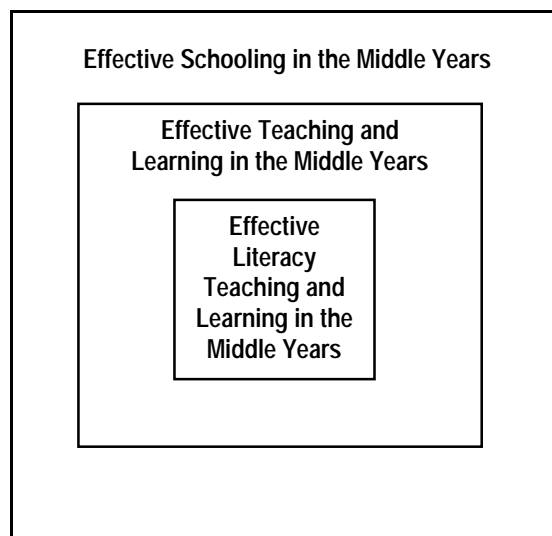


FIGURE 1: Mapping the layers underpinning effective literacy teaching and learning in the middle years.

This was consistent with the project brief, which directed that the project take as its starting point the design elements set out in the *General Design for a Whole-School Approach to Effective Schooling* (DEET 1990).

### 2.2 METHODOLOGY

This project was designed to identify, trial and analyse best practice in literacy education. The research methodology involved a number of key elements including:

- working closely with 12 case study schools
- the selection and use of suitable assessment instruments
- conducting a literature review
- investigating Victorian research projects and strategies with specific relevance to this project
- consulting with a wide range of groups including regional personnel, additional schools and networks and special needs groups.

In the field of educational research, this research was a qualitative study, which belongs in the interpretive research tradition, using case studies as the major source of data collection. Observation of data and gathering of knowledge through the case studies was achieved through the research team, school consultants, teachers, and students involved. Analysis of the data took into account:

- the multiple realities and subjectivities of the different groups of participants involved in the research
- the ways different knowledges, values and beliefs impacted on approaches to literacy and learning
- the range of school and student factors that impacted on literacy and learning.

### **2.2.1 Case Studies**

A major component of the research involved the design of twelve case studies. The school sample was selected in consultation with system and sector authorities. Schools were selected specifically for the contribution they could make to the research brief.

The selection of the 12 case study schools was based on the need to be representative of the three educational sectors, as well as the range and diversity of school contexts and communities in Victoria. It included:

- government, independent and Catholic sectors
- remote, regional and metropolitan locations
- primary, secondary and P–12 levels (with at least one case of a secondary with its feeder, or associate, primary school)
- high to low socio-economic status
- high to low cultural diversity
- small and large student numbers
- co-educational and single sex.

Given the relatively short time frame for the Project it was considered important to choose schools that were:

- already considering literacy as a priority
- trying new approaches to literacy education, or
- implementing or planning to implement middle years restructure and reform.

A whole school commitment was also considered essential in order to guarantee support for existing and new literacy initiatives that would form part of the research. The schools were therefore not representative of the full range of literacy practices and approaches that would be found across all systems and sectors.

### **Key Principles and Processes Underpinning the Work with Case Study Schools**

The research methodology used in working with the case study schools was designed to enact sound principles in educational research in general and in literacy research in particular. The aim was to maximise involvement in and ownership of the research by the participating schools, and to ensure that the work undertaken through the research could be sustained beyond the completion of the project. Key principles of the design are outlined below.

**Engendering a sense of ownership and autonomy**

Assisting schools to build on what they had already achieved, and developing approaches which, while based on a framework of best practice, were appropriate to their specific needs and enabling of their existing school charters, goals and priorities.

**Assisting schools to audit and build on current practice in literacy**

Mapping factors already present in schools, which were enabling of improved literacy practices, with particular reference to the Hill and Crévola (1997) design elements for effective schooling.

**Establishing coordination and communication structures processes**

Ensuring a school commitment to the research as well as coordination and support at a school leadership level. This involved the nomination of a School Research Coordinator, as well as the inclusion of the principal or member of the leadership team in all correspondence and communication.

**Involving teachers as co-researchers**

Encouraging local ownership in the selection of each school's research focus, selecting research instruments that place a value on teacher observation, reflection and expertise, modelling ways for teachers to build on and extend knowledge of students' literacy practices; and broadening the repertoire of literacy knowledges, skills and strategies.

**Providing professional development**

Ensuring that teachers were informed, equipped and motivated to reflect on their current literacy teaching practices and implement the changes necessary at a classroom and a broader school level. Staff from all research schools were brought together for joint activities, and professional development was also provided to staff at the individual school level.

**Providing ongoing support for schools in implementing change**

Allocating a consultant from the project team who was linked to a specific school. The consultant's role involved supporting, facilitating, evaluating and documenting the process and events taking place at the research site.

**Modelling effective practices**

Where possible, the strategies used to gather and document data, such as the use of the *Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART)* and the student surveys, were also used to model effective practices for use by teachers and schools beyond the life of the project.

**Research Focus within the Case Study Schools**

The case study schools were involved in research at two levels:

- developing and trialing approaches and strategies based on their individual research focus, which was determined by their specific needs and the effective practices which were already in place or being planned
- trialing additional classroom practices which were suggested by the research to be most appropriate in addressing the overall learning needs of middle year's students and in particular the key elements of literacy education in the middle years.

**Collection of Data within the Case Study Schools**



The information collected from the case study schools was primarily qualitative, gained through a variety of strategies. These included:

- completion of an initial school profile detailing the various characteristics of each school and its population and reviewing existing practice using the *General Design for a Whole-School Approach to Effective Schooling* (Hill & Crévola 1997).
- completion of a school research plan outlining the focus for the research, students and staff to be involved and the implications for teacher professional development
- ongoing recording and documenting of the various strategies associated with each school's research focus and the progress made with the implementation of these strategies, including the factors that facilitate and hinder effective implementation
- anecdotal records of student progress and attitudes in relation to the strategies being trialed
- interviews with 3 students who were representative of a range of literacy capabilities in order to gain detailed information on their perceptions of their literacy abilities, their use of literacy practices both in school and outside school, the impact of language background and socio-economic background
- interviews with a selection of classroom teachers to determine their perceptions of literacy and literacy education as well as the impact of the research being carried out in their school
- provision of a range of professional development activities (approximately 25 hours per school), with processes in place to evaluate the impact of this professional development on the literacy practices being undertaken by schools
- interviews with the principal, or member of the school leadership team, and teachers involved in the research.

Schools were provided with a range of proformas to assist with the collection of data, including research planning documents, teacher reflection sheets and journal entries. They were also provided with a range of other strategies for collecting information on students' literacy achievements and development over time. These included guidelines for a pre and post *read and retell* activity and student interviews/surveys on reading and writing attitudes and practices.

In addition, data was collected through the pre and post assessment assessment of a sample of students using the *Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers* or *DART* (Forster et al. 1994).

### 2.2.2 Selection of a Suitable Assessment Instrument

The project brief required assessment of a cohort of students from across the twelve case study schools. *The Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers* or *DART* (Forster et al. 1994) was selected as the most appropriate instrument for the pre assessment, conducted in March 2000 and the post assessment conducted in November 2000. This decision was based on a number of factors.

- The *DART* is referenced against the *National Statements and Profiles*, which are the basis of the Victorian *Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF)*.
- The *DART* was the assessment instrument used in the Successful Interventions Project, therefore enhancing the ability to successfully draw together the data from each project to provide a broader picture of best practice in literacy education across Victoria. The *DART* also became the instrument used in the Middle Years Research and Development project (MYRAD).

- The *DART* was the only assessment instrument readily available which had a structure and approach that addresses the full range of literacy skills including reading writing, speaking, listening and viewing
- The administration of the *DART* models effective practice in literacy teaching and shows the links between teaching and assessment.
- The moderation processes involved in the *DART* provide teachers with a basis for developing shared understandings and a common language for describing literacy progress and achievement. This common language and understanding of literacy can be, in itself, an extremely valuable tool for teachers, enabling literacy dialogue across the curriculum, across all year levels and across sectors.
- The *DART* provides a developmental framework for focussing on the literacy outcomes that the students were achieving rather than focussing on what they could not do.

While schools were encouraged to trial as many strands of the *DART* as possible, a minimum requirement was assessment of *DART* Reading and Writing strands.

It was noted that the *DART* should not be considered as the prime indicator of student progress, that the numbers of students assessed in each school was low, that the time between pre and post assessment was too short to reflect significant change and that the specific focus of some school's research would not necessarily be reflected in the *DART* results. These factors influenced the extent to which the *DART* results were reported on and used in this research.

In keeping with the principle of modelling best practice, the research focused not only on the results of the *DART* assessment but evaluated the structures, processes and content of *DART* and its suitability as a literacy assessment instrument. A summary of the evaluation of the *DART* from case study schools, along with a summary of the data gathered across the cohort of schools is provided in Section 3.3 of this report.

### 2.2.3 The Literature Review

One of the major tasks of the project was to draw together the vast body of local, national and international research on literacy in the middle years of schooling. While the focus for the literature review was primarily on literacy education, it was important to also take into account the extensive information surrounding middle schooling, the management of change, particularly in the school setting, and the pedagogical issues relating to best practice in teaching and learning.

The review was developed at two levels. The first was a working document, used by the research team to determine the most appropriate strategies and practices for trial by the case study school, to assist the team in providing the support and professional development required by the case study schools and to inform the research directions and outcomes.. The second was a more concise summary to support the implementation of recommended literacy education practices. This summary is contained in Section 3.1.

### 2.2.4 Ongoing Contact with Relevant Victorian Research Projects

Although the literature review took into account other local research projects relevant to this project, it was also considered important by the project team to maintain ongoing contact with the researchers involved in current middle years research in Victoria. This enabled a sharing of knowledge between different teams of researchers and an opportunity to identify common elements emerging from different projects. The group of researchers met on several occasions over the course of the project and included representation from the following projects:

- Successful Interventions, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)
- Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD), University of Melbourne
- The Middle Years Numeracy Research Project, RMIT University.

### **2.2.5 Consultation with Additional Schools, Teachers and Regional Personnel**

In addition to the case study schools, a range of other schools and regions located in rural and metropolitan areas have also contributed to the research through consultation on:

- the literacy strategies and practices which they have implemented
- the middle years structures, organisational factors and teaching and learning practices which enable effective literacy education
- the impact of the professional development activities they have undertaken
- the issues surrounding the implementation of the effective literacy practice in the middle years.

### **2.2.6 Consultation with Special Needs Groups**

Consultation also took place with representatives of special needs groups such as indigenous students, ESL students, students with learning disabilities and gifted students. This was achieved through:

- formal and informal consultation meetings with educators
- provision of professional development for particular interest groups
- attendance and presentations at appropriate seminars and conferences
- a review of research, exemplary practices and literature relating to specific needs groups.

### **2.2.7 National and International Links**

During the course of the project, the research team continued to explore developments in literacy education and in research and scholarship in other Australian states and territories. Also, wherever possible, opportunities were organised for professional dialogue with visiting middle years educators with literacy expertise from national and international contexts.

## SECTION 3: OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

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This section provides a summary of the main findings from the case studies, from the literature review and from the consultations with other groups. In the sections that follow, supporting evidence for these findings will be presented, the implications of the findings will be expanded, and recommendations will be provided for consideration by education systems and schools.

### 3.1 SUMMARY OF KEY IDEAS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this summary is to provide an overview of literature and research pertaining to middle years literacy education in the Victorian context over the last decades. It includes references to definitions of literacy, directions for literacy education in key national policies and guidelines, dominant schools of thought shaping current approaches to literacy pedagogy, theoretical models and frameworks for literacy pedagogy, professional development programs and selected curriculum materials and resources.

#### 3.1.1 The Middle Years of Schooling

Over the past ten years, there has been a growing awareness of issues in educational provision for students in early adolescence, and of the specific learning needs of students in the middle years of schooling, a period that coincides approximately with Years 5–9 in Australia.

There is a general understanding that students in the final years of primary school and the first years of secondary school are caught in the middle of a system which is designed for the needs of students at either end of it rather than for the needs of the young adolescents who make up the cohort in Years 5–9. The crux of middle schooling appears to be the reconsideration of all aspects of the middle years by looking at the needs and nature of those young adolescents that ‘inhabit’ them and redesigning education at upper primary and junior secondary levels with these aspects in mind. This has been the focus of many of the key middle schooling reports and reviews of the last decade.

In the international context, a number of key reports have highlighted the importance of reform in this phase of schooling. These include *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools* (NMSA 1995), *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (Report of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) and, more recently, *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century, a Report of Carnegie Corporation of New York* (NMSA 2000).

In Australia, the need to reconsider current policies, programs has led to a number of initiatives at state and Commonwealth levels. Reports written in the Australian national context in the 1990s include:

- *The Junior Secondary Review* (Eyers 1993)
- *From Alienation to Engagement* (ACSA 1996)
- *Shaping Middle Schooling in Australia: A report of the National Middle Schooling Project* (Barratt 1998).

Projects and reports in the Victorian context have included *Rethinking The Middle Years of Schooling: A Report to the Minister for Education of the Victorian Years 5-8 Research Project* (Kruse with Maxwell & Spooner 1998), the Middle Years Research and Development Project (MYRAD) and, more recently, the publication of *The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5-9* (DEET Victoria 1999).

The key components of this latter report include a school improvement model; a set of eight 'action areas' which teachers can address in the middle years; and a series of signposts for guiding ongoing development in the middle years of schooling. The school improvement model is comprised of nine design elements that form the basis of planned, systematic whole-school reform. While each design element has general features for application at all levels, the report also indicates a general focus and a middle years focus for each one.

### 3.1.2 Literacy in the Middle Years of Schooling

#### Defining Literacy

In the context of this report, *language* is seen as a set of signs and symbols, while *literacy* is seen as the range of social practices for which individuals and communities use this set of signs and symbols to achieve particular purposes in the world. While elsewhere, there are also important distinctions to be made between *literacy* and *literacy education*, these terms are seen as broadly synonymous for the purposes of this report.

A number of writers have attempted to categorise different definitions and approaches to literacy education according to their ideological underpinnings and their assumptions about language and literacy development. Though the categories differ from one author to another, most agree on a major distinction between those definitions that view literacy development as an individual, cognitive process involving mastery over specific skills and practices that are universally acquired, regardless of social and cultural context, and those that view literacy as fundamentally a social practice both socially shaped and socially shaping.

Richardson (1991) claims that, since the mid 1960s, literacy education has been influenced by what has been identified as the 'personal growth' model of curriculum, which emphasised the role of language as an expression of the self, whereas the early 1980s saw a shift towards a view of language as a social construct. Street (1993) proposes distinction between what he calls the 'autonomous' model of literacy and the 'ideological' model. Autonomous views are consistent with 'functional' or 'psycholinguistic' definitions, which regard literacy as a fixed set of skills that are acquired as the individual moves through sequential stages in cognitive development. Ideological views, by contrast, regard literacy as a social practice, both embedded in and defined by social and cultural context, and therefore historically, culturally and ideologically determined.

Interest in the ways literacy is defined in different social and cultural contexts has led to increased research into family and community literacies, and particularly into out-of-school literacy practices, in an effort to map more comprehensively the diversity of threads that make up the particular social and cultural fabric of literacy in the Australian context (Cairney & Ruge 1998; Freebody et al. 1995; Hill et al. 1998). Ways literacy is understood and defined has been expanded also by studies of the literacies of Indigenous and migrant communities (particularly from language backgrounds other than English), and research into the ways literacy is located within discourses of literacy, poverty and disadvantage (Edelsky, 1991; Freebody et al. 1995; Comber 1997; Comber et al. 1998).

#### The Changing Nature of Literacy

Most educators and researchers agree that the nature of literacy is changing (Christie 1990; Welch & Freebody 1993; Lo Bianco & Freebody 1997; Lankshear 1997). This view sees literacy as a moving target and definitions of what constitutes literate practice as changing with the shifting civil, sociocultural and job credential demands that any culture places on its members in their dealings with texts. Calls for 'back to basics' approaches to literacy education are challenged with arguments that the 'basics' have changed, or with references to the 'new basics' (Luke 2001). In response to the *National School English Literacy Survey* (ACER 1997), Lo Bianco and Freebody (1997) stated: 'Extraordinary changes are impacting on literacy practices, changes which derive from global economic, social, cultural and technological transformation'.

New ways of defining literacy, and text, are evident in the emergence of new language for talking about literacy. Terms and concepts such as 'multiliteracies', 'digital' or 'technoliteracies' and 'cultural' literacies are evidence of the increasing recognition of the plurality of knowledges, skills and abilities required for literate practice in the 'new world of literacy' (Cope & Kalantzis 1999): 'the increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioural, and so on, are particularly important in the mass media, multimedia and in electronic hypermedia' (New London Group 1996).

### **The Literacy Demands of the Curriculum**

The terms in which the literacy demands and learning expectations of the curriculum are themselves talked of has undergone a shift in recent times. Terms such as 'literacy across the curriculum' (which suggests a notion of literacy as a singular entity) have given way to 'curriculum literacies' and 'subject-specific literacies' (Green 1988; Cumming et al. 1998). These terms are used increasingly to signal the multiple literacy knowledges embedded in specific curriculum learning areas, which need to be taught and learned in conjunction with content knowledge in order for academic success. Teacher professional development programs and curriculum materials and resources developed by government education authorities in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia, reflect increasing emphasis on curriculum literacies, or even more specifically, 'Science literacy', 'SOSE literacy', and so on.

Research into the literacy demands and learning expectations of the curriculum in post-compulsory schooling (Cumming et al. 1998) has implications and resonances for the middle years also. The curriculum in the middle years is often characterised by an increasing mismatch between 'school' and 'out-of-school' literacies, by an increasing distinction between spoken and written language and by a shift towards more abstract and complex language and ideas. The concept of curriculum literacies (Wyatt-Smith & Cumming 1999), and the connection between increasing specialisation of field or content knowledge and increasing specialisation of language and literacy knowledge (Christie & Misson 1998; Unsworth 1999) are fundamental to research into literacy development in the middle years. Approaches in education systems or sectors and schools need to regard literacy education as learning language, learning through language and learning about language (Christie et al. 1991).

### **Directions for Policy and Practice in Middle Years Literacy**

The focus, both nationally and internationally, on education in the middle years has highlighted the importance of literacy education also in this phase of schooling, and on issues for education systems and schools in the literacy development of adolescent learners. This is reflected in an increased emphasis on the middle years of schooling in national policies and guidelines for literacy education.

The definition of literacy proposed by the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* (1991), though it does not reflect recent emphasis on visual, media or screen literacy, has been used widely by literacy researchers and writers of guidelines for literacy education in education systems and schools: 'Effective literacy is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing' (ALLP 1991 p. 8).

In 1998 the Commonwealth government launched *Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools* (DEETYA 1998), a policy document which consolidates the definitions and trends evident in earlier policies but gives more specific directions for literacy policy and practice in the middle and secondary years than earlier policies and focuses on improving literacy provision for individuals or groups considered to be 'educationally disadvantaged' or 'at risk' of not achieving minimum literacy standards.

In the United States, where it is common for schools to have a separate campus for students in middle schooling, *The Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy* demonstrates the extent to which adolescent education is recognised in this country as having a specific character all its own, and issues and priorities that are distinct from those in other phases of schooling. This journal has published a number of influential articles setting out priorities and directions for literacy education in middle schooling. The article 'Redefining Adolescent Literacies' (Elkins & Luke 1999) followed the publication in an earlier issue of *Adolescent Literacy: A position statement*, written by Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw and Rycik (1999).

In Australian educational publications, articles and reports on research into literacy in the middle years are becoming more evident, often as a sub-strand of publications dedicated to the middle years (Teacher Learning Network, Vol. 7, No. 2, Winter, 2000 & EQ, Issue 1, Autumn, 2001). The Australian Literacy Educators' Association now produces a journal *Literacy Learning: the Middle Years*, which appears several times a year and offers practitioners an opportunity for sharing professional dialogue and practice in effective literacy education for students in this phase of schooling. In her article in the first of these journals aimed specifically at the middle years, Kiddey (2000) explores the differences between the middle years and other phases of schooling, and the particular challenges in literacy education facing teachers and students.

Texts for teachers, such as the series published by Curriculum Corporation in Victoria which focus in literacy in selected key learning areas (Dumbleton & Lountain 1997) and another exploring oral language (Abbott & Godinho 2001), are becoming more prevalent. The Writing and Reading in Teaching English project (Catholic Education Office Melbourne 2000) has also produced a teacher resource book documenting the work of primary and secondary teachers in extending knowledge and understanding of how the language of texts works. In addition, there are a series of resources published by the New South Wales Department of School Education (1997) titled 'Teaching Literacy in (Science/SOSE/English/Mathematics/LOTE/History/Geography, and so on) in Year 7'.

### **Theoretical Models and Frameworks for Literacy Pedagogy**

A number of theoretical and practical models and frameworks for literacy pedagogy have been proposed over the last decades in Australia. These models or frameworks usually set out a series or sequence of elements that work collectively to form a teaching process, or a 'pedagogic discourse' (Bernstein & Diaz 1984) for literacy teaching and learning.

Often developed and refined through classroom trialing, some of these models or frameworks have been taken up in academic and classroom research activities in primary and secondary schools. Several of the most influential frameworks informing research

activity, projects and initiatives in literacy education are genre theory and functional grammar (Halliday 1985), multiliteracies (The New London Group 1996; Cope & Kalantzis 2000), the three dimensions (Green 1988) and the four resources model (Freebody & Luke 1990). All these models, which were summarised in a recent article by Ludwig (2000), have a significant contribution to make to the field of knowledge in literacy education, and all deserve attention as pedagogical frameworks informing directions for literacy education.

### Approaches to Teaching Literacy in the Middle Years

Different definitions and approaches to literacy in Australia in recent decades have been supported by an active research tradition, aspects of which have gained attention worldwide. The dominance of different approaches to literacy in recent educational history, both in Australia and other western nations, has been well-documented in literature reviews by Richardson (1991), Emmitt and Komesaroff (1995) and Bull and Anstey (1996) among others. These provide an account of the major waves of change sweeping through literacy education and successive changing paradigms of thought governing literacy practice from the 1960s and 1970s until the close of the twentieth century.

While earlier research, both in Australia and overseas, tended to place more emphasis on reading than on writing, recent research in literacy has been concerned not to separate reading and writing, as both involve the design of meaning in written language. The majority of research endeavours and teaching approaches in middle years literacy education continue to be concerned with reading and writing, but highlight the importance of listening, speaking, viewing and even critical thinking in literacy development.

A major principle underlying approaches to reading and writing, in the middle years is the notion of making literacy demands and learning expectations more explicit, and scaffolding students in meeting these demands. In the international context, particular writers have made a significant contribution to understanding the developmental needs of adolescents in literacy education. In 1987, Atwell (1987) wrote the text *In the Middle: Writing, Reading and Learning with Adolescents*, which explored her work with adolescent learners as readers and writers. More recently, Langer (2000) set out six features of effective instruction in her article, 'Teaching Middle and High School Students to Read and Write Well'.

In the Australian context, major influences on approaches to reading in the middle and secondary years have emerged from the demands on students of reading factual texts and dealing with textbooks as the basis of learning, in many in key learning areas. Strategies outlined in the landmark text *Learning to Learn from Text: Effective Reading in the Content Areas* (Morris & Stewart-Dore 1984) and in subsequent writings, are still included in many teacher professional development programs and resources for key learning area teachers. The focus on reading non-fiction texts has continued in teacher reference books such as *What's Your Purpose?* (Creennaune & Rowles 1996), and *Solving Reading Problems Across the Curriculum* (Nicholson 1997), and through articles contributed to teacher journals (Marshall 2000; Wooldridge 2000).

Many writers have pursued themes of explicit teaching of reading, higher order thinking and metacognition in reading, and the development and conscious use of reading strategies that are independent and transferable to other learning contexts (Bellanco et al. 1991; Edwards 1998; Marshall 1998; Hancock 1999; Moje et al. 2000).

A key development in the teaching of writing (with an influence on reading also) is genre theory and systemic functional grammar. Initially developed by Halliday (1985) and further explicated in the work of Christie, Martin, Derewianka and others, genre theory and functional grammar provides theorists and practitioners with a shared language – or



metalanguage – for describing the schematic structure of texts and associated linguistic, or grammatical, structures and features (Derewianka 1998; Christie & Martin 1997; Kamler 1995; Collerson 1994; Cope & Kalantzis 1993). Writing factual texts in key learning areas has been a major focus for work in classrooms, and in teacher professional development programs based on genre theory (Baker & McLoughlin 1994; Martin 1995), while more recent work explores the writing of argument in the middle years (Kamler, 2001).

Recent research into ESL and Indigenous literacy highlights the importance of rejecting ‘deficit’ models and of connecting concepts about culture and language to concepts about literacy development (McKay 2000). A current national research initiative builds on genre theory and systemic functional grammar (Rose et al. 1999) in supporting Indigenous students to reach age-appropriate levels as readers and writers. Using genre theory and functional grammar as a means of improving students’ writing in the middle and secondary years has also been the focus of a number of articles in teacher education journals documenting classroom research (Derewianka 1995; Marshall 2000).

Classroom discourse and oral language development are also important issues in middle years literacy education (Nichols 1998). A number of publications, such as *The Power of Talk in the Middle Years of Schooling* (Abbott 2000) emphasise the role of speaking and listening in learning and suggest that teachers create more structured opportunities for classroom interaction.

### **Literacy in Transition**

Recent years have seen increased research activity in the area of literacy in transition. A major focus in this research is the amount and range of texts students read and write in the upper primary and junior secondary years (particularly as compared with student expectations), and on issues relating to the nature and extent of continuity in literacy education in the transition from the primary to the secondary school (Cairney et al. 1994, Green 1995, 1998; McNamara & Cox 1995). Much of the literature relating to reading focuses on the challenges faced by students as they move, conceptually if not physically, from one key learning area to another in the more textbook-based curriculum of the secondary school. This makes high demands on the abilities of students to be independent readers equipped with a repertoire of reading skills and strategies. Added to this are issues of self-concept and peer culture, and changes in attitudes to literacy and literate practice, especially in self-selected leisure reading. Literature about writing tends to reflect a mismatch and lack of continuity in both the amount and range of text types or genres written in the junior secondary years. This tends to leave students under-prepared, even de-skilled, for the academic demands of the later years.

### **Literacy, Culture and Community**

Language, literacy and culture are inextricably linked and no education or schooling takes place within contexts that are culturally neutral. There has been much research activity exploring the interface between language and culture. Issues of cultural identity, bi-lingualism and bi-culturalism, and mono or multiculturalism impact on the ways that language and literacy education, particularly in standard Australian English, is viewed within education and schooling.

Interest in the ways literacy is defined in different social and cultural contexts has led to increased research into family and community literacies, and particularly into out-of-school literacy practices, in an effort to map more comprehensively the diversity of threads that make up the particular social and cultural fabric of literacy in the Australian context (Cairney & Ruge 1998; Freebody et al. 1995; Hill et al. 1998). Ways literacy is understood

and defined has been expanded also by studies of the literacies of Indigenous and migrant communities (particularly from language backgrounds other than English), and research into the ways literacy is located within discourses of literacy, poverty and disadvantage (Edelsky, 1991; Freebody et al. 1995; Comber 1997; Comber et al. 1998).

### Literacy and Gender

Literature on literacy and gender suggests that there are a number of factors influencing the educational performance of girls and boys (Teese et al. 1995). Student enjoyment of school appears to decline significantly in the middle years, particularly for boys, who are more likely than girls to manifest disengagement, alienation and therefore under-achievement. At the same time, subjects in which girls are over-represented and show high levels of achievement are less effectively linked to strong vocational paths, and girls continue to have fewer options for non-school based training. National data suggest that there is a decline in boys' retention and participation in post-compulsory schooling, and a continuing gender divide within curriculum participation (Ludowyke & Scanlon 1997). Two national initiatives, *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* (1997) and *Mapping Literary Achievement: Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey* (ACER 1997), draw attention to issues in the education of both girls and boys, which have implications for literacy and learning outcomes. In Britain, Millard (1997) published *Differently Literate: Boys, Girls and the Schooling of Literacy*. In Australia, writers such as Alloway and Gilbert (1997), Martino (1995, 1997), Fletcher and Brown (2000), Love and Hamston (2001) and Power (2001), have conducted recent research into boys and literacy.

### Literacy and Technology

An area of much research endeavour is the development of technology and digital literacy, or 'technoliteracies'. Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) have profound implications for both the ways literacy is understood and for the ways in which it is taught (McKenzie 2001; Green 1999). A survey of key research and reports into literacy and computers, or ICTs over the last twenty years shows a shift from thinking about computers primarily as a 'neutral' tool for word processing through to a concern with the ways in which ICTs reshape literacy, texts and textual practice, with their implications for equity, for teaching and learning, and with the need for students to develop critical/analytic skills in their use of ICTs. The policy document, *Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools* (DEETYA 1998:41), singles out literacy and technology, as an area of particular concern and urges further research and professional development exploring language learning and ICTs.

Studies of student literacy activity, where teaching followed writing process approaches and students were encouraged to revise found that the quality of students' writing was higher than that of students writing in a pen and paper class (Snyder 1993). Computer-produced writing achieved higher ratings (Hermann 1987); collaboration and writing-focused talk were facilitated (Dickinson 1986); classrooms were less teacher-centred (Hermann 1987) and writing was transformed from a private to a public activity (Snyder 2000).

Investigations into new textual forms, particularly Hypertext (Snyder 1996, Landow 1997 et al.) the Internet (Bolter 1991, Callister and Burbules 1996, Burbules 1997) and email (Moran and Hawisher 1997) support claims made by linguists and sociolinguists (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996, Cope and Kalantzis 2000, New London Group 1996) that literacy was indeed undergoing change and could no longer be regarded as exclusively verbal or print based. The report, *Digital Rhetorics* (Lankshear et al. 1997) focused on 'technoliteracy', literacies essential for operating in the digital age, and looked at the ways these were taught and might be taught across the curriculum. It emphasised critical literacy, and context, and a view of

language as social practice. The report has had widespread coverage and acceptance in professional journals and in-service activities, and has also been made available to teachers as a book (Lankshear & Snyder with Green 2000).

A number of studies have explored links between children and young people's use of ICTs and home, and the literacy practices developed there, and links and implications between digital literacy skills and practices develop in the home with those taught and valued by the school. Most researchers conclude that young people develop considerable proficiency with technology and technoliteracies from an early age, but that rather than capitalising on these abilities schools tend to marginalise them in print-oriented curriculum and assessment classroom work.

Considerable research in Australia and internationally has been undertaken into young people's engagement with a variety of computer based and electronic entertainment and education forms inside and outside schooling (Downes 1999; Sanger et al. 1997). The work that has been done suggests that young people's engagement with these new textual forms cannot easily be distinguished from their engagement with popular culture, and media culture (Beavis 1997; Buckingham 2000; Nixon 1999; Sefton-Green 1998).

### Teacher Professional Development in Literacy

One of the most significant developments influencing professional development programs aimed at teachers in the middle and secondary years in Victorian schools was a number of projects commissioned in 1990 by what was then the State Board of Education. This led to the development of a number of successful programs, which, though initially designed for delivery by trained tutors, became 'stand alone' materials available to schools through the Curriculum Corporation. Several of these programs, such as *Writing in the Subject Areas*, *Helping Students to Learn* and *Making a Difference*, are still in use in education systems and schools in Victoria. Courses developed in South Australia, such as the *ESL in the Mainstream Teacher Development Course* and *Literacy Learning Program* have also been taken up within education systems and schools in Victoria. More recently the *Writing and Reading in Teaching English (WRITE)* program has seen teachers in associate primary and secondary teachers working collaboratively in addressing the literacy needs of students in the middle years.

A number of studies in the literature emphasise the importance of access to quality teacher development underpinned by adult learning principles (Furniss 1993; Johnson 1999; Wray & Medwell 2000). A British study of secondary teachers' views of, and knowledge about, literacy and literacy teaching found that they are often hesitant, as a result of lack of training, and make limited use of a narrow range of literacy teaching strategies (Lewis & Wray 1999). This highlights the need for a broad-based, coordinated professional development strategy.

### 3.1.3 Key Themes Emerging from the Literature Review

The following is a summary of key themes emerging from a review of the literature. These can be seen as representing three broad, yet inter-related, conceptual frames or lenses through which to view research data. Each highlights a different angle or perspective on adolescence and literacy education.

The notion of *identity* is a key theme emerging from much of the research into the middle years of schooling. While, in the broadest sense, there is clearly a relationship between student identity and self-esteem, recent research has drawn attention to the particular ways literacy is configured in this relationship. This research highlights that issues of identity are central for middle years learners and that, as educators, we need to make stronger connection

between issues of identity and the literacy practices of students in the middle years. Issues relevant to this perspective are how students connect with texts they read, view and listen to, and the various positions or stances they take up as writers, and how this has real effects on who they are and the identities available to them.

Another key theme emerging from research into middle schooling research is the notion of *community* and the expanding role and diversity of social relationships within adolescent peer culture. Students in the middle years are members of many simultaneously intersecting and overlapping social and cultural groups, which are ‘communities of practice’ that share particular language and literacy practices. Like student identity, notions of student community are also integrally bound up with issues of student motivation, engagement and interest in learning. An issue for middle years educators is the gap or mismatch between ‘school’ and ‘out-of-school’ literacy practices – particularly with popular culture and technology literacies – and with curriculum relevance in general.

A third theme emerging from the literature focuses on *learning* and the cognitive development that characterises learners during late childhood and early adolescence. Much of the research emphasises the importance of autonomy and self-regulation for students in this age group, and recognises their increased capacity for metacognition, reflection and self-assessment in learning. Literature on metacognition can be considered as having two main aspects: first, learning about learning itself, which includes learning how to learn and developing a language to talk about learning (important for reflection and self-assessment); and second, learning about language, which includes developing a language – metalanguage or metalinguistic awareness – for talking about text and language, and about the oral, written and visual components of texts.

### 3.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FROM THE CASE STUDIES

The following is a summary of the overall impact of the research on the schools, and an overview of the common learnings emerging from the case study schools. A case study for each school, detailing their specific research activities and findings, is included at the end of this Report.

#### 3.2.1 Impact of the Research on the Case Study Schools

While common principles of effective literacy practice underpinned the research project as a whole, the specific research focus undertaken by the 12 case study schools differed in each school. The twelve schools were selected in order to be broadly representative of the diversity of school communities in urban, regional and rural Victoria, and also reflective of a range of social and cultural variables. This ensured a range of approaches underpinned by common principles which, in turn, would lead to findings that could be generalised for the wider cohort of students across the three educational sectors involved in the project.

Overall, the schools were highly positive about the impact of the research project on both students and staff, and the role the project played as a catalyst for change in their schools. One teacher, for example, relayed amazement at the leap forward, in both confidence and skill, of one of his ‘*less able students*’. Another commented that her students were ‘*coming ahead in leaps and bounds*’. ‘*A stronger commitment to literacy across the curriculum amongst the teachers*’ was reported by one school research coordinator while another claimed ‘*the teachers are on fire with enthusiasm*’ as a result of participating in a cross-key learning area team in the professional development offered to schools. A principal commented that ‘*The professional development provided by the project, along with the*

*influence of the school consultant, has been a crucial factor in changing teacher attitudes’.* The research project has shown many of the schools the value of coming together as a staff to discuss literacy practices, and working collaboratively to integrate effective practices into curriculum areas.

The issue of time, compounded by turnover of staff, difficulty in obtaining casual replacement teachers and in scheduling time for staff professional development in literacy as against other priorities, impacted on the progress that schools felt they were able to make over the period of the project. Clearly, the opportunity to track the progress of case study schools in a more longitudinal way would have provided deeper insights into their issues, challenges and achievements. However, for many schools their involvement meant that the groundwork was laid for the future and for major changes in their approaches to literacy education in the future.

A key theme which emerged from the project was the importance of understanding that change – and organisational change in particular – is a process that requires time to investigate needs, to bring key players on board, to establish agreed priorities, to negotiate roles and responsibilities, and to strategically plan for action and reform. All curriculum reform needs to be situated within a context of understanding and managing change, both at individual and organisational levels, and supported through a language for talking about the change process in school communities.

### **3.2.2 Key Learnings in the Case Study Schools**

The case study schools highlighted a number of factors, which were seen as critical to the gains made through their involvement in the research. These factors are pertinent to the implementation of any framework for middle years literacy education in schools and can be grouped into two main categories: key learnings about literacy in the context of the whole school and key learnings about literacy in the context of the mainstream classroom.

#### **Key learnings about literacy in the context of the whole school**

These included the importance of:

- raising the profile and status of literacy in the school
- recognising the vital role played by effective leadership, support and co-ordination
- providing opportunities for staff to discuss literacy in general but also literacy in relation to their particular key learning area and their specific context
- understanding the need to make structural, organisational and curriculum changes in order to successfully implement significant changes to literacy pedagogy
- developing a long term plan for the implementation of improved literacy education
- allowing time to plan, implement and evaluate outcomes
- being involved in quality professional development which involves teams of teachers and which provides opportunities to understand and work through issues in relation to the specific context of the school and its community
- establishing ongoing support structures for teachers within the school, especially for teachers from key learning areas other than English – and the role of the literacy coordinator in achieving this

- involving middle years students in the decisions and the discussions related to the curriculum restructure and the impact of changing the way literacy is approached
- promoting continuity of literacy education across the primary to secondary transition and bringing primary and secondary schooling cultures into closer alignment.

### **Key learnings about literacy in the context of the mainstream classroom**

These included the importance of:

- enabling authentic purposes or ‘world-connected’ learning which combines learning-rich tasks with opportunities for ‘targeted teaching’ of specific literacy knowledge, skills and capabilities in response to student needs and interests.
- developing literacy-focused teaching within an overall learning context that promotes choice, flexibility and independent learning
- creating structured opportunities for metacognition, reflection, and self-assessment of literacy and learning development within the curriculum
- having a common language for talking about literacy development and a unified approach to literacy teaching and learning in curriculum areas
- providing scaffolding for students to assist them in their literacy development across all key learning areas
- using learning technologies for engaging student motivation and interest and developing new literacies
- using developmental literacy assessment instruments linked to the mainstream curriculum.

## **3.3 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE *DART* STUDENT ASSESSMENT**

The project brief required assessment of the literacy development of a cohort of students from across the twelve case study schools. The *Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART)* was selected as the most appropriate instrument for a pre and post assessment. This decision was guided by a number of factors detailed in Section 2.2.2.

### **3.3.1 Administration of *DART* within the Case Study Schools**

The *DART* pre assessment was conducted by all case study schools in March 2000 and the post assessment in November 2000. Although the project required each school to assess a group of approximately 30 students, five of the twelve schools opted, at their own expense, to assess a wider range of students. In total, 289 students completed the pre and post assessment for both Reading and Writing.

Schools were asked to assess the reading and writing components but also had the option of using the listening, speaking and viewing components. Six schools took up this option.

Administration of the assessment was usually undertaken as a normal classroom activity, typically over 4–6 sessions. Although generally conducted by the English teacher, in one school a homeroom teacher was nominated, another used a SOSE/English teacher, while another used staff from across three KLAs. During the moderation process, teams of teachers were often involved with some schools including a range of KLA teachers.

Prior to the commencement of the pre-assessment, teams of teachers from each case study school took part in a full day training in the administration and moderation of the *DART*.

This was crucial in encouraging and supporting teachers to administer the assessment consistently and appropriately but also to assist them in gaining optimum benefit from the assessing and moderating process.

It was agreed that the schools would undertake their own assessment and moderation rather than having it done commercially. It was recognised that this would result in less consistent data across the schools. However, this decision was based on the notion that the experience and understanding gained through the process would not only provide the teachers with a clearer picture of their students' literacy achievements but that, through the moderation process, teachers would have the opportunity to engage in dialogue about literacy and develop shared understandings about student literacy performance. Key to this, however, was the full day of training which took place with those teachers who would be involved. Both the training and the joint moderation were recognised as extremely beneficial by the teachers across the schools.

### 3.3.2 Evaluation of the *DART* as a Literacy Assessment Instrument

Schools were asked to complete a written evaluation following the pre assessment and the post assessment phases in order to gather opinion on the usability of the *DART*, its structures, processes and content and its suitability as a literacy assessment instrument in the middle years. This gave them the opportunity to comment on specific aspects of the instrument, as well as the suitability and viability of the assessment and moderation processes and the usefulness of the information gained about their students.

The feedback from the schools, following both the pre and post assessment, was generally very positive. Teachers on the whole appreciated the fact that the assessment could be integrated into their day-to-day program although it did raise issues about the structure and timetabling of their lessons.

While the collation, analysis and moderation process was considered very time consuming, many teachers found that they gained a great deal from it. Those who worked in teams in the moderation process appreciated the opportunity to discuss the extent to which students met the various criteria, and the rationale for making these judgements. It highlighted areas of strength and weakness both at an individual student level and at a whole class level, assisting them to plan for literacy learning as well as providing them with a common language for literacy.

The results of the *DART* provided a useful guide for refining some of the research strategies within some schools as well as focusing on specific professional development needs. The following comments were typical of the more general views on the strengths of the *DART*:

*Extremely diagnostic and informative. Very comprehensive testing of reading/writing skills.*

*Very effective to moderate with another colleague – reassuring!*

*Provided a strong foundational basis on which shared understandings about student performance can be established.*

*We found it to be a valuable tool as it gave us lots of information about future teaching and possible strategies to be employed. Also it placed students on CSF levels which provided great insight to their achievement.*

*The variety and challenge of the various components made rigorous assessment both possible and practical.*

*It is quite accessible to students – attractively packaged (as opposed to some of the other assessment materials around).*

*I feel very informed about my students now.*

*It scaffolds teachers in assessing and moderating more accurately. A very reliable tool for Year 7 teachers at our school.*

*It gives a well-rounded picture of the students' language ability, confirming the assessment of the classroom teacher after observing and monitoring the student's general work.*

*I reckon DART has to be the most useful assessment tool I have ever encountered – it has helped me in my teaching, data gathering and reporting. I have used it to plan further work.*

On a general level, the main criticism referred to the time required to carry out the assessment and moderation processes. This was particularly seen as an issue 'for teachers who are not able to access special time off for assessment'. The inappropriateness of the 50 minute period in which to conduct the assessment was also highlighted.

A number of more specific concerns relating to different components of the *DART*, emphasised the need for:

- clearer and less ambiguous explanations and instructions
- marking criteria which take account of finer discrimination between levels
- greater recognition of the various genres which were represented by the tasks
- materials which were more age appropriate
- more relevant materials for students from a range of cultural and contextual settings.

For some schools the idea of assessing students more formally was new and therefore they felt that the students needed more preparation for the task. Several teachers of ESL students, reported that they needed to pre-teach some of the vocabulary, and ensure that students were familiar with the culturally assumed knowledge (such as the nature and uses of plaster of Paris). Occasionally the ESL students and low achieving students 'ran out of steam', particularly in the post assessment, which was found to be considerably longer and more challenging.

Many schools raised concern about the length, level of difficulty, degree of sophistication and lack of clarity in the instructions relating to some of the tasks, particularly in the post assessment of Reading.

In one school, the structure of the reading passages was questioned and it was suggested that greater analysis should be applied to the texts used in the assessment of student reading. This school was also concerned that the instrument did not take into account the genre-specific nature of their particular research focus.

It was also recognised that the *DART* was limited to one pre and post assessment instrument, therefore restricting its ongoing use with the same students over a number of years.

*Need DART 2, 3 and 4 so we can continue on a yearly basis.*

The schools that assessed the speaking, listening and viewing strands appreciated the opportunity to determine the wider literacy skills of their students. However a number commented that in some cases there was a heavy reliance on reading and writing, thus skewing the results of the student who struggled with these. In contrast, however, another school appreciated the fact that it highlighted the capabilities of those children who could not write their answers but were good listeners.

The strengths and the shortcomings of the *DART* as a tool for assessing literacy development in the middle years of schooling were highlighted through its trialing in the case study schools. Most schools saw it as highly valuable and this was reflected in their commitment to continuing its use in the future.



However, while it was regarded as possibly the most appropriate tool *currently* available, the research team recognised the limitations of the *DART*. It should be seen as only *one* aspect of literacy assessment which, together with a range of other assessment strategies, contributes to a full picture of the literacy development of each student. For example, although the *DART* covers reading, writing speaking, viewing and listening, the full range of literacy practices demanded of students from within each of the key learning areas may not be covered and so additional strategies, to ensure that they are assessed, need consideration.

There is a need to further scrutinise the *DART* in its current form in order to suggest ways to improve its usability and suitability. In addition, investigation should take place of further developments which will broaden the scope and depth of the data collected to enable accurate and continuous assessment of the literacy development of middle years students.

### 3.3.3 Data Gathered through *DART*

The following information was generated about student progress through the *DART*:

- An indication of each student's CSF level for Reading and Writing based on the *DART* Descriptive reports - a set of indicators describing the literacy skills typically displayed by students at this level of achievement (In general, the indicators below their reported achievement would be easy for them to do, while those above their position would be either difficult, or not achievable at this stage). A sample is attached as Appendix 1.
- Identification of individual student shifts between CSF levels.
- Analysis of individual student progress in the reading and writing strands in CSF levels for Reading and Writing between March and November 2000, based on raw scores.
- An average of the shifts within CSF levels for each school (for each year level where multiple levels were assessed).
- An average of the shifts within CSF levels across all schools and an indication of the percentage of students who had gone up, down or remained the same.

Research findings on the progress of students in the Reading and Writing strands between the pre and post assessment phases needs to be read and interpreted, however, in light of the following important qualifying information.

- The time frames between the pre and post assessments were closer than is ideal which minimised the time in between for development of aspects of literacy.
- In many schools the selected focus for their research did not necessarily match the specific skills and abilities assessed by the *DART* strands, which limited the validity of *DART* in assessing student achievement in those areas.
- There may have been inconsistency of moderation across schools.
- Assessment tasks were not always clear, which led to confusion for both teachers in their assessment and moderation and for students in their interpretation of the task.
- The post assessment materials in Reading were found to be (as acknowledged by ACER) considerably more challenging than those of the pre assessment phase in both the literacy demands and in the volume of the material to be completed - although this was calibrated accordingly to show comparative shifts from the pre-assessment, the degree of frustration for students, created through the more sophisticated tasks and instructions, could be considered to impact on the results.

### Broad Trends

The CSF levels for all students were calculated through The *DART* assessment. To refine this further, each CSF level was divided into low (L) medium (M) and high (H). Overall

results of the research students across the 12 case study schools, when analysed within year levels, indicated the following range of levels in both March and November.

#### READING

Year level	Student Numbers	Range in March (Pre)	Range in November (Post)
Year 5	28	CSF 3(L) – CSF 5(L)	CSF 3(L) – CSF 5(H)
Year 6	58	CSF 2(M) – CSF 5(L)	CSF 3(M) – CSF 5(L)
Year 7	188	CSF 1 – CSF 6	CSF 2(H) – CSF 5(L)
Year 8	11	CSF 3(M) – CSF 4(H)	CSF 3(H) – CSF 5(L)

Table 1: Range of Student CSF levels, by year level, in the Pre and Post Assessment - Reading

#### WRITING (content)

Year level	Student Numbers	Range in March (Pre)	Range in November (Post)
Year 5	28	CSF 2(H) – CSF 5(H)	CSF 2(H) – CSF 4(H)
Year 6	58	CSF 2(U) – CSF 5(M)	CSF 2(U) – CSF 5(M)
Year 7	184	CSF 2(M) – CSF 4(M)	CSF 1 – CSF 5(H)
Year 8	9	CSF 2(H) – CSF 4(H)	CSF 3(H) – CSF 5(M)

Table 2: Range of Student CSF levels, by year level, in the Pre and Post Assessment – Writing (content)

#### WRITING (language)

Year level	Student Numbers	Range in March (Pre)	Range in November (Post)
Year 5	28	CSF 2(L) – CSF 4(L)	CSF 2(L) – CSF 5(M)
Year 6	58	CSF 2(H) – CSF 4(M)	CSF 2(M) – CSF 5(H)
Year 7	184	CSF 2(H) – CSF 4(L)	CSF 1 – CSF 5(M)
Year 8	9	CSF 2(L) – CSF 4(H)	CSF 3(M) – CSF 5(H)

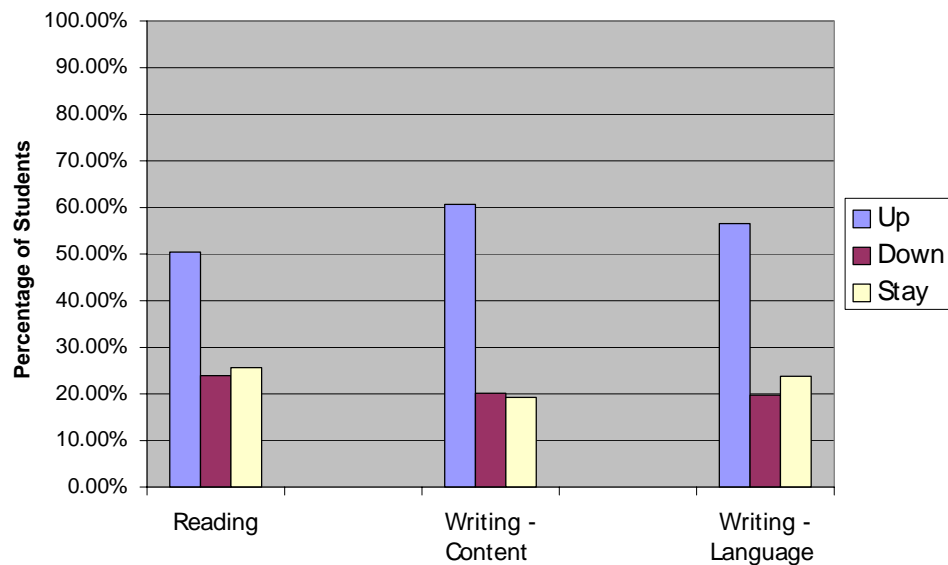
Table 3: Range of Student CSF levels, by year level, in the Pre and Post Assessment – Writing (language)

Although the number of students at some year levels was low, when the range of CSF levels were summarised for each school, it was very clear that these schools were dealing with a hugely diverse range of student literacy abilities. All schools, for example, covered a range of 3 or 4 CSF Levels within one year level. This highlights the enormous challenges facing schools in meeting the literacy needs of all of their students.

Both Reading and the two aspects of Writing (content and language) showed considerable improvement across the whole cohort when comparing the average level of student achievement in March and in November. This is indicated in the graph below, where the percentage of students who moved *up* or *down*, or who stayed the same (*stay*), were displayed. These shifts included the shifts within the CSF levels (high, medium and low).

For example a student may have moved from low level 4 to high level 4, a significant shift within one CSF level.

**Graph 1: *DART* Results - Total Cohort – Average Shifts in CSF levels between March and November 2000**

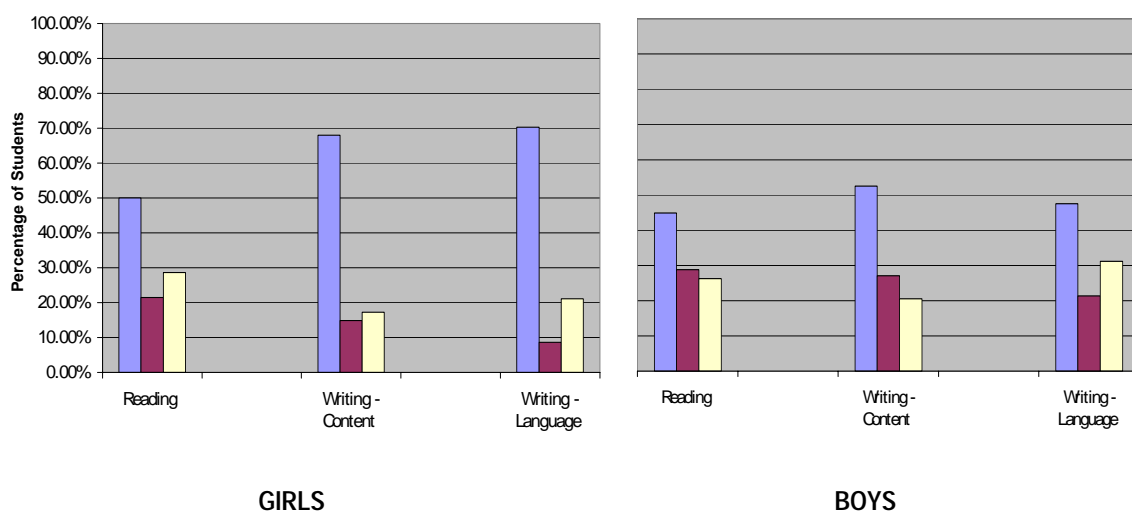





In the majority of schools, the students at the lower end of the CSF levels demonstrated a greater shift than those at the higher end. One school for example, had 34% of its students at the upper end of Level 2 for Writing (content), but by November all of these students had moved to at least the upper end of Level 3.

Although there were no significant trends shown in the differences in shifts between high ESL and low ESL schools, there were differences in the average results of boys and girls across the full cohort, as shown in the graphs below. The exception to this was one school that focused their research on using technology for literacy. In this school the progress made by the boys was, on average, greater than that made by the girls.

**Graph 2: Average Shifts in CSF levels between March and November 2000**

#### Comparison of Girls and Boys



	Up
	Down
	Same

The information gained by the schools through the *DART* could be used in a variety of ways. Some schools used their data to identify general areas for improvement.

*As a result of implementing DART it was decided that we needed to address the students' reading skills.*

Others focused on strategies to address more specific aspects which were highlighted by the indicator descriptions within each level, eg the need to 'select a main idea from competing information' (higher end of Reading Level 4).

More specific comments on the data at an individual school level have been included in some of the case studies.

## SECTION 4: STRATEGIC INTENTIONS FOR LITERACY

This section draws together the key findings of the research and suggests a series of recommendations, supported by details on the rationale behind them, what is required to implement them and the likely impact of their implementation. To provide a more practical focus for each recommendation and to highlight the scope for implementing them in a range of ways to suit the specific needs and context of different schools, a 'Research Snapshot' is also provided. These have been based mainly on materials from the case study schools involved in the research, but have also included information from the literature review and the range of other sources of data used in the project.

At the National Middle Years of Schooling Conference in Melbourne in 1999, Professor Peter Hill identified twenty strategic intentions for school and system level action in Years 5 to 9. These strategic intentions are grouped into six main areas:

- Securing the Curriculum Essentials
- Managing the Transitions
- Creating a New Model for Provision
- Transforming Teaching and Learning
- Creating Outward-Looking Communities
- Tooling up for Reform

These are summarised in *The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5–9* as giving a 'future orientation' and 'a sense of unity and common purpose in middle school change'.

These six areas are also seen in this *Middle Years Literacy Research Project* to have relevance and meaning for the ways education systems and schools approach effective literacy education in Years 5 to 9. To emphasise the links between middle years reform and middle years literacy reform, and to assist schools to plan in a comprehensive and systematic way, the six 'Strategic Intentions' have been given a literacy focus, and used as a framework for the recommendations and findings in this report.

### 4.1 SECURING THE CURRICULUM ESSENTIALS

Pursuing a student-focused approach that involves the specification of core knowledge to be acquired by all, together with an emphasis on thinking and autonomous learning.

The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5–9 (DEET, Victoria 1999)

Securing the essentials for effective *literacy* education in the middle years is concerned more with the *what* than the *how* of literacy education (the latter is discussed in Section 4.4). This involves understanding the fundamental relationship between literacy and learning, and recognising the importance of knowledge and control of a broad repertoire of literacies, including the curriculum and technology literacies, which are essential for success in education and schooling. In order to achieve this, schools need to identify the foundational or core literacy knowledge, skills and capabilities required for educational success, social

access and active citizenship, and ensure that these are addressed overtly within the curriculum. This involves, for teachers and students, developing knowledge about language and the ways language works to make meaning in different contexts and for different purposes.

### Recommendation 1

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That, with support from education systems or sectors, schools secure the curriculum essentials for effective middle years literacy education through:

- auditing students' literacy and learning needs and school literacy practices
  - establishing shared understandings and a common language for talking about literacy
  - emphasising a broad range of literacy capabilities, including literacies for information and communication technologies
  - teaching knowledge about language and curriculum literacies in each key learning area
  - defining clear roles, responsibilities and expectations in the teaching of curriculum literacies
  - assessing and reporting on curriculum literacies in each key learning area
  - increasing structured opportunities for oral language in each key learning area
  - supporting sustained reading and writing in a variety of genres
  - providing quality support in literacy for underachieving or at risk learners in all curriculum areas.
- 

#### 4.1.1 Auditing students' literacy and learning needs and school literacy practices

A starting point for schools aiming to secure the essentials for literacy education in the middle years is to carry out a literacy audit. A literacy audit can gather valuable information on a range of aspects of literacy provision, such as *what* is being taught in literacy, *where* in the curriculum it is being taught and even *how* it is being taught. This information then becomes a 'database' that directly informs school-based decision-making and assists schools in setting directions for policy and practice in literacy education and in developing school literacy plans. A literacy audit is most effective as a tool for reform where it is used not only to map current practice and identify needs, but also to acknowledge and value existing strengths and successes in literacy education.

A literacy audit can be used to map current literacy practices required by the curriculum across the key learning areas, both laterally (across the key learning areas at one year level) and/or vertically (tracking the progression within the key learning areas from one year, or teaching cycle, to subsequent years). This gives an overview of the breadth of texts and tasks in which students are engaged, and enables schools to identify significant gaps in literacy provision, breaks in continuity or areas of overlap.

An audit can include surveys of both students and teachers, across year levels or on a faculty or key learning area basis. Students may be asked to identify teaching practices they find

most helpful and areas in which they require increased support. Teachers, either individually or in professional learning teams, may be asked to identify areas in which students need additional support, and also to signal areas they would like to see targeted in teacher professional development. Some schools have surveyed parents/caregivers also.

This information provides a rich, and current database that assists schools to tailor literacy provision and teacher professional development directly to needs, and to monitor and evaluate outcomes. Because it moves beyond individual key learning areas, it also helps to promote a more global, yet more student-centred view of the challenges confronting learners, particularly in the secondary context, as they move from one key learning area to another. Information gathered through a literacy audit needs to be combined with knowledge about students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, particularly in schools with students with language backgrounds other than English (whether new or recent arrivals or longer-term residents) and Indigenous students.

A sample proforma for auditing student writing in secondary subject areas is provided in *Writing in the Subject Areas* (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne & Directorate of School Education, 1994). This proforma is used by individual teachers and then results collated (across departments/faculties or across particular year levels) to provide an overview of the range and frequency of particular writing tasks in key learning areas. This information provides an excellent starting point for further discussion and analysis of the literacy demands and learning expectations both within and between key learning areas and for mapping the progression from one year level to the next in particular subject disciplines.

A staged approach to the literacy audit can assist schools in keeping the task manageable and in ensuring that gathering the data does not become overwhelming, leaving no time for any data analysis or forward planning for reform. Though the broader the audit, the more it can reveal, focusing in the beginning on one particular aspect of literacy, such as writing may help schools to manage the process more efficiently. A sample audit is included as Appendix 2.

#### **Research Snapshot # 4.1.1**

*School L used school syllabus documents to audit writing tasks across the curriculum in Year 7 as a starting point for their research focus, which was looking at ways to improve student writing in the key learning areas. This enabled teachers to gain an overview of the range of written tasks required of students in the key learning areas, and to identify gaps, areas of overlap and also 'peak periods', often related to assessment and reporting schedules, where the volume of work increased significantly. While this was carried out in Year 7, teachers agreed it would be extremely valuable to complete a similar task for Years 8, 9 and even 10, as this would enable the school to explore issues related to the progression within each key learning area from one school year to the next.*

### **4.1.2 Establishing shared understandings and a common language for talking about literacy**

Establishing shared understandings and a common language for talking about literacy in the middle years represents both an important component and a valuable starting point for reform. This may be pursued in a number of ways but is most effective where it is an active and exploratory process undertaken in collaborative partnerships between middle years teams or clusters. Working towards shared understandings and definitions of literacy, shared knowledge about language and shared models or frameworks for literacy teaching and learning, establishes common ground between the different cultures of primary and secondary schools, and the diverse knowledges and curriculum orientations among teachers in Year 5 and 6, English and other key learning areas.

Finding a common language may involve critically analysing different characterisations and constructions of literacy, and identifying strengths and shortcomings of these, both for different groups of teachers *and* for students. For example, the term 'literacy across the curriculum', while widely accepted, nevertheless denotes literacy as a singular entity, rather than as a plurality of practices and skills. In placing 'literacy' first, and in using the term 'curriculum' to refer to all key learning areas, the term also suggests a view of literacy as undifferentiated from one key learning area to another.

More recently, terms that refer specifically to the literacies of different subject disciplines such as 'Science literacy' or 'SOSE literacy' or even the term 'curriculum literacies', are gaining preference. These terms are arguably more inclusive of the multiple literacy knowledges embedded in curriculum learning areas, including those associated with information and communications technologies, which are considered essential for success in education and schooling. These terms are also more inclusive of different key learning area teachers in that, by putting the 'subject' or 'curriculum' first, they foreground specialist curriculum knowledge as the starting point for exploring the related literacy demands and learning expectations.

An important part of developing shared understandings and a common language for talking about literacy, also involves discussing student diversity, and the linguistic and cultural knowledge and experiences, that might impact on the particular learning needs and pathways of different individuals and groups of students.

### **Building on Student Literacy Knowledge**

An essential component of effective middle years literacy education and 'engaged learning' involves actively valuing and building on the literacy knowledge and experiences students bring to learning. This also means narrowing the gap between 'school' and 'out-of-school' literacy practices and developing curricula that is inclusive of the community, technology and popular culture literacies that are part of students, literacy experiences outside school. Therefore, it is important that the notion of 'curriculum literacies', does not become a means of inadvertently prescribing limits for literacy education or excluding literacy practices, thus deepening the divide between the school and out-of-school experiences of adolescent learners.

Terms such as 'multiliteracies', which indicate the plurality of literacies that students need to have access and control for successful learning, assists both teachers and students to be aware of the audio, visual and spatial elements as well as the linguistic elements of various texts.

As discussed further in Section 4.6, using a common instrument for assessing literacy can also facilitate the development of a common language for talking about literacy and for describing different stages in literacy development, particularly between middle years



teachers in the primary and secondary contexts, but also between literacy specialists and key learning area teachers.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.1.2**

*Over the course of the research, a number of tools and resources were used to develop shared understandings and a common language for talking about literacy as this was important not only within each case study school but also across the twelve schools.*

*Initially, the Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART) was used as a common instrument for assessing literacy development. This led to significant gains in establishing shared understandings and a common language for describing different levels of progress and achievement in literacy. This was even more effective where secondary schools made efforts to involve wider numbers of teachers in the moderation and assessment of student performance, often by requesting other key learning area teachers to read and assess several scripts as well. Broadening the numbers of teachers involved in some or all stages of the DART assessment process extended the potential of the DART results to have an impact on curriculum, teaching and learning. This was because teachers were equipped with first-hand knowledge of the implications of student levels of performance for the teaching of their own key learning areas and now shared a common language as a basis for ongoing dialogue and teacher learning.*

*As the research progressed, common theoretical models and frameworks were used for identifying and naming different resources or textual practices. The four resources model (Luke & Freebody, 1990) was presented as part of the professional development, as were a number of literacy teaching and learning strategies. Where teachers attended as professional learning teams, often comprising teachers from different key learning areas, this provided a shared knowledge base to support ongoing dialogue and collaboration back in schools.*

#### **4.1.3 Emphasising a broad range of literacy capabilities, including literacies for information and communications technologies.**

Emphasising a broad repertoire of literacy knowledges, skills and capabilities is essential not only for educational success but for active participation in all aspects of academic, personal, social, working and civic lives. In the same way that students are encouraged to develop multiple intelligences, so too should they be supported in recognising and developing multiple literacies. This should include the literacies that students bring to learning which should be used as a basis for developing new literacies and for fostering engagement, confidence and self-esteem. It should also include reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and critical thinking in all curriculum learning areas.

Raising students' metacognitive awareness about different literacies or literacy practices, and the range of contexts in which these are foregrounded is a valuable study in itself. This includes making students more aware of school and out-of-school literacies and the role literacy plays in different aspects of everyday life, whether in the workplace, in citizenship, in family, community and culture or in the personal domain.

Schools need to consider learning technologies and the new literacies and textual practices ('technoliteracies') that are created as a result of these technologies. Information and communications technologies are not neutral tools for supporting literacy and learning development but are instrumental in reshaping and remaking the ways meaning is made in electronic or digital texts. These technologies challenge print-based views of literacy and require both teachers and students to develop particular literacy knowledges, skills and

capabilities. An important aspect of these capabilities involves the development of 'critical literacy' and skills in subjecting texts and information available through computer technologies to analysis and critique.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.1.3**

*Collectively, case study schools in this research focused attention on developing broad range of literacy knowledges, skills and capabilities. There was widespread acknowledgement in this process of the challenge for teachers in ensuring access to a broad range of literacy experiences, and to opportunities to develop a broad repertoire of literacy capabilities. The research project was evidence in itself of the multifaceted and multimodal nature of literacy, as the emphasis in each school differed from others.*

*Many of the school research projects involved information and communications technologies. School B investigated the impact of combined use of email, the internet and a dedicated website on the engagement and literacy development of students in a vertically-grouped Year 7 and 8 class. The focus for the research, which built on an earlier project involving technology, was on teaching argumentative discourse. This involved students writing a range of argumentative and other texts, which were 'conferenced' over an established website with a group of university student teachers. The group used computers in their English classes for access to the worldwide web for information on current social issues, for email and for the dedicated website. Using the DART results, students were grouped into mixed-ability groupings of two or three to work collaboratively with an on-line tutor. The aim of this research was to encourage students to develop reading and writing skills by writing for an unseen audience sharing a technologised virtual classroom space. Writing for an audience outside the school community required students to be more explicit and more confident in their writing, while the technology engaged their interest. Freed from the permanence of committing errors on paper, and able to select their own topics for writing, students experienced increased enjoyment and engagement in reading and writing tasks. Having an authentic purpose and audience for their writing naturally raised the level of effort students invested, which led to enhanced literacy development and outcomes.*

*School I was also involved in integrating learning technologies into teaching and learning in the key learning areas. Locating and critically evaluating information from web searches was a key emphasis, as were the synthesising, summarising and note-making skills required in preparation of student powerpoint presentations.*

#### **4.1.4 Teaching knowledge about language and curriculum literacies in each key learning area.**

Access for all students to literacy-focused teaching, or teaching that focuses explicitly on the language and literacy aspects of the curriculum in all key learning areas is essential for improving students' literacy and learning outcomes. This requires more than simply using language, but 'learning language, learning through language and learning about language' (Christie 1985).

##### **Literacy Focused Teaching in all Key Learning Areas**

Teachers need to maximise classroom opportunities, in all key learning areas, for developing students' knowledge about language and actively making language a focus for discussion, analysis and experimentation. This involves teaching about the ways language works to make meaning, particularly in written text, teaching a language for talking about text and language, teaching text structure and aspects of grammar and analysing the ways the

author's linguistic choices shape particular meanings. Being more explicit in teaching about the ways language works to make meaning is an essential way of demystifying language and cracking the linguistic and social codes for students in the middle years so that they can develop control of these processes for themselves.

Students need to learn not only new forms of knowledge, but also the ways that these new forms of knowledge are demonstrated, or represented, in texts and language in the different subject disciplines. Therefore, students need to develop understanding of, and control over, the literacy demands and learning expectations associated with different disciplines or fields of knowledge. These are best learned at the same time as the new 'content' knowledge is being acquired and at the site where new learning is taking place.

The explosion of curriculum literacies associated with the specialised knowledge of key learning areas also explains why this is beyond the brief of the English teacher. In addition, differences in the literacy knowledge and skills required from one key learning area to another, and from one CSF or year level to another, highlight the need for literacy teaching to be meaningful and contextualised within the specific literacy demands and learning expectations of each key learning area. While Year 5 and 6 teachers and English key learning area teachers may take responsibility for developing foundational knowledge of language and literacy, it is essential that all teachers are teachers of not only the content and subject matter of their field but of the associated literacy demands and learning expectations.

Even though the curriculum in the primary school context may be less specialised, it is important that students in Years 5 and 6 are provided with opportunities to interact with a wide range of texts, and with opportunities for developing knowledge, skills and strategies for reading and writing factual texts independently. This includes developing critical literacy and a language for talking about the ways language and texts work to shape particular meanings and serve particular interests.

### **Models or Frameworks Informing Literacy Teaching**

Using a model or framework to inform literacy teaching assists teachers to plan systematically for the development of curriculum literacies in key learning areas. The four resources model (Section 4.4.2) proposed by Luke and Freebody (1990) addresses the literacy resources or textual practices of the literate person. The model proposed in the professional development program *Writing in the Subject Areas* (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne & Directorate of School Education, 1994) focuses on preparing students for writing through building field knowledge and supporting students in developing knowledge of the specialised language and genres of different subject disciplines, through modelling and joint construction of text.

Aspects that might be included in literacy-focused teaching in all curriculum areas include the following:

- text structure and associated linguistic and grammatical features in different text types or genres
- paragraph organisation and structure
- syntax or sentence structure
- visual, spatial and linguistic elements of texts and the interaction between these elements
- new literacies and texts associated with information and communications technologies
- word knowledge, usage and specialised terminology.

Learning and assessment in all key learning areas need to provide opportunities for students to develop as readers, writers, listeners, speakers, viewers and critical thinkers, and to support students in transferring new knowledge and skills from one learning context to another.

For English as a Second Language (ESL) students, Indigenous students and students with specific learning disabilities, literacy-focused teaching needs to be informed by specific knowledge about the learner and about the literacy experiences, capabilities and needs the student brings to learning. Where students' first language is not English, or where it may be a form of English other than standard Australian English, it must be recognised that students require opportunities to develop language resources as a basis for developing literacy.

In schools with significant numbers of ESL students, professional development in literacy education needs to include a focus on differences between first and second or subsequent language learning, and strategies for supporting students in developing literacy in English, drawing on first language literacy as a resource.

Teachers require professional development and support in drawing on specific theoretical models and frameworks for literacy, and in becoming informed and critically eclectic in making choices from a repertoire of possible literacy approaches and strategies according to student needs and the learning context.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.1.4**

*All case study schools were involved in providing literacy-focused teaching within the context of the curriculum literacies required by students to enhance literacy and learning outcomes. In many schools, a critical element in the success of teaching curriculum literacies was the fact that the teaching was delivered 'at the site' of the curriculum learning. In other words, teaching the report structure in Science could not have been separated from the teaching and learning of Science content taking place simultaneously in the Science class.*

*Two schools, School C and School L, trialed approaches which involved teaching explicitly about language, text and grammar. Significantly, both schools were secondary colleges with a high proportion of students from language backgrounds other than English, a percentage of whom were newly or recently arrived in Australia. These schools reported significant gains in students' understanding of the schematic structure of texts and of associated linguistic or grammatical features, evident in the development and use of a language for talking about language (metalinguage) and in improved student writing in the different key learning areas targeted.*

*In School C, the emphasis was to make teaching explicit and structured in order to scaffold students' literacy development, to give them a sense of security and confidence in their ability to control language patterns and structures to achieve particular purposes, within meaningful learning contexts. An important*

*component of learning activity involved the manipulation of sentences by joining, editing, simplifying and rearranging, and on students verbalising their own understanding of grammatical concepts. The aim was to develop students' metacognitive (or metalinguistic) awareness of language use, to enhance their analytical and reflective skills, and to support them in becoming more independent as learners*

*In School L, which had a significant history of previous staff professional development in literacy, the focus was on developing teacher and student knowledge about language, with particular emphasis on text structure and aspects of grammar. In this school, the majority of teachers of students in Year 7 were involved in developing and sharing their own knowledge about language as a basis for improving student*

*writing. After carrying out an audit of writing tasks across the key learning areas, teachers selected particular text types or genres to focus on in teaching within their curriculum area. Teachers used a teaching plan to address the particular writing demands of their key learning areas and to ensure that they focused not only on the content knowledge but also on the associated language and literacy aspects.*

#### **4.1.5 Defining clear roles, responsibilities and expectations in the teaching of curriculum literacies.**

Defining clear roles, responsibilities and expectations in literacy teaching provides baseline standards in Years 5 and 6 classes, in the English key learning area and in all key learning areas. This requires schools and teachers to work collaboratively (ideally within the structure of middle years professional learning teams) to audit current practice in literacy, map the specific literacies required in different key learning areas, and identify clear directions and targets for literacy teaching.

The issue of who has responsibility for literacy education in schools is often seen as problematic for a number of reasons. Currently, there are few opportunities to pursue specialist language and literacy qualifications in teacher training courses. At the same time, in the majority of secondary school contexts, literacy is not allocated time on the school timetable as it is not a key learning area, but rather embedded in all key learning areas. Secondary English teachers are not necessarily trained to teach literacy, and the content of English as a key learning area increasingly diversifies through the middle and secondary years of schooling. While the most effective place for literacy to be taught and learned is in conjunction with new content learning, this may pose a considerable challenge for teachers with little or no training in literacy education.

This highlights the need for establishing clear roles, responsibilities and expectations in literacy education, and also for ensuring that teachers are provided with ongoing professional development and support in identifying the literacy demands and learning expectations and in teaching the curriculum literacies of their key learning areas. Where middle years teachers are working collaboratively in professional learning teams, this provides a sound basis for sharing knowledge about the kinds of reading and writing students will be engaged in, and for making links between the literacy learning in different key learning areas. This also provides a context for ongoing teacher professional development and support tailored to the specific needs of middle years teachers.

#### **Literacy Roles and Responsibilities**

Years 5 and 6 teachers and English key learning area teachers have a particular role in literacy education role, as outlined within CSF levels 3, 4 and 5. This involves teaching strategies for composing, comprehending, analysing and responding to a wide range of print and non-print texts. It is vital that Years 5 and 6 teachers and English teachers include specific literacy-focused teaching that provides students with opportunities to learn about differences between speech and writing, and between different text types or genres (such as narrative and factual). Also important are opportunities to interact with a wide range of texts, to develop a language for talking about texts and language use, and drawing attention to the ways texts are constructed to serve different purposes and interests. This focus will be more effective, where links are made with other teachers and relevant text types or genres from other key learning areas included as objects of study in English.

Expectations for key learning area teachers (as outlined in 5.1.2) are that they teach the literacy demands and learning expectations of their subjects. In addition, selected classroom

strategies, such as *literature* or *reading circles*, *reciprocal teaching* or *read and retell* may be identified for use across a number of curriculum areas. This supports students in transferring effective literacy and learning strategies from one learning context to others, and in heightens awareness of the ways language and texts change according to different contexts and purposes.

As part of establishing clear roles, responsibilities and expectations in the teaching of curriculum literacies, teachers need to reach agreement on common approaches to the more generic, or less subject-specific, aspects of literacy such as spelling and handwriting, which are frequently overlooked or seen as some-one else's responsibility. While these may be covered in the English key learning area, all teachers in the middle years require training in effective strategies for teaching the texts and language of their key learning areas. This includes teaching the spelling and writing of the specialised or technical language of subject disciplines.

In order to be effective, these processes need to have the active support of school leadership, and the involvement of the literacy coordinator, library staff and specialist literacy teachers. A key role for these teachers is working collaboratively with key learning area teachers (ideally within professional learning teams), and providing ongoing advice, resourcing and in-class support.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.1.5**

*The case study schools were required to nominate clear areas of focus in literacy education and clear responsibilities and expectations in literacy teaching for teachers involved.*

*In School L, the majority of teachers of students in Year 7 were involved in negotiating different expectations and responsibilities for auditing, analysing and teaching the writing demands of their key learning areas. An audit of the curriculum in Year 7 was used to identify the written genres required in each key learning area over the four terms of the school year. From this information, the teachers identified the genres that would be the major focus within each key learning area for the research project.*

*An interesting issue that emerged at this school towards the end of the research was the perception among the English teachers that students had not achieved the same rates of progress in their writing of texts in English as they had in their writing for other key learning areas. Closer analysis revealed that this was due to the fact that the English teachers were attempting to cover a wide range of written genres in their key learning area. This meant that they were not able to specialise to the same extent as their colleagues in other key learning areas who could dedicate their focus to one or two particular genres appropriate to their*

*discipline or field of knowledge. For example, in Science, both teacher and students were able to concentrate attention on the report genre exclusively and to spend significant time refining students' control of the schematic structure and grammatical features of reports. With a net cast more widely to embrace the development of foundational skills across a range of genres, the English teacher's literacy brief was much broader.*

*While this did not detract from the success of the project in this school, it underlined the need for schools to establish clear expectations, for each teacher to have a clear literacy teaching brief and for expectations of student progress and achievement to be adjusted according to that brief. It may be that the literacy brief of the English teacher continues to cover a broader range of text types or genres than other areas, meaning that both foundational and more specialised literacies are being addressed in the curriculum, or it may be that having specific genres covered elsewhere in the curriculum, frees the English teacher to select and focus attention on genres more specific to the English key learning area. The process of school-based decision-making with regard to this issue is essential for recognising literacy as a whole-school concern.*

#### 4.1.6 Assessing and reporting on curriculum literacies in each key learning area.

Teaching and assessing curriculum literacies in all curriculum areas is essential for improved literacy and learning outcomes. This involves recognising that literacy is developmental, and that language, literacy and learning are inextricably linked. Schools need to:

- include literacy assessment criteria in key learning areas, and
- monitor, assess and report on students' literacy progress and achievement in all curriculum areas.

This is most effective when embedded in existing classroom teaching and learning practices, approached from the point of view of 'working smarter not harder' rather than increasing the burden of assessment for teachers. The emphasis should be on collecting information on listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing and critical thinking across a range and variety of learning tasks, which have been strategically selected, rather than on an increased volume of assessment information.

##### Strategic Collection of Student Data

At the school level, collecting initial baseline data on student attitudes and performance in aspects of literacy at the start of a year or teaching cycle provides a reference point against which to measure ongoing progress and achievement. Whether through a commercially available resource, through student surveys or through the use of a particular strategy such as *read and retell*, the data can be used to inform teaching and learning, to monitor and assess literacy development over time, and to evaluate the effectiveness of particular approaches and strategies. Collecting data on a cohort of students also enables schools to compare results with other like-schools, as well as with state and national expectations, which may lead to productive networking between schools and sharing of approaches and strategies that support improved literacy and learning outcomes for students.

Assessment instruments that can be referenced against the *CSF II*, such as the *Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART)*, are useful in directly informing curriculum, teaching and learning, and for comparative pre and post assessment. A benefit of instruments such as the *DART* is the opportunity for teacher moderation in assessing student work. Establishing consistency of teacher judgement, and gaining a collective sense of the continuum of literacy development in the middle years, as well as the developmental range among students, provides a valuable space for teacher dialogue and a means of informal professional development. This is particularly important for middle years teachers in the secondary context who may not have had opportunities to access training or professional development in literacy and may require increased support in setting and reporting against literacy assessment criteria.

However, it is vital that moderation processes also attend to issues of cultural and linguistic inclusivity. Tools used for assessment of student performance are not culturally neutral and may assume, and therefore privilege, particular backgrounds and experiences not only through their content but also in their design. Schools need to consider the impact of these issues on student performance and to make adjustments accordingly in assessment processes. A valuable aspect of the moderation process is that it raises wider awareness of these issues and enables teachers to reach agreed approaches to student assessment that take these factors into account

While recognising the importance of student development in writing, assessment tasks should be designed to give students additional ways of demonstrating their learning by

including opportunities for assessing listening, speaking and viewing as well as reading and writing in key learning areas. Students also need to be encouraged to reflect on and assess their own literacy and learning development through opportunities for peer and self-assessment.

### Standards and Targets

State or national performance measures for literacy development provide standards and targets, which are a valuable guide literacy education in schools. Documents such as the Victorian *CSF*, the *National Goals for Schooling*, the *Literacy Benchmarks* and the *Assessment Improvement Monitor (AIM)* all give or imply standards and targets for progress and achievement. While it is important for schools and teachers to maintain high expectations for student achievement, interpretation of student assessment data against literacy standards and targets must take account of all the factors impacting on students' literacy and learning outcomes. These factors include social, cultural and socio-economic considerations as well as the capacities of schools to adequately resource effective literacy provision for the numbers of students with specific literacy and learning needs.

### Reporting on Literacy Development

Literacy assessment information needs to be incorporated into curriculum assessment and reporting procedures, and reported to students and parents/caregivers in ways that are comprehensible, inclusive and culturally appropriate. Where parents/caregivers are seen as partners in the educational process and equipped with selected strategies for supporting students' literacy development outside of school, this is even more effective.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.1.6**

*The experience of implementing and assessing the DART led many schools to be more aware of the relationship between literacy and learning, and to include literacy assessment criteria in areas of the curriculum other than English. The value of involving teachers from key learning areas other than English in teacher moderation processes is that it raises awareness of the literacies embedded in the learning in*

*different disciplines or fields of knowledge. In addition, it establishes shared understandings and a common language, which in turn provides a basis for exploring implications for teaching and assessing curriculum literacies.*

*An audit of curriculum literacies, such as that carried out by School L, can also be used to inform the development of assessment criteria for literacy in the key learning areas. Many schools have used the English CSF or the ESL Companion to the English CSF as a starting point for developing literacy assessment criteria, adapting or rewriting the outcomes to reflect the specific literacy demands and learning expectations of the different key learning areas.*

*The research project also modelled other tools and resources for gathering information about students' attitudes to literacy, their perceptions of their own strengths and needs and their literacy practices, particularly in reading, viewing and oral language, both in and out-of-school. Surveying students to gather this kind of information can provide middle years professional learning teams with a rich database which informs teacher monitoring of student progress and achievement in literacy.*

### **4.1.7 Increasing structured opportunities for oral language in each key learning area.**



Oral language development, or oracy, plays a fundamental role in the literacy development of students in the middle years. Structured opportunities for oral language, through class discussion and interaction or co-operative pair or group work, provide an important means for students to explore their own and others' evolving identities and emerging values at the same time as enhancing learning. Classroom learning environments need to capitalise on the increased inclination of adolescent learners towards peer interaction and social relationships, and to recognise the role of dialogue and discussion in developing oracy, identity and self-esteem. Through oral language, learners experiment with ideas, debate and clarify meanings, elaborate arguments and defend viewpoints as part of 'talking their way to understanding'. Effective literacy teaching and learning strategies incorporate classroom talk as a bridge into reading and writing and working with texts. Access to opportunities for using spoken language and developing oral fluency in English are especially important for students from language backgrounds other than English.

Middle years restructure and reform, especially where this involves extended class times, allows increased scope for planning teaching and learning activities in all key learning areas that involve structured dialogue, focused discussion and co-operative group work.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.1.7**

*Increasing structured opportunities for students to use oral language to exchange ideas and opinions, to explore understandings clarify meanings and experiment with language was a focus in many of the case study schools. In School C, students were encouraged, as part of working with the grammar of the English*

*language, to manipulate and experiment with words, phrases (or clauses) and sentences to explore how this altered meaning. This raised student awareness of the ways language makes meaning differently in spoken and written texts, and developed confidence in manipulating language for different contexts and purposes.*

*Structured opportunities for oral language within co-operative pair and group was often seen as an important element in effective classroom strategies for supporting students in reading both narrative and factual texts, and was pursued as part of trialing reciprocal teaching and literature or reading circles.*

*In School E, students worked in small self-managing groups, called 'literacy rotations', through a series of different oral reading and writing activities matched to their ability levels. Some of the activities were guided reading, literature response, researching a topic and preparing an oral presentation. In the teacher exchange that took place during the research, the Year 5 teacher pursued opportunities for promoting the development of oracy with the Year 7 students in the secondary context. This demonstrated the important role of oral language for middle years students as a means of expressing identity, experimenting with different values and points of view and developing linguistic resources for speech acts such as debating, clarifying, questioning, challenging and defending.*

*School I, School K and School F used versions of literature or reading circles, adapted to their own needs and contexts, as a means of structuring oral language related to the reading of selected texts in small groups. This involves students taking turns to prepare and perform a variety of roles within the group based on agreed topics and themes. Through the course of their shared reading, students develop oral knowledge and confidence in different textual practices within a supportive context.*

*Using reciprocal teaching as a strategy for supporting students in interacting with meaning in written texts provided School G with ways of developing students' oral language skills. The four roles associated with this strategy involved students in speaking and listening, and in developing their confidence and linguistic resources through the various language functions.*

#### **4.1.8 Supporting sustained reading and writing in a variety of genres in curriculum areas.**

The capacity for sustained reading and writing in a variety of text types or genres is essential for students' literacy growth and development. It is also essential for academic success, particularly in the middle and later years of schooling, where it plays an increasingly prominent role in formal assessment. Students need to be supported in developing these capacities to ensure that they progress through a continuum of learning towards independent understanding and control of these processes for themselves. This builds knowledge and confidence, and the ability to see the task through to the end.

Reading and writing both involve interacting with written language, and require knowledge and understanding of the ways written language makes meaning, as distinct from spoken language. For students, critical deconstruction and analysis of texts should lead to more informed construction of their own texts, and to enhanced awareness of the ways their own texts position their audience. Where the reading and writing demands in key learning areas are minimal and involve only short texts, students can become de-skilled, and this has implications for their performance in the middle and senior secondary years where the demands are more rigorous.

##### **Scaffolding Students in Reading and Writing**

Teachers in all key learning areas need to have a repertoire of literacy approaches and strategies that 'scaffold' students as readers and writers of the texts in those curriculum areas. The notion of scaffolding literacy development recognises literacy development as a continuum, and the critical role of teachers in assisting students to progress through this continuum towards becoming independent readers and writers. Scaffolding reading and writing emphasises the importance of the following:

- activating prior knowledge and experience to make connections and predictions about possible meanings
- making connections between texts students are reading or writing and their existing knowledge and experience of similar texts in other contexts
- recognising concepts of audience and purposes and the ways the writer's choices shape particular meanings
- understanding different text structures and associated linguistic and grammatical features
- understanding the role and meaning of technical or specialised language
- engaging in practices such as summarising, synthesising and categorising text information, or joint construction of text.

##### **Teaching the Language of Argument**

One genre that tends to be under-represented in classroom teaching in the middle years curriculum, yet one required for learning across a variety of key learning areas and for success in schooling, is the argument genre. Teaching argument provides a number of challenges and opportunities for middle years learners. It allows students not only to develop skills that are foundational for curriculum literacies in the later years of schooling, but also to explore issues of identity they are grappling with in other areas of their lives as young adolescents.

Adolescent learners are typically engaged with issues of identity in more explicit and intense ways than at other times in the human lifespan. Recent research activity challenges the idea that ‘personal’ or ‘factual’ are at opposite ends of the writing spectrum, and explores the writing of argument as intimately bound up with issues of ‘writer identity’ and the authorial positions available to writers take up. (Kamler 2001; Ivanic 1998). Whether written or spoken, this genre provides an avenue for developing and using linguistic resources for expressing ideas and opinions, and for clarifying values and beliefs. Through argument, students can express awareness of, and interest in, issues in wider global, social and environmental spheres, and ‘try on’ different ways of representing themselves and their views in texts while simultaneously learning to control the text structures and grammatical features that are characteristic of written argument (such as theme, nominalisation, or modality), and which express confidence, power and authority in text.

#### *Research Snapshot #4.1.8*

*In some secondary case study schools, audits of writing tasks across the key learning areas revealed a tendency to set shorter writing tasks such as paragraphs, or brief summaries and responses, and fewer than expected opportunities for extended or sustained reading and writing. This can lead to a general lowering of academic expectations and to students becoming de-skilled through lack of instruction, scaffolding and practice, which leaves them under-prepared for the writing demands of the later years.*

*In School D, the focus was on increasing students’ reading comprehension and interpretation of deeper levels of meaning in sustained listening, reading and writing tasks. Students made significant progress in abilities concentrate on, interpret and analyse meaning in text.*

*The focus in School B, School C and School L, while not designed to address this issue specifically, supported teachers and students in both setting appropriate writing tasks and in providing scaffolding and support for student writing in particular text types or genres. This equipped students with knowledge about text structure, language and grammar, which enhanced their confidence and self-esteem as writers and encouraged them to tackle and complete writing tasks of more sustained length and quality.*

#### **4.1.9 Providing quality support in literacy for underachieving or at risk learners in all curriculum areas.**

All teachers in the middle years need to be equipped with literacy knowledge, strategies and resources for supporting underachieving students, or students at risk of not achieving minimum literacy standards. This includes designing appropriate literacy and learning plans for students in each key learning area, and monitoring and assessing the literacy and learning development of individuals and groups of learners identified as requiring increased support in the mainstream classroom context.

This needs to be informed by teacher knowledge of:

- the general literacy needs and likely learning pathways of diverse groups of learners
- the particular literacy and learning needs of students
- the learning cultures students have previously experienced (particularly in the case of new and recent arrivals)
- standards and targets for literacy
- a repertoire of core teaching practices/strategies for students requiring increased teacher support.

Schools and middle years teams need to work collaboratively to establish literacy and learning goals across cohorts and for individual students for whom there is evidence of underachievement. This involves developing manageable frameworks for implementing individual learning plans designed to support underachieving students in increasing their literacy competencies within the mainstream classroom context. Literacy intervention and special assistance for middle years students should be aimed at providing literacy knowledge and skill development that is age-appropriate and informed by the literacy demands and learning expectations of a CSF-based curriculum.

Literacy specialists need to have ongoing contact with key learning area teachers in managing this process and in ongoing links between literacy intervention or special assistance and mainstream curriculum and assessment processes. Where possible, in-class support teaching, or literacy 'clinics', can be sensitively targeted to particular student literacy needs within key learning area classes. Mainstream curriculum and assessment tasks need to be modified to ensure progress towards realistic goals, informed by curriculum literacies, to ensure that underachieving students do not become 'curriculum disenfranchised'.

Effective literacy intervention programs provide a balance between literacy-focused teaching, scaffolded literacy learning and opportunities for practice of new literacy knowledge and skills in meaningful learning contexts and supported by teachers who know when to foreground aspects of literacy appropriate to individual student needs.

Learning environments that support students in these ways may be especially important where teachers have students from language backgrounds other than English, Indigenous students or students with special learning needs in their classes. While schools need to be cautious in assuming that students in these groups are necessarily 'educationally disadvantaged' or 'at risk', teachers need to be aware that they may require increased support, both within the mainstream classroom context and through additional assistance outside the classroom designed to link with the demands of the mainstream curriculum.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.1.9**

*While intervention and special assistance in literacy was not the main focus in this research, the project drew on the previous Successful Interventions Research Project which investigated literacy intervention programs and strategies in 44 Victorian schools. Since one of the case study schools, School J, was involved in both projects, it was important to make links with previous work. More important, however, was the concern voiced by many case study schools that the numbers of students requiring literacy support in the mainstream classroom context had implications for teaching, curriculum and assessment in all key learning areas.*

*Many of the case study schools were exploring more effective ways of catering for the literacy and learning needs of underachieving students. The findings of this research project are congruent with those of previous research exploring the principles of effective literacy intervention. These are offered here as guiding principles of effective literacy intervention programs in the case study schools involved in the research:*

- *ensure that the intervention is reflective of mainstream classroom curriculum and assessment tasks*
- *ensure that the literacy intervention is sensitive to the particular developmental and social needs of adolescent learners*

- *train key learning area teachers from diverse curriculum areas and involve them in the intervention program (especially where this can increase the gender balance)*
- *ensure that phonics-based programs are attending also to questions of meaning and developing independent strategies for understanding and interpreting text*
- *ensure that strategies focus on all aspects of literacy and scaffold students' development in (sustained) writing as well as (sustained) reading*
- *ensure that the difficulties confronting struggling students are not compounded by being withdrawn from mainstream classes and falling further behind in class work*
- *involve only trained personnel to work with students in one-to-one or small group sessions.*

## 4.2 MANAGING THE TRANSITIONS

Ensuring that there is continuity of care and educational provision from one stage of schooling to another, with particular emphasis on the bridging of any gaps that may occur between primary and secondary schools.

The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5–9 (DEET, Victoria 1999)

Managing effective transitions in *literacy* education in the middle years requires primary and secondary schools to establish collaborative partnerships that focus on three main areas:

- improving communication about students' literacy development between associate schools
- promoting continuity of curriculum and continuity in the development of curriculum literacies, and
- providing effective teaching and learning which is specifically attuned to and designed to meet the diverse developmental, cognitive and social needs of students in middle schooling.

### Recommendation 2

That, with support from education systems or sectors, schools manage effective transition in middle years literacy education through:

- planning collaboratively for continuity of literacy education between associate schools
- using common approaches and strategies, including consensus moderation, for assessing literacy progress and achievement
- developing common strategies and instruments for communicating school and student literacy information.

### 4.2.1 Planning collaboratively for continuity of literacy education between associate schools.

Planning collaboratively between associate primary and secondary schools is essential for promoting continuity in literacy and learning, and for minimising the 'secondary dip' that occurs in the transition from primary to secondary school. Establishing more effective and efficient processes for communication and collaboration between associate schools is vital in order to enhance communication and professional relationships between the sectors, and provide a foundation for shared teacher learning, and joint projects involving classroom research in literacy.

#### Middle Years Literacy Clusters

Partnerships can be fostered through formation of middle years literacy clusters comprising teacher representatives from associate primary and secondary schools. These clusters would meet regularly to share literacy knowledge and expertise, and work towards the common goal of promoting continuity of literacy education, particularly from Years 6–7. Forming

middle years literacy clusters creates an authorised space for achieving a number of purposes:

- discussing local concerns and issues in continuity of literacy education
- working towards common definitions and concepts about literacy
- mapping the literacy demands and learning expectations of the curriculum
- reviewing existing transition documents and procedures, and communication about student literacy development
- determining common strategies and instruments for assessing and reporting literacy development
- establishing effective approaches to literacy teaching and learning in all areas of the curriculum
- ensuring that students from language backgrounds other than English and Indigenous students, as well as students with special learning needs, receive adequate support within the mainstream classroom context.

It is important that middle years clusters identify areas for collaborative work that have concrete or practical goals and outcomes. This enhances professional relationships and mutual accountability between associate schools. A valuable starting point is examining the literature on literacy in transition and identifying issues emerging from various research projects. Mapping the literacy demands and learning expectations of the curriculum, particularly across Years 6 and 7 may lead to the preparation of curriculum materials and resources not only for middle years teachers but also for students and parents. This could include, for example, literacy curriculum or assessment materials, or guides for students on particular curriculum or subject-specific literacies. Other practical initiatives may involve developing common strategies and instruments for assessing literacy development and for communicating school and student literacy information.

Collaboration between associate schools needs to be reported to participating school communities on a regular basis. Structures need to be put in place in each school to ensure that outcomes are shared, and that middle years teachers are both informed and consulted on emerging developments and initiatives. Establishing clear roles and responsibilities for literacy co-ordination in the middle years supports schools in maximising the gains of this professional collaboration for students' literacy and learning outcomes.

### **Increasing Teacher Mobility**

Increasing teacher mobility between primary and secondary schools is another means of promoting collaborative partnerships and building shared knowledge and understanding between associate schools. Teacher shadowing and teacher exchange are two strategies that enhance professional relationships and strengthen curriculum continuity.

Teacher shadowing is usually regular and ongoing contact for short stretches of time, while teacher exchange involves swapping roles for a defined period, such as a term or semester. Both enable teachers to experience different developmental phases in the continuum of student literacy and learning development, and different contexts for learning. Opportunities for teacher shadowing and teacher exchange need to be supported at system levels through formalised procedures and protocols that facilitate the organisation and professional recognition of these initiatives.

**Research Snapshot #4.2.1**

*Several of the case study schools in the research project had varying levels of involvement in local or regional clusters, operating loosely as professional learning teams of representatives from associate primary and secondary schools.*

*The two rural schools, School J and School G, belong to a particularly active cluster which holds regular, well-attended meetings. As part of the research, two joint professional development sessions were organised for middle years teachers in this cluster which were attended by representatives from schools across the three education sectors – government, Catholic and Independent.*

*While the focus for the first session was on strategies for supporting students in reading, the second session focused on exploring issues for literacy in transition, on mapping the curriculum and literacy emphases in each of the schools and on consistency of teacher judgement about students' literacy development, based on analysis of writing samples against CSF levels.*

*Mapping curriculum literacies in an effort to promote continuity in literacy teaching and learning was also a focus in School L, and one which the school had pursued for a number of years prior to becoming involved in the research project.*

*The opportunity to work in collaborative partnerships for the mutual benefit of all participating schools was well-received and provided a basis for planning further opportunities for promoting continuity of curriculum and literacy education.*

*The 'Continuing Literacy' professional development program, presented in conjunction with staff from the DEET Western Metropolitan Region, provided another site for teachers from associate primary and secondary schools to work together in middle years clusters or professional learning teams. This program, which focused on issues and strategies for promoting continuity in literacy education, highlighted the value of shared dialogue and pooling of knowledge and expertise as a basis for enhancing professional practice in literacy. It also provided an impetus for participating schools to pursue ongoing plans and practical strategies such as reviewing approaches to literacy, redesigning transition processes and documents, examining possible instruments for assessing literacy progress and achievement and developing school literacy plans.*

*School E and School K were associate primary and secondary schools which organised a teacher exchange in Term 2, 2000. The experiences and perspectives of these two teachers, presented at the Middle Years of Schooling Conference in August 2000, highlighted a number of issues in curriculum and literacy continuity, and in approaches to teaching and learning. Apart from obvious differences between the way the curriculum is organised in each sector, there were implications for both teachers in assessing and reporting literacy development. For the secondary teacher, who usually teaches Maths and Physical Education, the experience of reporting on the achievement of Year 5 students in all key learning areas was very different from the curriculum specialism she was used to. The primary teacher, on the other hand, found it somewhat limiting to be reporting progress and achievement in a narrowed range of curriculum areas.*

*For the primary teacher, part of the interest in the exchange, was the opportunity to track students from the previous Year 6 to see how they were coping with the literacy demands and learning expectations of the secondary curriculum. This highlighted some interesting issues, which correspond with findings documented in research into literacy in transition. In many cases, students found that the text types or*

*genres required across the key learning areas represented a narrower range than students expected. Students also found they were writing fewer texts of sustained length in the key learning areas, but more short-answer paragraphs.*



*The primary teacher was also alerted to the incredible power of the peer group for students in years 7, 8, and 9 and recognised the need to use this more effectively in her teaching. Coupled with this was the need for middle years students to 'talk and talk and talk - the whole atmosphere is rich with language and evolving adolescent identities which are inextricably entwined in those peer conversations'.*

#### **4.2.2 Using common approaches and strategies, including consensus moderation, for assessing literacy progress and achievement.**

Using common strategies and instruments for assessing literacy progress and achievement promotes continuity of literacy education across primary and secondary school contexts by making a significant contribution to the development of shared understandings and a common language for talking about literacy development. This is even more effective where it involves teachers participating in a process of consensus moderation in assessing student performance. Benefits of this for middle years teachers are that it:

- helps to establish shared understandings and a common language for describing students' literacy growth and development from Years 5 to 9
- forms a basis for consistency of teacher judgement of literacy progress and achievement
- aids in streamlining communication of information about students' literacy development between associate schools
- assists schools to maintain high expectations of students in the transition from Year 6–7
- creates a shared context for ongoing professional development aimed at supporting teachers to build on the literacy strengths and needs students bring to learning in all curriculum areas
- alerts teachers to issues of cultural and linguistic inclusivity impacting on student performance and achievement in different assessment strategies and instruments.

Using common strategies and instruments is most effective where middle years teams or clusters of teachers have opportunities for working through a consensus moderation process with samples of student work. Including teachers in key learning areas other than English in some or all of the process helps to raise the awareness of all teachers of students' strengths and needs in different aspects of literacy. This in turn provides a basis for exploring implications for each key learning area, for planning ways of supporting students in coping with the literacy demands and learning expectations of the curriculum and for planning joint professional development activities.

Where the instrument used is one that articulates to the mainstream curriculum, such as the *Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART)*, this potentially enriches existing student transition information and may encourage the involvement of teachers from key learning areas other than English. An issue requiring the urgent attention of education systems and schools is that, currently, only one set of *DART* materials (*Danny's Egg*) is available for assessment of students in Years 5 upwards (though these materials are generally believed to be inappropriate for students in Years 8 and 9). This has implications where primary schools may be implementing the *DART* in the upper primary years while secondary teachers plan to use the same set of materials in Year 7. This can lead to the situation that exists in one of the case study schools where students in 2001 will encounter *Danny's Egg* for the fourth time in as many years.

Clearly, there is a need for education systems to adequately resource an assessment strategy for the middle years through commissioning the writing of new assessment materials that support teachers in working collaboratively towards increased understanding of literacy development and consistency of judgement. This provides a basis for middle years professional learning teams to work collaboratively and to participate in consensus moderation processes, not only within the one school, but also in middle years clusters as a strategy for promoting continuity of literacy education in transition.

Where associate primary and secondary schools are both considering the use of the *DART*, it may be advisable for them to negotiate using the *DART* pre-assessment (or similar resource) during the latter part of Year 6, and post-assessment in the latter part of Year 7. This would maximise its value as a strategy in the transition of literacy education from the primary to the secondary school. Where schools are involved in middle years clusters, this provides a valuable forum for consensus moderation between participating primary and secondary teachers to enhance shared knowledge of students' development across this phase of schooling with a view to improving literacy and learning outcomes.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.2.2**

*As the project brief required the assessment of a cohort of students in each of the case study schools, a decision was made to use the Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART) for pre and post assessment. The findings on both student assessment and teacher evaluation of the DART are discussed more fully in Section 3 of this report.*

*Overall, the significance and value to schools of teacher moderation around students' work was confirmed. Since they were involved in the teacher exchange, teams of teachers from School E and School K worked as one team in the moderation training for the DART. This was beneficial for teachers from both primary and secondary contexts in promoting shared understandings and a common language for discussing aspects of literacy development. One teacher commented that, in this context, disagreements in the interpretation of assessment criteria were useful as practitioners had to articulate their reasoning in order to defend opinions and persuade colleagues. This process of making explicit, both to themselves and others, the beliefs and values teachers hold about language and literacy development is an important foundation for working towards consistency of teacher judgement.*

*There were also some important cautionary notes and qualifying statements made by some teachers, particularly those in culturally diverse urban or regional settings with high numbers of students from language backgrounds other than English. These responses related particularly to the design of some of the tasks, the extent to which the materials assumed particular cultural and linguistic background knowledge and experience, and the importance of using the DART CSF levels only as a guide to confirm teacher judgement.*

*However, despite the perceived shortcomings of the actual DART materials or their suitability for their student cohort, many expressed positive responses on the value of the moderation process for their staff, as a means of raising teachers' awareness of the literacy and learning needs of students in all key learning areas. The majority of schools indicated that they would continue to use the DART in the future. Many teachers commented that the students themselves should have opportunities to participate in moderation*

*assessment processes, to discuss samples of work from across the range and to debate the relative strengths and weaknesses of different texts as a basis for developing shared understandings and a language for talking about text and language.*

#### 4.2.3 Developing common strategies and instruments for communicating school and student literacy information.

Developing common strategies and instruments for communicating information about literacy education between associate schools is an essential aspect of primary to secondary school transition. This includes information about students' literacy development as well as information about school literacy programs and practices.

##### Student Literacy Information

Student literacy information is a vital component of transition data. However, the sheer numbers, and diverse language and literacy experiences, of students converging in Year 7 in the secondary school can yield volumes of individual student information. Associate schools need to work collaboratively to review existing transition processes and documentation with a view to developing more effective and streamlined processes for sharing student literacy information. The nature and volume of information to be communicated, and also the format and timing of that information should be considered to ensure processes that are meaningful yet manageable for the schools involved. These processes need to recognise and build on the professional judgement of middle years teachers in the primary context,

Of particular importance is the communication of information about students who may require increased teacher support, additional assistance and/or a learning environment that responds to their particular cultural and linguistic needs. These include students with language backgrounds other than English (especially where these are newly or recently arrived), Indigenous students and students with special learning needs.

Student self-assessment and selection of work, as is common in many transition portfolio and student passport initiatives, is an important component of assessment data for middle years students. While this is effective in promoting student ownership, confidence and self-esteem, it also enables Year 7 teachers to recognise student work at optimum levels of achievement, which can then be used as a benchmark in student performance at the beginning of year 7.

##### School Literacy Information

While effective communication of student literacy information is an important element of successful transition, of equal importance is that secondary schools have an overall picture of the approaches to literacy teaching and learning in associate primary schools. This includes an understanding of the kinds of literacy and textual practices, curriculum emphases and classroom learning cultures that incoming students have experienced in Years 5 and 6, and which have shaped their literacy and learning development.

Developing a *School Literacy Transition Passport* – as distinct from a *student* passport – provides secondary schools with an overview of the range of curriculum and literacy practices with which incoming students are familiar and enables them to identify broad patterns and trends that will have implications for classroom pedagogy in the secondary context. Middle years teams in secondary schools can use this information to directly inform curriculum development, teaching and learning. It assists them to identify the range of knowledge, skills and capabilities that incoming students can be expected to bring to learning, and to plan collaboratively to build on literacy programs and resources – whether the DEET *Early Years Literacy Program*, CECV *Children's Literacy Success Strategy (ClasS)* or *West Australian First Steps* – where they are in use in associate primary schools.

The process of formally documenting and reporting on school literacy teaching and learning practices also inhibits the effects of the 'secondary dip' by 'benchmarking' not only optimum levels of student progress and achievement in literacy, but also exemplary teaching practices and the features of successful classroom learning environments in Years 5 and 6. Further benefits are increased teacher and school communication, enhanced professional relationships and the informal professional development, which are instrumental in promoting continuity of literacy education in the middle years of schooling.

Developing a school passport needs to be viewed as a two-way communication process, serving the needs of both primary and secondary schools in promoting continuity in literacy education. While it need only involve one document, copied for each associate secondary school, this instrument is most effective where middle years teams or clusters collaborate in its design as this ensures that it will reflect local issues and literacy teaching and learning needs.

A sample School Literacy Passport is included as Appendix 3

### Dissemination of Literacy Information

Clear and effective pathways for communicating the literacy information to relevant staff is essential. Both the instruments used and the strategies developed for disseminating this information within the secondary school, need to be designed with attention to the intended target audience, or end-user. The ways information can be best disseminated, whether to the transition or year level coordinator, home-room teachers, or professional learning teams, should be given careful consideration.

Where instruments are designed by middle years teams working collaboratively across primary and secondary schools, this ensures that they are responsive to the needs, challenges, and realities of both contexts.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.2.3**

*As a starting point for talking about literacy in transition, several of the case study schools participated in sessions discussing issues relating to the kinds of information gathered about students' literacy development, and the ways this information was communicated between associate schools. School J, for example, is part of an active cluster of representatives from surrounding schools which meets on a regular basis and organises shared professional development activities on a range of topics. One session, organised through the research, involved middle years teachers from this cluster in discussion and critique of a random selection of transition documents in order to identify strengths and weaknesses for literacy in transition. This discussion and analysis were framed by the following key questions:*

- *what is the most meaningful and useful information about students' literacy development to share between schools?*
- *how is this information best conveyed to ensure it is used to maximum effect?*
- *what is this information best accompanied with (eg work samples, self-assessments etc)?*
- *what format and processes will facilitate the dissemination of this information to appropriate personnel in the secondary context?*

- *how will this information be used to inform curriculum and literacy teaching and learning?*

*The following points emerged in the research as key principles for guiding the efforts of middle years teachers in associate schools in redesigning existing transition instruments or strategies:*

- *the need for transition forms to establish a common language for talking about literacy development*
- *the need for transition forms to avoid duplication with enrolment forms and other documents by concentrating on gathering different information*
- *the need to respect confidentiality and give teachers options to signal where they would like the opportunity for a face-to-face discussion about a students' literacy needs*
- *the need for a balance between quantitative and qualitative information*
- *the need to apply a 'less is more' principle to both limit the volume of information to what can be realistically handled and also to ensure that information gathered has maximum meaning and value*
- *the need to maximise accessibility, and 'usability' of information by creating formats and processes with the end-user in mind.*

*The 'Quad' outlined in the text Evaluating Literacy (Anthony et al.1992) was used in professional development with some case study schools as a useful data-gathering framework that assists middle years teachers and schools to analyse and classify different kinds of student assessment information according to four broad categories: observation of process, observation of product, classroom measures and decontextualised measures, conceptual framework for analysing and classifying different types of student assessment data. This is a useful conceptual framework for ensuring that student assessment data reflect a range and balance of different kinds of information communicated in appropriate ways.*

### 4.3 CREATING A NEW MODEL OF PROVISION

Constructing a model that is neither primary nor secondary in its orientation and which provides a middle ground between teaching across the curriculum and curriculum specialisation.

The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5–9 (DEET, Victoria 1999)

Creating a new model of provision for effective *literacy* education in the middle years requires schools to respond to research into effective education for students in the middle years of schooling, in both primary and secondary school contexts, and to design schools, classrooms and curriculum in ways that maximise opportunities for literacy and learning development.

#### Recommendation 3

That, with support from education systems or sectors, schools create a new model of provision for effective middle years literacy education through:

- creating a middle years mindset and model for supporting literacy education
- establishing literacy-focused professional learning teams
- maximising potential for literacy education through school and class restructure.

#### 4.3.1 Creating a middle years mindset and model for supporting literacy education.

Creating a middle years mindset and model for supporting literacy education is essential for promoting continuity of literacy education, both *within* and *between* primary and secondary schools, and for improving literacy and learning outcomes. This involves developing shared beliefs and understandings about literacy, and approaches to literacy education that create a ‘middle ground’ between teaching across the curriculum and curriculum specialisation.

There are clearly differences between primary and secondary schools in school and class organisation, in curriculum structures and in teaching and learning cultures. However, differences in teaching approaches between two classes at the one school may sometimes be as significant as differences between different schools. Creating a new model of provision that supports the literacy and learning development of adolescents involves developing learning environments that build on the strengths of both school contexts in creating a new ‘middle ground’ for curriculum, literacy and learning in the middle years.

This highlights the need for developing shared beliefs and understandings about literacy based on shared knowledge, *within* each school and also *between* primary and secondary schools. In creating a new model of provision for literacy and learning, the process of establishing shared beliefs and understandings needs to build on knowledge of:

- students and the literacy experiences, capabilities and needs they bring to learning
- the cultural and linguistic backgrounds and experiences of students
- language and the literacy demands and learning expectations of the curriculum
- the continuum of literacy growth and development in reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and critical thinking

- theoretical models and frameworks informing literacy teaching and learning
- literacy teaching practices and strategies
- approaches to assessing literacy progress and achievement.

Teachers, of students in Years 5 and 6 or 7, 8 and 9, need to be professionally encouraged and supported in seeing themselves as teachers of students in the ‘middle years of schooling’, and as professional colleagues with their counterparts in the primary or secondary sector, with the common goal of promoting continuity of education, and literacy education in particular, for adolescent learners in both contexts.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.3.1**

*One case study school, School B, has a long tradition of vertical groupings of students and is organised in four sub-schools or units. This provides opportunities for the curriculum and timetable flexibility to support literacy and learning outcomes in an environment where teachers and students have increased contact and develop ongoing relationships.*

*Many case study schools such as School A had instituted changes in school structures and in teacher and student groupings much more recently. In secondary case study schools which had previously introduced the practice of referring to Years 7, 8 (and, in some cases, Year 9) as ‘the middle years’ and where teachers were working in groups named ‘middle years teams’, these schools reported a marked change in the working culture, mindset and ethos. In these schools, teachers were reconceptualising their roles and their professional practice within more longitudinal views of educational provision. This was most effective where it was actively understood and supported by the school leadership and the wider school community.*

#### **4.3.2 Establishing literacy-focused professional learning teams.**

Establishing literacy-focused professional learning teams promotes positive professional working relationships, enhances professional practice in literacy and fosters shared commitment and mutual accountability for improving literacy and learning outcomes. This promotes curriculum continuity and consistency and cohesion in approaches to literacy teaching and learning across key learning areas.

The concept of ‘professional learning teams’ can be interpreted broadly to include the many different permutations of teachers who work together at different times and for different purposes. This can include teams of teachers from diverse key learning areas who share responsibility for the same group of students, teams within the same key learning area or faculty, middle years clusters of teacher representatives or literacy coordinators from associate schools, or even the whole school staff. In addition, schools need to include literacy specialists and library staff in literacy professional learning teams to ensure a cohesive approach to improving literacy and learning outcomes.

An important prerequisite, however, for the success of middle years reform at school and system levels is for teachers, to be active participants in professional learning teams that operate both *within* the one school and *between* associate schools. Where school reforms are planned and implemented by middle years teachers working collaboratively in professional learning teams, this in itself represents the basis for a new model of provision with important scope and potential for extending students’ repertoire of literacy knowledges, skills and capabilities.

### Focusing on Literacy in Professional Learning Teams

Focusing on literacy in middle years teams supports both students and teachers by creating greater consistency in literacy practice through agreement about, and adherence to, common literacy expectations and standards for different curriculum areas. Students benefit from working with teachers who know them and their literacy strengths and needs. Teachers are supported in responding to these strengths and needs, in planning and implementing agreed approaches to reading, writing and oral language, and also in addressing specifics such as paragraphing or spelling. Middle years teams with joint responsibility for a group of students can arrange for flexible timetabling and grouping of students for specific literacy initiatives. For example, small groups can be skilled in a particular approach or strategy, either to support them in their own learning, or in order to introduce a new skill or strategy to the class.

Middle years clusters represent another level of professional learning team involving teacher representatives from associate schools working collaboratively to promote continuity of literacy education. This forms a sound basis for focusing on literacy, and on the similarities and differences in approaches to literacy in each context. Gains are likely to be greater where teams or clusters have access to ongoing quality teacher professional development and opportunities for sharing professional practice in literacy. Recognising and building on teachers' existing knowledge and expertise is an essential underpinning for the sharing of knowledge in effective middle years literacy teams, and creates a sound basis for the development of new knowledge and understanding and for enhancing professional practice in literacy.

The needs of professional learning teams should be conceptualised within the overall framework of staff co-ordination, support, resourcing and professional development. High functioning professional learning teams capitalise on the strengths of individual members, whilst also creating opportunities for members to develop expertise in new areas. However, schools initiating professional learning teams need to address the professional needs of staff working within new structures, new expectations and changed workplace culture.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.3.2**

*Several of the schools involved in the research had established professional learning teams of teachers who shared responsibility for particular classes, usually teaching them in two or more key learning areas. In the majority of primary schools, shared curriculum development and planning is an accepted part of the culture and of school organisation. In secondary schools, this has been traditionally hindered by organisation of classes, timetable structures and the compartmentalised curriculum, and the complexity of timetabling shared planning between teachers on a regular basis.*

*In secondary case study schools where professional learning teams were operating, such as School A, School H and School J, there was unanimous agreement that the shared planning was one of the most effective and essential elements of reform and restructure. For some secondary teachers, the experience of working in teams with shared responsibility for and increased contact with a class was enlightening and rewarding beyond their personal and professional expectations.*

*A vital element underpinning the success of professional learning teams is scheduled meeting and planning times. Though times allocated for this in case study schools varied in length, frequency and timing from one school to another (in some cases, meetings were held after school), teachers found that it provided an opportunity for sharing professional practice in curriculum and in literacy not possible at other school and staff meetings. The extent to which the school timetable was conducive to collaborative team planning for literacy was often found to correspond with the degree of restructure in the school.*



*Professional learning teams in the research worked most effectively where school and class organisation allowed the timetable flexibility for dedicated meeting and planning times both within and across key learning areas. In School A, creating MYOS (Middle years of Schooling) teams, and increasing contact time with classes had a positive effect on the school culture by promoting professional satisfaction, commitment and mutual accountability. In School H and School J, where these structural changes were fairly new, there was extremely positive feedback on the impact on both student engagement in learning and on the opportunities this created for improving students' literacy and learning outcomes.*

*The 'Continuing Literacy' professional development program, presented in conjunction with staff from the DEET Western Metropolitan Region, provided another site for teachers from associate primary and secondary schools to work together in middle years clusters or professional learning teams. This program, which focused on issues and strategies for promoting continuity in literacy education, highlighted the value of bringing primary and secondary teachers from associate schools around one table and creating an authorised space for shared dialogue and exchange of knowledge as a basis for enhancing professional practice in literacy. This was both a reflective and pro-active process, leading to ongoing plans for reform in literacy education in the middle years.*

*The Team Small Group model (Ratzki 1999), adapted by many schools from the German model of schooling, was seen by some case study schools as providing a valuable resource for schools seeking a framework for establishing professional learning teams and also for exploring alternative ways of grouping students for literacy and learning*

#### **4.3.3 Maximising potential for literacy education through school and class restructure.**

School and class restructure has a profound impact on classroom teaching and learning and maximises potential for effective literacy and learning. By responding to recommendations for structural reform of school and class organisation in the middle years, schools make significant moves towards creating a model of provision that establishes a middle ground between teaching across the curriculum and curriculum specialisation. Where teachers are supported in maximising the scope and potential of these structural reforms, this middle ground is profoundly enabling of effective literacy teaching and learning.

Many schools are restructuring timetables to enable teams of teachers to share responsibility for classes of students with whom they have increased hours of contact and extended class times. Apart from enhancing continuity and connectedness for students, and professional commitment and satisfaction for staff, these schools are creating classroom learning environments that have a positive impact on students' literacy development and learning outcomes.

Extended class times and increased contact with particular classes of students enable teachers to gain deeper and more comprehensive knowledge of students' literacy and learning capabilities and needs across a broader range of key learning areas. Under less pressure to cover the maximum amount of curriculum content in a short time, and less time lost in lesson changeovers, teachers are able to incorporate more effective and sustained literacy teaching and learning strategies. Particularly where schools accompany these changes with a policy of 'no interruptions', teachers have increased scope to implement a wider variety of classroom organisational structures to support learning, including structured opportunities for oral interaction and co-operative learning. While these features are of benefit for the literacy and learning development of all students, they are particularly important for students with language backgrounds other than English, Indigenous students

and students with special learning needs, many of whom may require increased teacher support through literacy-focused teaching, and more time to complete learning requirements.

Secondary schools need to be aware of the implications of restructuring the timetable to create longer class times and the need to support both staff and students in maximising the literacy and learning opportunities it creates. This involves providing professional development and support for teachers in broadening their repertoires of teaching practices and strategies, and classroom management techniques.

The curriculum flexibility created by structural reforms to school and class organisation in the middle years leads to increased opportunities for teachers to work more cohesively in teaching and assessing aspects of literacy. Collaboration in teams, especially where teachers have responsibility for teaching two or more key learning areas, supports teachers in planning units of study or topics in different key learning areas that are thematically linked. This in turn enables literacy and learning outcomes to be integrated across compatible and complementary areas, especially where curriculum projects involve literacy-rich learning tasks.

### **Research Snapshot # 4.3.3**

*Many of the case study schools involved in the research were in the process of taking up middle years restructure and reform, particularly where this meant establishing teams of teachers who were taking a class for more than one key learning area, and revising timetables to allow extended class times, or increasing the number of double periods.*

*While changes to school and class structures in School A were implemented simultaneously as a raft of middle school reforms, others, such as School J and School H, were introducing changes through a more staged approach. Schools taking a more staged approach felt they were yet to realise the full impact of these structures for improving literacy and learning outcomes but were convinced of this potential by witnessing improved engagement of students in literacy and learning. One school, which at the beginning of the project felt that revising the timetable to allow this innovation would be unlikely in the foreseeable future, was investigating this as a possibility and laying the groundwork for change by the conclusion of the project.*

*School and class restructure and reform were seen by all case study schools to impact positively on literacy teaching and learning. Key elements of school and class organisation that emerged from the research as supporting effective literacy education are as follows:*

- *linking groups of teachers who teach a class for more than one key learning area*
- *flexible timetabling that enables teachers to meet and plan in teams*
- *extended class times or increased double periods*
- *clear roles, responsibilities and expectations in literacy*
- *established and managed structures for planning, implementing and evaluating literacy provision.*

*Where changes to class timetables in case study schools involved the introduction of longer class times (referred to by one case study school as 'learning zones'), or increased the frequency of double periods, this was found to be profoundly enabling of more effective literacy pedagogy. In School A, reorganising Years 7, 8, and 9, into a middle school with professional learning teams and extended blocks of time led to increased staff and student satisfaction, heightened student connectedness and engagement, as well as improved literacy and learning outcomes.*

*It is worth noting, however, that these changes are not equally welcomed at first by all staff, or even by all students, in secondary schools. Literacy coordinators and school leadership teams need to be aware of the importance of providing teachers with ongoing professional development and support in realising the pedagogic opportunities afforded by extended class times. In some case study schools, the major focus of the research involved supporting middle years teachers in developing more constructivist approaches to learning (as distinct from transmission pedagogies). The major objective here was broadening teachers' repertoire of classroom strategies as a basis for maximising opportunities within those strategies for improving literacy and learning outcomes.*

*Teachers in case study schools found that extended class times provided a strong foundation for implementing effective teaching practices such as those described above. These teachers reported that there was significantly less time wasted in transit between classes, resulting in less restlessness and increased student attentiveness and engagement. Similarly, teachers could be more relaxed and more inclined to take risks in trialing new strategies and establishing changed learning cultures. Importantly, lengthened class times allowed greater opportunity for metacognition, reflection and self/peer assessment, which are essential if middle years students are to become more autonomous, independent and self-regulating as learners.*

*An issue that emerged particularly in secondary schools exploring a more integrated approach to curriculum design and learning outcomes was the challenge of maintaining a balance between teaching across the curriculum and curriculum specialisation. School A approached this issue by working in middle years teams to design integrated curriculum studies that combined compatible learning outcomes across the CSF documents of several key learning areas. These integrated curriculum units (often literacy-rich learning opportunities) did not wholly replace existing curriculum structures, but represented short-term curriculum initiatives, rotated at different times for different year levels in the middle school, that created innovative learning sites for students and teachers while still allowing time in the curriculum for the specialised knowledge of individual disciplines and associated subject-specific discourses and literacies.*

## 4.4 TRANSFORMING TEACHING AND LEARNING

Maintaining an emphasis on constructivist learning, reflective teaching and information technology, with a view to engaging students in creative thinking and problem-solving activities.

The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5–9 (DEET, Victoria 1999)

Transforming teaching and learning for effective *literacy* education in the middle years requires setting literacy teaching in the broader context of constructivist and engaged learning. Constructivist learning emphasises the process of actively making meaning, rather than passively consuming received knowledge through what is often referred to as ‘transmission pedagogy’ (Driver et al. 1994).

Although explicit teaching of knowledge about language in the context of curriculum literacies is essential in the middle years, this needs to be firmly situated in classroom pedagogies that allow learners to be active agents in constructing their learning. For improved literacy and learning outcomes for all students, it is important that the emphasis on more overt and explicit literacy pedagogy in all areas of the curriculum does not lead to an increase in transmission pedagogies, at the expense of other more effective learning.

Constructivist approaches to learning are supported by co-operative, student-centred learning environments characterised by interaction, enquiry and negotiation. Other important features are those that are reiterated in much of the literature about the needs of adolescent learners:

- choice and ownership within a framework of support and guidance
- independence, autonomy and self-regulation
- meaningful and authentic purposes
- metacognition and higher order thinking skills
- reflection and self-assessment.

These principles represent a fundamental starting point for focusing on effective literacy teaching and learning in the middle years.

### Recommendation 4

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That, with support from education systems or sectors, schools transform teaching and learning for effective middle years literacy education through:

- planning for a diversity of literacy teaching and learning needs
  - using a shared model or framework to inform planning for literacy and learning
  - using core teaching practices and strategies to support literacy and learning in each key learning area
  - using learning technologies to enhance literacy and learning
  - planning for authentic purposes and autonomy in literacy and learning
  - including metacognition, reflection and self-assessment in literacy and learning.
- 

### 4.4.1 Planning for a diversity of literacy teaching and learning needs.

Students in the middle years of schooling bring a diversity of linguistic and cultural knowledge and experience, and a wider range of developmental levels, literacy capacities and needs than in any other phase of schooling. All teachers in the middle years need to be equipped with literacy knowledge, strategies and resources for catering for the range of developmental levels students bring to learning (see 4.4.3). This involves building on the literacy knowledge and skills students bring to learning, and enabling students to demonstrate new learning in a range of ways, including oral and visual.

Middle years teachers need to work collaboratively (ideally in literacy-focused professional learning teams) to establish literacy and learning goals across cohorts, for high-achieving students requiring additional challenge as well as students for whom there is evidence of underachievement. This needs to be informed by knowledge of:

- the general literacy needs and likely learning pathways of diverse groups of learners
- the particular literacy and learning needs of students
- the learning cultures students have previously experienced (particularly in the case of new and recent arrivals)
- standards and targets for literacy
- a repertoire of core teaching practices strategies for students requiring increased teacher support.

Teachers need to develop curriculum and assessment processes that enable students who are working at different stages on a continuum of learning to experience progress and success. This involves planning teaching and learning activities that are designed to offer different levels of challenge and achievement according to individual student literacy and learning needs and capacities. This is particularly important for students with language backgrounds other than English, Indigenous students and students with special learning needs, many of whom may require increased teacher support.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.4.1**

*Schools involved in the research were selected in order to be representative of a broad cross section of students and social and cultural communities. Each school was required to select a particular focus for the research. This in itself fostered a diversity of approaches and strategies for improving literacy and learning outcomes of students. Several of these schools had students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and significant numbers of ESL students with a wide range of literacy and learning needs.*

*School J had high numbers of students from remote rural communities, many of whom found it difficult to be engaged and motivated in their learning. Teachers in this school focused on engaging students in learning as a precursor to focusing on improving literacy and learning outcomes. Professional learning teams of teachers in Year 7 planned activities in key learning areas to captivate students' interest and increase motivation for learning.*

*School A focused on integrating effective literacy teaching and learning strategies into key learning areas in Year 7. They also developed a term's integrated curriculum unit of work which involved literacy-rich tasks that combined learning outcomes from English, SOSE, Technology, Science and Maths.*

*This unit, which involved students in researching an issue in the local community and constructing a website, developed students' reading and writing skills in range of text types or genres, as well as integrating learning technologies.*

*School B pursued a focus on literacy through creating a virtual technologised classroom space on a dedicated website linking them with pre-service teachers in a tertiary institution. The focus was on student writing for an unknown audience and conferencing about their writing.*

*In School F, the autonomous learning unit, which already worked on principles of high student engagement, became a site for strengthening the focus on literacy development through authentic learning tasks.*

*School E used 'literacy learning rotations' to create optional activities within a set structure of tasks. This structure was devised to meet the diverse literacy needs of 53 students while building a learning culture of collaboration, support and interdependence between student and student, and between teacher and student. This involved dividing students loosely into ability groups and selecting literature according to the particular needs and interests of students, with some attention to challenging and extending their literacy capabilities. Literature or reading circles were used as a way of supporting students in reading selected texts, while Bloom's taxonomy was used to design a series of optional tasks, which were then grouped under four key headings. Students were able to select four different activities, one from each of the headings or categories, with the proviso that their activities formed a balance overall.*

*The benefits of this for middle years students were clearly that having an element of choice within set parameters resulted in greater ownership and autonomy and in completing the requirements more fully and comprehensively. There was also a greater scope for assessment products, which enhanced student interest in sharing their responses to the whole group as some presented poems or raps while others developed sociograms or wrote a further final chapter for the text. Through sharing their responses, the students gained different perspectives from the different presenters and indicated, in turn, their enthusiastic interest in their questions and comments of the presenters. The students needed to be able to clarify, justify and explain their responses to the audience, which allowed them to articulate their knowledge and interpretations of the novel.*

*Literacy learning rotations also included other components of the curriculum including reading and writing experiences based on an integrated unit of work. Some possibilities for curriculum and assessment tasks related to this unit were viewing a video and responding to it, using interactive CD ROMS which might have had a spelling focus linked with the integrated unit, developing research skills, and practising summarising and note-making skills using everyday 'authentic' texts such as newspapers, magazines and pamphlets.*

*Literacy learning rotations enhance the individuals' literacy learning experiences while enriching the whole learning culture of the classroom through*

- *providing a framework for small group work, and building on the needs of middle years students for peer interaction and learning*
- *providing a variety of literacy options that may incorporate a variety of media and resources*
- *focusing on a range of aspects of literacy development within the teaching and learning cycle*
- *enhancing a sense of autonomy and interdependence as students work in their groups and plan ahead to gather required resources*
- *increasing collective autonomy through taking responsibility for accessing peers for assistance and recognising when to ask peers for help and to know, in turn, when to offer assistance.*

*Two secondary schools, School I and School K, also used literature or reading circles as an effective means of catering for student needs, particularly in the English key learning area, where teachers have been seeking an alternative to the 'whole class novel' approach to reading literary texts. In these schools, the introduction of literature circles was not necessarily seen as completely replacing the practice of the whole class reading and discussing a shared text, as there may be situations where this is called for. Rather it was seen as a structured way of engaging middle years students in reading through choice, through small*

*group work and through texts matched to students' needs and interests, and yet providing guided instruction in relation to the reading.*

*Though the introduction of literature or reading circles in these schools was mainly through the English key learning area, where it led to large-scale revision of the English curriculum for students in the junior secondary years, it is important to note that the strategy can be adapted for use with newspaper articles and selected factual texts, either in English or other key learning areas.*

*In School G, the focus was on using knowledge of students' literacy performance (using the DART and other assessment strategies) to group students for literacy and learning activities tailored to their needs and abilities. Students were working on common projects in three broad groups with activities designed to extend their literacy knowledge and skills.*

#### **4.4.2 Using a shared model or framework to inform planning for literacy and learning.**

Using a model or framework to inform planning for literacy and learning provides teachers with a basis for sharing professional practice in literacy and a common tool for planning and auditing literacy teaching in curriculum areas.

While it is important for teachers to have information about the different theories informing literacy education, it is also essential that models for literacy teaching and learning mesh with the ways teachers conceptualise their classroom practice, and assist teachers to integrate a literacy focus into their practice. Adopting one particular model or approach can assist in developing a shared language for talking about literacy practice and provides a basis for working collaboratively to develop strategies and resources for addressing students' literacy and learning needs.

The process of discussing and evaluating the pros and cons of different theoretical models and frameworks is a valuable strategy in itself for promoting dialogue among teachers about different ways of seeing language and literacy, and for raising awareness of different approaches to literacy teaching and learning in the classroom. Several of the most influential frameworks informing research activity, projects and initiatives in literacy education are genre theory and functional grammar (Halliday 1985), multiliteracies (The New London Group 1996), the three dimension model (Green 1988) and the four resources model (Freebody & Luke 1990; Luke & Freebody 1999). All these have a significant contribution to make to the field of knowledge in literacy education, and all deserve attention as pedagogical frameworks to help teachers think about and plan for literacy development of all learners.

The four resources model has been taken up and further explicated by both theorists and classroom practitioners (Campbell & Green 2000; Edwards 1998; Ludwig 2000), which suggests that it articulates with the way teachers conceptualise classroom practice.

One reason may be that this model takes 'text' and 'textual' resources or practices as its central organising concept in identifying the different possible roles or resources the literate person brings to text – text codebreaker, text meaning-maker, text user and text analyst (see Figure 1). This makes the model immediately accessible to non-literacy specialists since, as long as the notion of 'text' is interpreted broadly, teachers of all key learning areas can be seen as users of texts, and also as teachers of the texts that students use for learning in their key learning area.

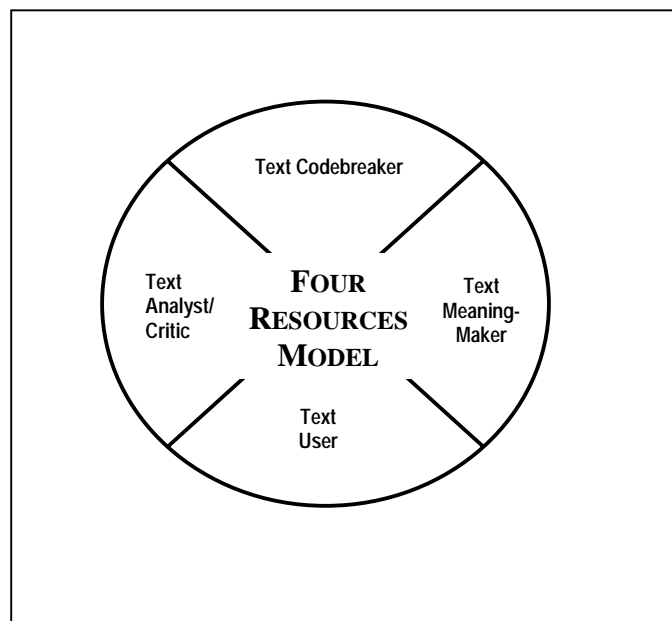


FIGURE 2 : The Four Resources model, Luke & Freebody, 1990

The model can provide teachers with a planning framework for meeting the needs of the diversity of learners in the middle years by making aspects of language and literacy more explicit, and in increasing their effectiveness as ‘mediators’ of meaning between the student and the text.

This is important for all students, but particularly for ESL students and Indigenous students who may be at different stages of developing English language literacy, or literacy in standard Australian English. For these students the model is suggested as a useful springboard for an exploration of the interface that exists between language learning and literacy development (McKay 2000).

The *text codebreaker* aspect highlights the need for expanding students’ language resources in the codes and conventions of spoken and written English (This includes knowledge of phonics, knowledge of words and subject-specific terminology or technical language, and knowledge about texts). The *text meaning-maker* aspect highlights the need for this knowledge to be embedded in meaningful learning contexts that both build on existing knowledge as a basis for new learning, or provide scaffolding if the text, or task, relies on assumed knowledge students may not have. The *text user* aspect highlights the need for learners to develop understanding and knowledge of the ways language and texts are shaped and used to meet particular purposes within various social and cultural contexts in order to use these processes independently. The *text analyst or critic* aspect highlights the importance of critical literacy and the need for students to have both the knowledge to confidently analyse and critique texts, and a language for talking about the ways language and texts work to shape particular meanings and serve particular interests.

It is important that the four literacy resources not be viewed as involving a linear or lock-step sequence but rather a group of textual practices that operate simultaneously in ongoing, dynamic relationship with one another. An additional strength in the way the model characterises literacy is that it does not suggest a hierarchy of literacy resources but is



inclusive of both psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives. As other writers have shown, the four resources can be seen as bringing together a number of theoretical perspectives on literacy development, often considered to be incompatible with one another. The text codebreaker reflects an emphasis on decoding which includes phonological and phonemic awareness, text meaning-maker has some connections with whole language, language experience and process writing approaches, text user draws on the body of knowledge offered by genre theory and functional grammar, while the text analyst or critic can be seen as critical literacy.

An additional strength of this model is that it includes critical literacy as an integral part of literate practice rather than seeing it as an add-on, as a separate entity or as a higher-order skill for more able students. The ability to engage critically with texts, and to see that texts are constructed to serve particular interests and ideological purposes, is widely acknowledged as fundamental to the literacy development of students in the middle years.

The four resources model provides a basis for discussion among teachers of the different literacy teaching and learning strategies that can be used to develop the different literacy resources required for effective literacy and learning (see Figure 3). This equips both literacy educators and key learning area teachers with a shared language and a common conceptual framework for thinking about texts and textual practices, for auditing their current practice, and for planning more systematically to engage and support students in developing independent literacy resources.

Though it is important to emphasise that the four resources do not reflect a linear, developmental sequence, and that effective literacy strategies simultaneously address many, if not all, of the four resources, nevertheless teachers may find they need to focus more on one aspect than others at different times according to the demands of the learning task, context or purpose.

Figure 3 below, details the key knowledge, questions and strategies and approaches associated with each of the four resources in the model.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Text Codebreaker</b> <i>How do I crack this code?</i></p> <p><b>Key Knowledge</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>letter/sound combinations</li> <li>word/sentence structure</li> <li>grammar and syntax</li> <li>spelling, punctuation and handwriting/keyboard skills</li> <li>conventions of language vocabulary and specialised language/terminology</li> <li>text type/genre</li> <li>academic discourse</li> <li>text design and layout</li> </ul> <p><b>Focus Questions for Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What knowledge of written language do students bring to this text?</li> <li>What explicit teaching will support students in understanding the language and structure of this text?</li> </ul> <p><b>Possible Practices and Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>using headings, titles &amp; illustrations to make predictions</li> <li>pre-teaching vocabulary and specialised terminology</li> <li>glossaries and taxonomies</li> <li>skimming and scanning the text</li> <li>graphic outline/text preview</li> <li>think aloud/read aloud</li> <li>word splash</li> <li>focusing on phonics and word knowledge in context</li> <li>focusing on literate language and writers' linguistic choices</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Text Meaning-Maker</b> <i>What does this mean to me?</i></p> <p><b>Key Knowledge</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>background/prior knowledge</li> <li>personal/life experience</li> <li>cultural and linguistic experience</li> <li>general/world knowledge</li> <li>commonsense understandings</li> <li>specific field/topic knowledge</li> <li>ways knowledge and texts are constructed</li> </ul> <p><b>Focus Questions for Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What knowledge do students bring of the meaning of this text?</li> <li>What explicit teaching will support students in understanding and interacting with the meaning of this text?</li> </ul> <p><b>Possible Practices and Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>literature/reading circles</li> <li>concept maps/mind maps</li> <li>read and retell</li> <li>guided reading</li> <li>three level guide</li> <li>four corners</li> <li>reciprocal teaching</li> <li>co-operative cloze</li> <li>information gap</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Text User</b> <i>What do I do with this text?</i></p> <p><b>Key Knowledge</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>understanding the shaping influence of social/cultural factors and contexts</li> <li>recognition of different school and life purposes and audiences for texts and language</li> <li>changes in text and language use from one social context to another</li> </ul> <p><b>Focus Questions for Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What knowledge do students bring of the social purposes and uses of this kind of text?</li> <li>What explicit teaching will support students in using this text for particular purposes?</li> </ul> <p><b>Possible Practices and Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>modelling and joint construction of texts</li> <li>summarising a text</li> <li>data charts</li> <li>cognitive organisers</li> <li>gathering grid</li> <li>grids for extracting and organising information</li> <li>note-making</li> <li>text patterning</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Text Analyst</b> <i>What does this text do to me?</i></p> <p><b>Key Knowledge</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recognition of the ways texts positions authors and readers</li> <li>attention to what is included, what is excluded from the text and why</li> <li>writer's linguistic choices/critical language awareness</li> <li>relationship between this text and other similar texts/intertextuality</li> <li>alternative readings/writings and responses to text</li> </ul> <p><b>Focus Questions for Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What knowledge do students bring of the ways this text is designed to represent particular views and interests?</li> <li>What explicit teaching will support students in developing critical language awareness of the ways language works to create particular meanings?</li> </ul> <p><b>Possible Practices and Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>writing on reading</li> <li>four corners</li> <li>multiple perspectives</li> <li>resistant reading</li> <li>problematising/interrogating the text</li> </ul>

*Culican, with material from Edwards (1998).*

**FIGURE 3:** Using the Four Resources model to support literacy teaching and learning in the key learning areas.

**Research Snapshot #4.4.2**

*One case study school, School F, which has a culturally and linguistically diverse population, used the four resources model to develop a checklist of developmental descriptors of reading and writing achievement that could be used by teachers and students alike (see case study in this report). While the starting point was to list the skills students were expected to develop in Years 5 and 6, the four resources – text codebreaker, text meaning-maker, text user and text analyst – were used to ensure that reading was represented not as a set of discrete skills but as an interactive process (Luke & Freebody 1990). Descriptors were written in language that could be understood by students to encourage them to use the profile for self-assessment. Students were invited to fill in the profile by marking the skills they believed they had already developed. One high-achieving student commented that the profile helped her to set goals, adding that, while the teachers expected her to achieve the Level 3 outcome, she herself expected to achieve at Level 4 but aimed to achieve in all areas of reading at Level 5. Another student found that the profile helped him recognise skills he had not previously considered as part of 'reading', such as using the computer. He had spent some time on a website reading the instructions for an electronic game, obtaining information about new products and reading about 'cheats'. By going to the section of the profile related to 'text meaning-maker', he located the appropriate descriptor: 'I use a range of resources for research including newspapers, internet, encyclopaedia, magazines, CD Rom.*

*The use of this model has facilitated a more purposeful approach to the teaching of literacy at this school, which reiterates the importance for middle years professional learning teams to have access to shared professional development and planning time in order to develop common approaches and resources for literacy.*

#### **4.4.3 Using core teaching practices and strategies to support literacy and learning in each key learning area.**

Using core teaching practices and strategies that support literacy and learning in each key learning area ensures that students' needs are addressed and supports students in transferring literacy knowledge, skills and strategies from one learning context to another. This requires addressing literacy through key elements of effective teaching/learning processes, and selecting appropriate practices and strategies according to the particular literacy demands and learning expectations of the relevant key learning area/s.

Effective literacy teaching and learning:

- defines literacy broadly to include listening, speaking viewing, as well as keeping a firm focus on reading and writing
- recognises the fundamental relationship between language, literacy and learning
- builds on the language and literacy knowledge and experience students bring to learning
- addresses the literacy demands and learning expectations embedded in curriculum learning
- maximises classroom opportunities in all curriculum areas for explicit teaching of aspects of literacy
- fosters development of independent literacy and textual practices that students can transfer to other learning areas.

#### **Addressing Literacy through Core Teaching Practices**

Literacy teaching and learning is most effective where it is embedded in the key elements of the effective teaching/learning processes. These key elements, identified in many different models and frameworks for classroom pedagogy, can be summarised as follows:

**Knowing**

For middle years teachers, this means knowing students and what they bring to literacy and learning, as well as the 'curriculum literacies', or the literacy demands and learning expectations of the particular key learning areas being taught.

**Connecting**

For middle years teachers, this means both connecting new literacy knowledge and skills to prior knowledge and skills, and also connecting 'school' literacy and learning to 'out-of-school' literacies and to literacy in wider community and global contexts. Teaching strategies that activate prior knowledge and encourage students to anticipate meaning by making and confirming predictions are

**Modelling**

For middle years teachers, this means modelling the desired practice in a way that makes the processes and/or linguistic choices explicit.

**Scaffolding**

For middle years teachers, this means supporting students by providing scaffolding in the form of guidance that enables them to experience success and to develop confidence and knowledge to tackle literacy tasks independently. Scaffolding may involve providing templates, models or frameworks for literacy tasks, or teaching particular approaches that give students structural supports in accessing or making meaning in text.

**Responding**

For middle years teachers, this means responding to students' work with constructive feedback that uses a language for talking about text and language that teachers have supported students in developing. It also alerts teachers to the need to provide students with an option of responding and demonstrating knowledge in a variety of ways.

**Reflecting**

For middle years teachers, this means creating opportunities for reflecting on both teaching and learning, through teacher reflective practice and through ongoing student reflecting on learning and through self-assessment.

**Addressing Literacy through Core Teaching Strategies**

While addressing literacy through these key elements of the teaching/learning process, teachers also need to establish a repertoire of effective strategies and approaches to be used or adapted across key learning areas. These should be informed by knowledge of students' literacy capabilities and needs, and knowledge also of the literacy demands and learning expectations of the relevant key learning area/s. These literacy teaching practices and strategies need to be regarded as representing baseline expectations for teaching and learning in key learning areas, and should extend students' capabilities in listening, speaking and viewing as well as in reading and writing.

In order to improve literacy and learning outcomes, strategies need to do more than *use* language. An essential feature distinguishing an effective literacy teaching strategy is the

extent to which the strategy maximises opportunities for ‘learning language, learning through language and learning about language’ (Christie 1991). For a strategy to be effective in extending students’ knowledge about text and language in the context of curriculum literacies, teachers need to capitalise on its potential for explicit teaching to this purpose.

The concept of ‘low book (or text) orientation’ and ‘high book (or text) orientation, emerging from national literacy research with Indigenous students, provides a useful distinction between strategies which provide *initial* preparation of students for reading and writing (for example, using prior knowledge and context clues to make predictions in reading), and strategies which attend much more closely to the sequence of meaning in a text, to the structure of the text and to the writer’s linguistic choices (Rose et al. 1999).

### Creating a Reading Culture

Students require continuing support to be active readers in the middle years, and schools can no longer assume that students read print texts in the form of books outside the school context. Therefore, schools need to create a ‘reading culture’ through a combination of providing guidance and support for students in self-selected reading, and through setting expectations for student reading. This needs to be understood and supported by the whole school community and embedded in the curriculum in a visible and structured way. Many schools are revisiting and adapting earlier strategies, such as *Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR)* in order to place reading back firmly within a focus on improving literacy and learning outcomes. Literature circles, or reading circles (Daniels, 1994; Dawson & Fitzgerald, 1999) provide another exemplary approach to reading and an alternative to the ‘whole class novel’ in English, that provides a structure that allows choice and flexibility and fosters independent reading within a framework that can be closely monitored by teachers. This strategy provides authentic opportunities for teachers to assess students’ reading progress with different text types and texts of varying levels of difficulty.

### Reading Texts and Textbooks in Key Learning Areas

All teachers need to see themselves as teachers of the range of texts students read in the key learning areas they teach. Students need to be supported in reading factual texts through baseline strategies such as *graphic outline* (also known as *surveying the text* or *text preview*), *reciprocal teaching*, or *guided reciprocal*, *literature* or *reading circles*, *three level guide* and others lend themselves to opportunities for literacy-focused teaching within meaningful learning contexts. Graphic organisers, data charts or grids assist students in extracting and categorising information and support students in structuring their writing.

### Writing in Key Learning Areas

As the literacies of key learning area become increasingly specialised and differentiated within the middle and secondary years, all teachers need to incorporate explicit teaching of curriculum literacies. In writing, baseline strategies are *explicit teaching* of the text structures and genres and their associated grammatical features, combine with *modelling* and *joint construction of text*.

#### **Research Snapshot # 4.4.4**

*The aspect of core literacy teaching practices and strategies was directly relevant to the research brief for the project which focused on ways all teachers of students in the middle years maximise their effectiveness as literacy educators in the mainstream classroom context. The research required schools to select an*

*aspect or area in literacy education for particular attention. Professional development and consultancy could then be tailored to supporting schools in their particular research focus.*

*The key elements of the teaching/learning process outlined above were highlighted in the professional development provided for case study schools as elements of best practice in literacy education. Many of the case study schools trialed literacy practices and strategies that demonstrated these elements, used these elements as a tool for auditing current literacy practice or built these elements into existing practice in schools.*

*Case study schools focused on the following elements as part of the research into effective literacy teaching and learning practices in the mainstream classroom context:*

- creating a community of readers and writers who read and write for a range of purposes including enjoyment and learning*
- activating and developing prior knowledge through activities such as brainstorming, graphic organisers and word splash*
- engaging with text and interacting with meaning at deeper levels through activities such as graphic outline, directed reading and thinking, reciprocal teaching, read and retell, literature or reading circles, three level guide and co-operative cloze*
- demonstrating and scaffolding through activities such as analysing text structure and grammatical features, modelling, joint construction and discussing samples*
- responding to the text appropriately through activities such as structured discussion, graphic organisers, written responses, visual display, powerpoint presentation, performance,*
- reflecting on what they have learned and how; what worked well and what could be done better, what learning strategies can be transferred to other contexts, and what language has been learned to talk about text and language.*

*A key theme emerging from the research was that, in order to lead to improved literacy and learning outcomes, classroom teaching strategies need to be underpinned by sound principles and pedagogies and by teacher knowledge about language and literacy in general, and students' literacy and learning needs in particular.*

*Teachers need to be able to make informed choices from a broad repertoire of possible practices and strategies according to the demands of the task, the learning context and student needs. In addition, classroom strategies for literacy need to be firmly embedded in engaged learning and the principles of effective middle years pedagogy in general. These provide for active and constructivist learning, authentic purposes, choice and autonomy, meaningful literacy practices, metacognition, reflection and self-assessment.*

*Case study schools trialed particular strategies and approaches to literacy. In those schools with a particular focus on reading, approaches to reading factual texts such as 'graphic outline' (otherwise known as 'surveying the text' or 'text preview') and 'reciprocal teaching' were essential baseline strategies for supporting students in engaging with the texts and interpreting and analysing meaning at different levels. School G found that students trained in 'reciprocal teaching' in small groups demonstrated increased understanding of meaning through applying the independent strategies of predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarising. Naming these different roles, or textual practices, provided students with a metalanguage for talking about their learning; even the youngest students could identify and classify the different kinds of questions (level 1, 2 Or 3) being asked or answered within the group.*

*School D used a number of strategies for improving student comprehension and interpretation of deeper meaning in text. This was combined with strategies such as data charts and information grids that supported students in extracting and organising information from texts in ways that supported them in structuring their writing for reports, character studies and other texts.*

#### 4.4.5 Using learning technologies to enhance literacy and learning.

Learning technologies enhance literacy and learning outcomes where they are used thoughtfully and strategically to support students in developing as readers, writers, listeners, speakers and critical thinkers in an increasingly digital environment. This involves the development of 'technoliteracies' and the ability to locate and select appropriate information as well as to explore, create, question, problem-solve and evaluate. The rationale and goals for the use of learning technologies to enhance literacy and learning need to be twofold:

- to ensure that students are supported in becoming capable, informed, confident and critical users of new literacies associated with information and communications technologies
- to enhance students' literacy development and their capacities for sustained reading and writing for authentic purposes and audiences.

Learning technologies provide opportunities for students to communicate appropriately with other users of email, the internet and dedicated websites. Teachers need to explore the scope and potential of these for improving engagement in learning and literacy development for all learners in the middle years, but particularly for boys who may be more likely to engage with learning through the use of learning technologies.

##### **Research Snapshot # 4.4.5**

*School B investigated the impact of combined use of email, the internet and a dedicated website on the engagement and literacy development of students in a vertically-grouped Year 7 and 8 class. The focus for the research, which built on an earlier project involving technology, was on teaching argumentative discourse. This involved students writing a range of argumentative and other texts, which were 'conferenced' over an established website with a group of university student teachers.*

*The group used computers in their English classes for access to the worldwide web for information on current social issues, for email and for the dedicated website. Using the DART results, students were grouped into mixed-ability groupings of two or three to work collaboratively with an on-line tutor. The aim of this research was to encourage students to develop reading and writing skills by writing for an unseen*

*audience sharing a technologised virtual classroom space. Writing for an audience outside the school community required students to be more explicit and more confident in their writing, while the technology engaged their interest. Freed from the permanence of committing errors on paper, and able to select their own topics for writing, students experienced increased enjoyment and engagement in reading and writing tasks. Having an authentic purpose and audience for their writing naturally raised the level of effort students invested, which led to enhanced literacy development and outcomes.*

*School I was also involved in integrating learning technologies into teaching and learning in the key learning areas. Locating and critically evaluating information from web searches was a key emphasis, as were the synthesising, summarising and note-making skills required in preparation of student powerpoint presentations to the class*

*School G also represented a learning environment where learning technologies were integrated as both a tool for learning and as a means for students to develop proficiencies in the particular literacies ('technoliteracies') required by digital technologies.*

#### 4.4.6 Planning for authentic purposes and autonomy in literacy and learning.

Planning for authentic purposes and autonomy in literacy and learning creates more meaningful and engaging contexts for learning and promotes student independence and ownership. This involves connecting literacy and learning to authentic contexts and designing learning tasks with purposes, which are related, as far as possible, to 'real life' contexts and to the development of essential knowledge and skills. For learning to be effective, it needs to engage with student 'subjectivities' and to connect with the world outside school, particularly with the wide range of information, technology and popular culture literacies students participate in the world outside school.

Promoting autonomy in literacy and learning involves creating the curriculum flexibility for students to make informed choices and to exercise autonomy and self-regulation in learning. Students in the middle years are in a developmental phase of learning where they need to be encouraged to make guided and informed choices from a range of options within the curriculum. Research into the developmental needs and cognitive abilities of adolescent learners suggests that they are more likely to engage in learning contexts where there is some flexibility and room for negotiating curriculum and assessment requirements.

Where students are given a series of options, and encouraged to make balanced and informed choices, this enhances a sense of ownership, autonomy and responsibility, and leads to more independent and self-regulated learning. Flexibility and choice in relation to literacy and learning tasks within curriculum learning areas also enables middle years teachers to cater for a diversity of student interests and capabilities, and to work with small similar-needs groupings of students requiring explicit literacy instruction and support within the mainstream classroom context.

Using theoretical bases such as multiple intelligences analyses can be useful as a starting point for students to assess their own preferred learning styles. This in turn provides a sound basis for decision-making about the kinds of literacy and learning tasks required, and ensures a balance between preferred learning styles and those benefiting from further development.

##### **Research Snapshot #4.4.6**

*While all of the case study schools focused on making learning more meaningful, engaging and authentic for students in the middle years in one way or another School F had a particular focus on authentic purposes for literacy and learning. This school had established an autonomous learning unit, which emphasised authentic and purposeful learning. Highlighting and further developing the literacy within these authentic tasks became a central feature over the period of the research. One teacher, for example, designed a language activity on the topic of recycling. This involved the students contacting the council to inquire about the recycling program. Students practised with the teacher as she acted out different scenarios the students might encounter and have to respond to. Part of this involved exchanging information on the telephone and giving details, such as the school fax number. The commitment of these teachers to authentic learning, and to authentic language and literacy learning as part of this, led them to make strong statements against traditional decontextualised language teaching, which compartmentalises language into isolated sets of skills, assessed through paper and pen tests.*



*School B connected students in year 7 and 8, through the use of email, the internet and a dedicated website, to tertiary students for ongoing communication and conferencing over their writing. Students were involved in selecting their own topics for writing argumentative texts and their own topics, design and content for their magazine. Writing for an audience outside the school community required students to be more explicit and more confident in their writing, while the technology engaged their interest. Having an authentic purpose and audience for their writing naturally raised the level of effort.*

*School E used 'literacy learning rotations' to promote student autonomy within a learning culture of collaboration, support and interdependence between student and student, and between teacher and student. Students were able to select four different activities, one from each of the headings or categories, with the proviso that their activities formed a balance overall. The emphasis was on students making informed and thoughtful decisions, and understanding that their decisions would have consequences. Multiple intelligences were used as a framework to develop students' awareness of their strengths and preferred learning styles, as a basis for encouraging them to both build on these, but to select tasks from a list of options to extend their development in less preferred areas also.*

#### **4.4.7 Including metacognition, reflection and self-assessment in literacy and learning.**

Metacognition, reflection and self-assessment are particularly important for supporting literacy and learning development of students in the middle years. Learners in this phase of schooling have increased capacities for developing self-knowledge and self-awareness, for developing control of learning processes, and for consciously applying and transferring new knowledge and skills from one learning context to another.

Metacognition involves higher order knowing and thinking. Strategies, such as graphic organisers, which encourage thinking processes, and which assist students' to record their thinking, also support students' literacy development. Applied to language and literacy development, metacognition may be understood as

- knowing about language and the way language works
- having a language to talk about text and language (a metalanguage, or metalinguistic awareness), and
- being able to use and manipulate language for different contexts and purposes.

Metacognition applies also to the development of independent learning strategies. These encompass learning how to learn, developing a language for talking about learning, as well as self-monitoring and self-assessment of learning. While the developmental and cognitive characteristics of learners in the middle years suggest increased capacity for metacognitive and reflective learning, this needs to be actively fostered, and students scaffolded in the development of a language for talking about their own and others' learning. Increased opportunities to reflect on their learning, on how aspects of learning and literacy development relate to curriculum learning areas, and on how they might transfer new knowledge to other learning contexts need to be incorporated into everyday classroom teaching and learning practices in all areas of the curriculum.

Middle years teachers need to draw on a range of strategies that cultivate higher order thinking and language skills in all key learning areas and which give students frequent opportunities to articulate aspects of the learning process, both individually and in groups. As part of fostering this aspect of literacy and learning development for middle years students, teachers may also need to scaffold students in developing the linguistic resources required for reflection and self-assessment.

## Student Learning Journals

A student learning journal can be used across key learning areas to provide a means not only for supporting reflection and self-assessment of learning, but also for enhancing students' literacy development. Journals can be used for recording personal response, for spelling of key words (as with the spelling journal, recommended in the *West Australian First Steps* program), for focusing on aspects of curriculum literacies (such as subject-specific terminology), and for recording and reflecting on the use of learning strategies and reading strategies for different contexts and purposes.

### **Research Snapshot #4.4.7**

*A number of schools in the research were exploring the impact of metacognition, reflection and self-assessment in literacy in the middle years. School H found that students required a considerable level of support in not only recognising what had been learned but in having a language (or metalanguage) for talking about their learning. Significantly, though not surprisingly, students found it difficult to reflect 'in a vacuum' and required structured prompts or frameworks to guide their responses. In reflecting on this, the teacher recognised that the nature of learning is such that new information is 'naturalised' and becomes an invisible addition to the learner's existing repertoire of knowledge. That is, unless 'benchmarked' against a previous 'knowledge state' as a point of comparison, open questions such as 'what have you learned?' or 'how have you progressed?' can be problematic where students lack the confidence and the linguistic resources required to 'textually' demonstrate metacognition. Students in School H were encouraged to keep a learning journal and simultaneously scaffolded in acquiring the skills and resources to reflect more actively on their learning through the use of optional responses, sentence stems and prompts.*

*School G used learning journals and reading journals to support students in developing metacognitive, as well as metalinguistic, awareness of learning processes and strategies impacting on literacy development. The aim of the reading journals was to highlight different kinds of texts, and different ways of reading to*

*achieve different purposes. By term 3, students involved in the research at School G were able to write a reading rubric to use for self-evaluation and identification of their phase of development in reading.*

*The learning journal at School G was designed to give students an opportunity to reflect on their learning in all areas of the curriculum, and to write about any issues or difficulties they were encountering. These journals were also used for personal spelling lists from all curriculum areas and as a learning tool that applies across key learning areas. In their self-evaluation, students were able to verbalise or write about the learning strategies they found effective and why.*

## 4.5 CREATING OUTWARD-LOOKING COMMUNITIES

Promoting the participation of parents, the collaboration of youth service providers and the involvement of the wider community through links and partnerships in order to improve student learning outcomes.

The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5–9 (DEET, Victoria 1999)

Creating outward-looking communities for effective *literacy* education in the middle years involves cultivating effective and appropriate communications, relationships and partnerships that broaden learning opportunities and experiences, and that improve literacy and learning outcomes for students. An important aspect of this is connecting school literacy and learning to real life social, community and global contexts and purposes, and building on the community and popular culture literacies that students bring to learning. Schools also need to pursue productive partnerships that enrich the learning resources and the repertoire of learning contexts and experiences within school communities. The notion of partnerships is interpreted broadly to include those established with parents/caregivers, associate primary and secondary schools, tertiary providers, community agencies organisations and businesses, and various social and cultural groups and communities.

### Recommendation 5

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That, with support from education systems or sectors, schools create outward-looking learning communities that promote effective middle years literacy education through:

- communicating about literacy education between home and school
  - valuing and building on literacy practices outside school
  - connecting school literacy and learning to the wider community
  - pursuing productive partnerships to enrich literacy and learning.
- 

#### 4.5.1 Communicating about literacy education between home and school.

Communicating about literacy education between home and school is of vital importance in valuing the contribution of families/caregivers in supporting and extending the literacy and learning development of students in the middle years. This involves keeping parents informed in ways that are culturally inclusive and appropriate, as well as in language that is accessible. It also means demystifying classroom and curriculum processes for parents/caregivers and recognising ways that they actively contribute to these processes. Creating informal opportunities for dialogue about students' learning, both between teachers and parents and between groups of parents, is another way of sharing perceptions and expectations, and provides teachers with an opportunity to mediate where there may be misconceptions about school expectations.

Middle years professional learning teams or clusters need to work collaboratively in exploring appropriate ways of involving parents/caregivers and communities in supporting students' literacy development. At the most fundamental level, this means keeping parents informed of literacy initiatives in schools and teacher professional development or action research projects, especially where these are promoting continuity of literacy education for students in Years 5-9. Expectations of students relating to reading, writing and other aspects of literacy need to be made clear to parents. Opportunities for parents to participate in sessions out of school hours demonstrating ways they can support students' progress are beneficial, where sufficient numbers of parents can attend.

Literacy assessment information needs to be incorporated into curriculum assessment and reporting procedures and communicated to students and parents/caregivers in ways that are

accessible. This is more effective where it is supported with information about how parents/caregivers can support students' literacy development outside the school.

Communication and partnership between home and school is strengthened where parents/caregivers are also kept informed about homework expectations and where homework tasks are not an add-on but are integrally related to meaningful and authentic literacy and learning processes.

#### ***Research Snapshot #4.5.1***

*Many of the case study schools were concerned to develop stronger communication links and partnerships between home and school. School D was especially active in involving parents and families in events within the school community that profiled the literacy and learning activities in which students had been involved. One annual event involves students researching a notable person of their choice and conducting a research project culminating in a presentation at what is known in the school community as the 'Night of the Notables'. As it is a single-sex school for boys, this school also runs a program for fathers and sons which explores aspects of identity, relationships, self-concept, stereotypes and role models.*

*School B was preparing to change their reporting system to parents/caregivers by including a mid-year skills-based report. The school intends to use the DART as a basis for communicating information to parents in accessible language.*

#### **4.5.2 Valuing and building on literacy practices outside school.**

Valuing and building on the literacies students bring to learning, including literacy practices students engage in beyond the school context, is an important foundation for new literacy and learning. Students are engaged in a range of contexts outside school, which are characterised by different literacy practices including family and community literacies, workplace literacies, technology and popular culture literacies, commercial and consumerist literacies, religious and liturgical literacies, and many more. Students' literacy competencies outside the school environment are not always reflected within the classroom, or within the parameters of what traditionally constitutes 'school' literacy. Literacies associated with technology and popular culture are obvious starting points for teachers and students. Teachers of students in the middle years need to find ways to recruit these literacy capabilities, and to value and build on them in the classroom.

Research into home, school and community partnerships in literacy (Cairney et al. 1995) has recommended that there be fuller investigation family literacy initiatives to support the diversity of parent needs and literacy practices, and addressing the mismatch between home and school literacy practices. A starting point for schools is to investigate students' literacy practices and develop rich literacy and learning tasks that both build on these, while extending new knowledge and capabilities. An important aspect of this is supporting students in developing critical literacies through including in school curriculum content community and popular culture texts.

#### ***Research Snapshot #4.5.2***

*Much of the research into literacy and adolescent learners emphasises the importance of addressing the gap between school and out-of-school literacies. While the case study schools did not address this issue overtly in their research plans, they were nevertheless aware of the divide between 'school' and 'beyond school' literacy practices.*

*Case study schools that included a focus on literacy and technology in their research, such as School A, School B, School I and School G, found that using technology engaged students interest and motivation and met many of the principles of effective middle years teaching pedagogy, including authentic purposes, autonomous learning, choice, and ownership. Several schools found that boys who were reluctant to read and write in more 'school' like ways were more likely to become involved in literacy activities when the purpose and audience was more authentic and involved the use of technology.*

*Several of the case study schools with significant numbers of ESL students, particularly new and recent arrivals including those with refugee status, raised the issue that students were often engaged in sophisticated negotiations with government and community agencies on behalf of their families or communities yet struggling at school.*

#### **4.5.3 Connecting school literacy and learning to the wider community.**

Connecting school literacy and learning to the wider community, both in the local and global sense, is vital for students in the middle years. This involves expanding the boundaries of the classroom and school learning environment through connecting learning to meaningful and authentic contexts and purposes in the world outside school. This increases both the legitimacy and the authenticity of school literacy and learning, and promotes the development of rich learning tasks.

##### **Research Snapshot # 4.5.3**

*In two case study schools the research involved connecting students' learning to individuals and groups beyond school, and both involved the use of learning technologies, though for different purposes.*

*The major focus of the research at School F was connecting literacy and learning to valid and authentic learning tasks, particularly where these involved students communicating with individuals, groups or organisations in the wider community. Students were encouraged to take responsibility for these interactions as part of developing a broad range of social skills and literacy capabilities.*

*School A designed an integrated curriculum unit exploring local grasslands for middle years students, which combined literacy and learning outcomes in English, SOSE, Science, Technology and Mathematics key learning areas. The major curriculum and assessment task involved in this cross-curricular unit was designing a website. This task built on students' existing technology and literacy skills, and forged strong connections between school literacies and the literacies involved in environmental science and natural history.*

*School B connected students in year 7 and 8, through the use of email, the internet and a dedicated website, to tertiary students for ongoing communication and conferencing over their writing. Writing for an audience outside the school community required students to be more explicit and more confident in their writing, while the technology engaged their interest. One of the tasks students developed was a student magazine for which they selected the topic, design and content. This drew on their knowledge and experience of texts both from information technology and popular culture. Having an authentic purpose and*

*audience for their writing naturally raised the level of effort students invested, which led to enhanced literacy development and outcomes.*

*Through their focus on presenting to a public audience comprising school leaders, parents and members of the wider school community, students in School D were not only engaged in learning with authentic purposes but were connecting literacy and learning outcomes to wider historical and cultural contexts.*

#### 4.5.4 Pursuing productive partnerships to enrich literacy and learning.

Pursuing productive partnerships to enrich literacy and learning extends the learning opportunities available to students in the middle years. Productive partnerships can be interpreted as those schools form with parents/caregivers and families, but also partnerships schools form with individuals, organisations and agencies in the wider community. This involves developing projects (often described as rich tasks) that encourage students to utilise off-campus learning as well as community resources, which promotes engagement in authentic learning tasks and expands the social and cultural contexts for learning. Involvement in community projects also broadens the range of adult role models with whom students come into contact, particularly where projects involve sustained contact and ongoing links.

##### **Research Snapshot #4.5.4**

*While all case study schools recognised the importance of fostering positive and productive partnerships in literacy, many secondary schools found it more challenging than the primary schools to pursue initiatives in this area. Factors such as size of school, number and location of campuses, school and curriculum organisation, roles and responsibilities and allocated time allowances were all seen as to some extent prohibitive. This highlighted the need for schools to be fairly selective and pragmatic in pursuing curriculum projects and partnerships of most relevance and value to the school community, rather than attempting to succeed in a variety of different initiatives which may lack sustained support and co-ordination. Where this appeared to be most successful in case study schools, partnerships were focused, short-term and had concrete aims and objectives, which could be clearly monitored and evaluated.*

*School B established a virtual technologised classroom that connected Year 7 and 8 students with trainee teachers in a tertiary institution, in order to enhance students' literacy development. This involved writing to an unseen and unknown audience and conferencing over the writing.*

*School A designed an integrated curriculum unit exploring local grasslands for Year 7 which involved students working with the Victorian Institute of Technology and the Wurundjeri people indigenous to the area. Another integrated unit at Year 9 involved designing a website. Both projects combined literacy and learning outcomes in English, SOSE, Science, Technology and Mathematics key learning areas. The major curriculum and assessment task involved in this cross-curricular unit was designing a website. This task built on students' existing technology and literacy skills, and forged strong connections between school literacies and the literacies involved in environmental science and natural history*

*School E entered a productive partnership in organising a teacher exchange with its associate secondary school, School K. This involved the primary and secondary teachers swapping roles for one term to extend their own professional experience, and to extend the experiences of students also.*

*School L was partly selected for the research on the basis of a ten year history of school professional development activity in literacy education, with a particular focus on writing in the key learning areas. The*

*research focus in this school was a continuation of work begun in the Writing and Reading in Teaching English (WRITE) project organised by the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne. This project involved pairing an English key learning area teacher with at least one teacher from another key learning area to enhance the teaching and assessment of student writing in different curriculum areas. More recently, the WRITE project has focused on promoting continuity of curriculum literacies in the middle years, particularly in the Year 6 to 7 transition, through the pairing or grouping of teachers across associate primary and secondary schools. Where it is given adequate support and resourcing by education systems and schools, this project represents an excellent model for active and productive partnership between associate schools focusing on improving literacy and learning outcomes.*

## 4.6 TOOLING UP FOR REFORM

Developing new forms of pre- and in-service training and allocating appropriate resources to ensure that educators in the middle years have the required expertise and appropriate status to deliver high quality education to young adolescents.

The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5–9 (DEET, Victoria 1999)

Tooling up for reform in middle years *literacy* education involves putting in place a number of strategic elements designed to improve literacy and learning outcomes for students. These elements need to represent a multi-pronged approach, targeting change at a number of intersecting and overlapping levels. These include the system or sector level, the whole school level, the classroom level and the level of the individual student.

### Recommendation 6

That education systems or sectors and schools tool up for reform in middle years literacy education through:

- raising the profile and status of literacy education
- providing ongoing quality professional development and support in literacy education
- securing leadership, co-ordination and succession planning in literacy education
- designing policies and structures to sustain reforms in literacy education
- developing school literacy plans informed by an understanding of change processes and a design for effective schooling.

### 4.6.1 Raising the profile and status of literacy education.

Raising the profile and status of literacy education requires the tertiary sector, education systems and schools to respond to the professional needs of teachers in meeting the literacy and learning needs of students. This may involve providing more support for literacy coordinators and specialist literacy teachers through, for example, developing an accredited certificate course for literacy. It would also involve education systems or sectors giving more specific directions for policy and practice in the form of guidelines for literacy education.

#### Supporting Literacy Coordinators and Literacy Teachers

Literacy coordinators and specialist literacy teachers require access to opportunities to extend their professional knowledge base and their expertise in literacy education, according to the particular demands of their roles. Currently, teachers holding positions as literacy coordinators bring a diversity of qualifications, experience and expertise to the role. These include qualifications and experience in Special Education, English as a Second Language, primary teaching or secondary English method. While many literacy coordinators have considerable knowledge and expertise, formal opportunities for professional renewal within an accreditation framework, with a focus on literacy in the middle years, enhances the professionalism of the role and raises the status and profile of literacy education, both at system and school levels.



## Developing Policies and Guidelines

Developing system or sector policies and guidelines is another strategy for raising the profile and status of literacy education. As a starting point, this could be achieved through, for example, the writing of a Position Statement on Literacy Education in the Middle Years. The United States document, *Adolescent Literacy: A position statement* (Moore et al.1999), while tending to reflect an emphasis on reading at the expense of a broader view of literacy, sets out fundamental beliefs and philosophical foundations for adolescent literacy and learning, which could be used as a basis for the development of a paper suitable for the Victorian context. Such a paper could be written through collaboration between the three education sectors.

Education systems and sectors also need to provide more specific directions for policy and practice in literacy education in schools. In particular, literacy coordinators and specialist literacy teachers require increased support in the form of practical guidelines and resources for planning, implementing and evaluating effective literacy provision at the whole school, classroom and individual student levels.

Increased systemic support should also be given for celebration of success in middle years literacy education, and for providing local forums for schools focusing on restructure and reform to share their findings with the wider educational community, and to 'mentor' other schools.

### **Research Snapshot #4.6.1**

*This research project in itself contributed to raising the profile of literacy education by inviting selected schools to participate, by developing school research plans and by providing quality professional development for teams of teachers from primary and secondary schools involved in the research. Key findings from the research related to raising the profile of literacy were:*

- *the importance of an understanding in schools of the relationship between literacy and learning across the curriculum*
- *the importance of securing active and ongoing support from leadership in fostering staff commitment*
- *the importance for literacy positions to be seen as having status within the school culture and hierarchy*
- *the importance of having a literacy structure (whether a committee, sub-committee or working party) embedded within the school framework*
- *the need to work collaboratively towards common literacy goals and achievements*
- *the need for accredited undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in literacy and in-service accreditation pathways*
- *the need for education systems and sectors to provide practical directions for literacy policy and practice in schools*
- *the importance of access to quality teacher professional development and support in literacy.*

## **4.6.2 Providing ongoing quality professional development and support in literacy education.**

Quality professional development and support for teachers in middle years literacy education is fundamental to improving the literacy and learning outcomes of students. This involves ensuring that all teachers of students in middle schooling are equipped with:

- the specific literacy knowledge required to explicitly address the literacy demands and learning expectations of curriculum areas, and
- a repertoire of effective teaching practices and strategies for meeting students' literacy and learning needs.

This is also an essential foundation for promoting the continuity of literacy education from the primary to the secondary school context.

### **The Scope of Effective Professional Development in Literacy**

In order to be effective in bringing about reform at the school level, professional development should consist of a number of layers that combine expert input, access to school-based consultancy, peer mentoring and/or coaching and ongoing support for teachers to engage in guided classroom research activity and reflective practice. Where schools have established professional learning teams, it may be more useful to conceptualise professional development as 'professional learning', which is fostered through a variety of strategies that each fulfil different professional learning needs.

Professional development in literacy education needs to focus on developing knowledge about language and the curriculum literacies required for success in education and schooling. Professional development needs to go beyond awareness-raising or 'one size fits all' approaches, and to be tailored to the different roles and responsibilities for literacy within the school. The professional development needs of leadership teams may be different from those of the literacy coordinator or other literacy specialists who require a different focus again. Key learning area teachers are likely to be more engaged where professional development is directly targeted to the literacy demands and learning expectations of their key learning areas, and draws on the curriculum materials and resources used in those areas.

A starting point for professional development may involve laying the groundwork by assisting the school to clarify different roles and responsibilities in literacy, and to carry out an investigation or audit of the literacy needs and capabilities of both students *and* teachers, informed by state and national literacy standards and targets. This provides a basis for designing professional development – or professional learning – that is directly targeted to literacy needs and for supporting middle years professional learning teams in planning and implementing effective literacy practices and school literacy plans.

A model or structure that is highly effective in supporting teachers to enhance professional practice in teaching and learning is the *Project for Enhancing Effective Learning (PEEL)*. The principles underpinning *PEEL*, which began in Victorian schools almost two decades ago, have the potential to impact as significantly on literacy learning as they do on learning in general. The *PEEL* model may provide a template, or starting point, for teachers collaborating in trialing and sharing ideas, strategies to improve literacy and learning outcomes for students. However, it is also important to acknowledge that the success of *PEEL* is due, in part, to the local autonomy with which it is organised and that it is organised *by teachers for teachers*, rather than part of a strategy imposed on teachers externally.

### **Principles of Effective Professional Development in Literacy**

In general terms, professional development in literacy for middle years teachers, is likely to be most successful where it:

- involves professional learning teams working in collaborative partnerships with mutual commitment and accountability
- follows a model of spaced learning over an extended period to allow time for professional reading and trialing of theoretical and practical approaches and strategies;
- models through its delivery, principles of effective middle years pedagogy
- builds on existing strengths and on the collective knowledge and expertise of participants
- achieves a balance between individual and group learning; and
- is supported by ongoing opportunities for reflective practice through classroom research activity and collegial sharing of professional practice.

Significantly, those programs aimed at teachers in the middle and secondary years that have been most successful in Victoria reflect many of the principles of best practice in professional development. Programs such as *Writing in the Subject Areas*, *Helping Students Learn*, *ESL in the Mainstream Teacher Development Course* enhance professional practice in literacy education through combining spaced learning over extended periods with classroom research activity and reflective practice.

### Focus of Effective Professional Development in Literacy

While taking into account the particular needs of individual schools and specific target groups, the following broad areas are considered to be key to effective professional development in literacy:

- training in developmental literacy assessment and consensus moderation processes as a basis for common understandings, a shared language and consistency of judgement in literacy
- analysing the literacy demands and learning expectations of the curriculum, with a focus on curriculum or subject-specific literacies
- exploring general approaches and strategies that support effective literacy teaching and learning in all curriculum areas
- examining principles and practices of effective middle years pedagogy and constructivist learning
- identifying specific classroom strategies and practices that support the development of independent skills in reading and writing, as well as in listening, speaking and viewing (such as graphic outline and graphic organisers, reciprocal teaching, literature or reading circles, data charts, modelling and joint construction of text, summarising and note-making)
- examining ways of promoting metacognition, reflection and self-assessment in learning (such as student learning journals, reading journals, self and peer assessment activities)
- developing teacher knowledge about language, and a shared language, or metalanguage, for talking about texts and language across key learning areas and across the primary and secondary contexts
- supporting middle years professional learning teams and/or clusters as they work towards improved continuity of literacy education and enhanced student literacy and learning outcomes
- supporting personnel with key roles and responsibilities in literacy education in planning a comprehensive approach to literacy at the whole school, classroom and individual student level
- setting directions for schools in establishing effective structures for supporting long-term reform in literacy education

- assisting schools to develop literacy policies and strategic plans
- integrating approaches to literacy that cater for a diversity of literacy capabilities and needs, including ESL, Indigenous and special education areas.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.6.2**

*This research project itself represented the combination of many of the ingredients of successful professional development in literacy. It provided on-site consultancy and support, access to expert input and to professional development aimed at teams of teachers from the case study schools. Underpinning this was the raw data, gained from the DART assessments, indicating students' literacy capabilities and needs. The project required case study schools to select a focus for the research and provided ongoing consultancy, resourcing and support for schools in pursuing this focus. The professional development and consultancy with the case study schools focused on the key areas listed above, and feedback from the schools, as well as clear evidence of the impact of the professional development on their teaching practice, reinforced the importance of those areas.*

*Teachers responded extremely positively to the professional development days which enabled them to work together in school or cluster groups, especially where efforts had been made to involve key learning area teachers as well to form middle years professional learning teams from the one school. The impact on some schools of participating in the professional development as a team was borne out in the results some of the schools were able to achieve as a consequence. School A, School D, School K and School F all indicated that the professional development, combined with access to ongoing consultancy and support, offered as part of the research was a major catalyst for change in their schools. Where the ongoing consultancy closely matched with the existing school identity, ethos, and ideological views of literacy education, this was seen to be even more effective.*

*School L was partly selected for the research on the basis of a ten year history of school professional development activity in literacy education, with a particular focus on writing in the key learning areas. The research focus in this school was a continuation of work begun in the Writing and Reading in Teaching English (WRITE) project organised by the catholic Education Office, Melbourne. This project involved pairing an English key learning area teacher with at least one teacher from another key learning area to enhance the teaching and assessment of student writing in different curriculum areas. More recently, the WRITE project has focused on promoting continuity of curriculum literacies in the middle years, particularly in the Year 6 to 7 transition, through the pairing or grouping of teachers across associate primary and secondary schools. Where it is given adequate support and resourcing by education systems and schools, this project represents an excellent model for active and productive partnership between associate schools focusing on improving literacy and learning outcomes.*

*Part of the research brief involved liaising with other organisations and/or programs in order to identify best practice in literacy. While only one of the case study schools involved in the research (School C) appeared to have been involved in the Project for Enhancing Effective Learning (PEEL), the research team liaised*

*with the organisers of this program, which already operates successfully in many secondary schools, and seems to be becoming established in a number of primary schools also. This structure brings teachers together in their school context to exchange shared professional practice and exchange effective teaching*

*and learning strategies at the local level. Where schools already have PEEL groups in place, or could establish a new group, this provides an effective way of teachers and schools focussing on improving the literacy and learning outcomes of students. Advantages to building on the PEEL model are that it avoids 'reinventing the wheel', acknowledges the success (both locally and nationally) of this initiative, and recognises the correlation between effective literacy development and effective learning. However, it is also important to acknowledge that PEEL in schools is locally grown and locally owned, with as little or as much support from the PEEL organisation as teachers request.*

#### **4.6.3 Securing leadership, co-ordination and succession planning in literacy education.**

Securing leadership, co-ordination and succession planning in literacy education is essential in improving literacy and learning outcomes of students. This involves:

- active support and involvement of school leadership in determining goals and priorities,
- planning and implementing school literacy plans
- evaluating outcomes to inform and refine ongoing provision.

School leadership teams have responsibility for embedding literacy as a priority within school policies and structures and in establishing clear roles and responsibilities in literacy education within their school communities. Providing effective leadership and coordination in literacy education requires:

- appointment of a literacy coordinator
- establishment of a literacy committee, subcommittee or working party
- the allocation of a budget for literacy across all levels and curriculum areas.

Where they are most effective, middle years leadership and coordination positions combine literacy knowledge and expertise with well-developed leadership and communication skills. A literacy coordinator works with the school community to plan, implement and evaluate literacy education, and ensures that literacy provision is integrated across three levels:

- the whole school,
- the classroom
- the individual student.

Other aspects of the literacy coordination role may include the following:

- developing literacy policies and guidelines, and literacy professional development plans
- organising literacy professional development tailored to the particular needs of different groups of teachers
- establishing clear roles, responsibilities and expectations in literacy provision
- assisting teachers to identify the literacy demands and learning expectations of key learning areas
- supporting teachers in developing knowledge about language and curriculum literacies
- working with key learning area teachers to develop literacy teaching practices and strategies, and literacy assessment criteria in curriculum areas
- organising ongoing collaborative partnerships with associate primary or secondary schools
- pursuing opportunities for productive community partnerships that extend literacy and learning
- developing programs and strategies for students requiring literacy intervention or special assistance, linked with mainstream curriculum and assessment practices.

Where the literacy brief is subsumed within the role of a professional development coordinator, curriculum coordinator, student welfare coordinator or other responsibilities, it is important that the literacy component be recognised as central to the educational aims of the school community as a whole and to improving student learning outcomes.

Schools need to ensure succession planning in literacy education and to embed strategies for this within school literacy plans. This is important for securing the ongoing quality of literacy provision for students and professional development and support of staff. At the whole school level, establishing a literacy committee, sub-committee or working party with wide representation from staff, supports the goals of succession planning by ensuring a broader base of knowledge and understanding about literacy education. At the classroom level, establishing middle years professional learning teams creates a foundation of shared knowledge that minimises the impact of change and teacher turnover on the school's capacity to deliver effective literacy education.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.6.3**

*Leadership and coordination in literacy education emerged in the case study schools as having a profound effect on the capacity of schools to make literacy a genuine priority, to develop strategic plans for literacy and to direct resources towards areas of greatest need. It is an essential underpinning for developing a focus on literacy in the key learning areas, and for improving literacy outcomes of all students.*

*Where leadership and co-ordination was enabling of effective literacy education it was characterised by active support for literacy as a priority in both policy and practice, by maintaining the profile and status of literacy among the staff and wider school community, by being flexible and open to restructure and reform, and by recognising the needs of teachers, particularly key learning area teachers, for ongoing professional development and support in meeting the literacy and learning needs of students.*

*Factors perceived as impacting on leadership and co-ordination in literacy education were:*

- *size of school and number and proximity of campuses*
- *appointment and relative status of literacy co-ordinator and teachers with specialist literacy roles*
- *access to a dedicated budget for literacy and other school facilities and resources*
- *ability to focus sufficiently on literacy education where it was combined with other responsibilities and expectations*
- *degree of time allowance and resourcing of teachers with literacy responsibilities*
- *degree of timetable flexibility for collaborative planning and teaching understanding and commitment to literacy among the wider staff*
- *existence of school literacy policy or statements about literacy in curriculum documents*
- *existence of a school literacy plan*
- *literacy as a priority in the school charter or school development plan.*

#### **4.6.4 Designing policies and structures to sustain reforms in literacy education.**

Policies and structures are essential to sustain reforms in literacy education. This requires education systems and schools to cultivate a 'middle years mindset' and establish a literacy focus within policies and structures relating to middle years education. Historically, middle schooling in Victoria has a conceptual more than a physical or geographic reality. Therefore, it is vital that systems provide leadership for schools by developing a middle years emphasis in general, and a middle years literacy emphasis in particular. This should be within policies and structures at all levels of educational organisation, including education systems, the structure and organisation of schools, and even professional teacher associations.

Where policies and structures are most effective in schools, policy constitutes a foundation, or cornerstone, which sets out the principles that can be used both to guide and evaluate practice, while structures facilitate the ongoing implementation of the goals and principles outlined in school policies and guidelines. Schools, policies and structures need to be designed and developed according to the particular operations, context and needs of each individual school in order to be manageable and sustainable within that school context. The baseline elements needed to support literacy in one school may differ from those in another.

School policies and structures need to support schools in planning, implementing and evaluating school literacy plans. This includes supporting middle years teachers in implementing sustained change in curriculum, teaching and learning that enhances the literacy and learning outcomes of students in the middle years of schooling.

### **Developing Literacy Policies and Guidelines**

School literacy policies and curriculum guidelines are most effective where they are developed through a process that involves the school community working collaboratively. This ensures that policies and guidelines developed as a result, are contextualised within the overall goals and priorities of the school and respond to literacy needs at the local level. Schools may develop separate literacy policies that are independent of curriculum guidelines. However, statements about the teaching and assessment of curriculum literacies can also be included in curriculum statements or guidelines for each key learning area. This enables key learning area teachers to be more explicit about the literacy demands and learning expectations and ways these will be addressed within specific curriculum areas.

### **Developing School Structures**

School structures for supporting a sustained focus on literacy in the middle years need to be developed at a number of levels, and include the following key elements:

- clear roles and responsibilities in literacy education, with a particular focus on the middle years,
- clear lines of communication and accountability,
- effective organisational structures such as a literacy committee, subcommittee or working party
- professional development plans
- school literacy plans.

Forming literacy committees or working parties with representatives from each key learning area can be an effective starting point for supporting a sustained focus on literacy education, and for monitoring the progress of school literacy plans. While school structures for supporting literacy need to be developed according to the particular organisation of each school, these need to be subject to ongoing monitoring and review to ensure their continuing effectiveness.

### **Models for Teacher Collaboration**

Structures also need to provide the curriculum and timetable flexibility to support the work of professional learning teams, or teacher partnerships, particularly where these involve teachers from different key learning areas developing knowledge about language and texts in their own and others' key learning areas. A successful example of this model can be found in the *Writing and Reading in Teaching English (WRITE)* project (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 2000), which partners English key learning area teachers with teachers from other key learning areas, either within one school, or between associate primary and

secondary schools. This project supports teachers in increasing their knowledge base about language and implications for classroom teaching, and involves designing lessons, materials and strategies to teach students about English grammar.

#### **Research Snapshot #4.6.4**

*While not all case study schools had a written policy for literacy education, literacy was a charter priority in many schools, or named specifically on the school development plan. Many schools had established committees or working parties with responsibility for literacy education, while others were aiming to embed a literacy focus within the middle years professional learning teams.*

*While School B had maintained a vertical structure in Years 7 and 8 for two decades, many case study schools had instituted changes in school structures and in teacher and student groupings much more recently. In secondary case study schools which had previously introduced the practice of referring to Years 7, 8 (and, in some cases, Year 9) as 'the middle years' and where teachers were working in groups named 'middle years teams', these schools reported a marked change in the working culture, mindset and ethos. In these schools, teachers were reconceptualising their roles and their professional practice within more longitudinal views of educational provision. This was most effective where it was actively understood and supported by the school leadership and the wider school community.*

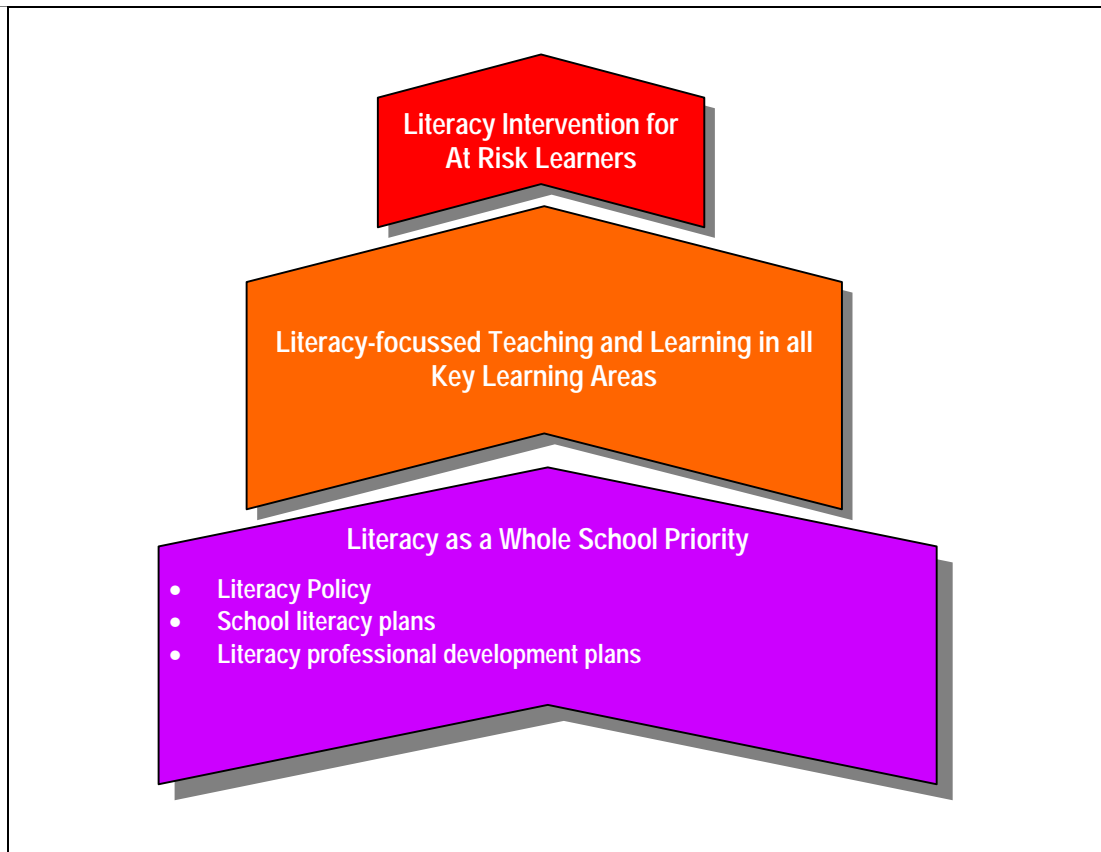
*The Team Small Group model (Ratzki 1999), adapted by many schools from the German model of schooling, was seen by some case study schools as providing a valuable resource for schools seeking a framework for establishing professional learning teams and also for exploring alternative ways of grouping students for literacy and learning.*

*The Team Small Group model (Ratzki 1999), adapted by many schools from the German model of schooling, was seen by some case study schools as providing a valuable resource for schools seeking a framework for establishing professional learning teams and also for exploring alternative ways of grouping students for literacy and learning.*

#### **4.6.5 Developing school literacy plans informed by an understanding of change processes and a design for effective schooling.**

Schools need to develop comprehensive literacy plans that are informed by an understanding of change processes, particularly organisational change, and an overall design for school improvement. Effective school literacy plans integrate literacy provision across three levels: the whole school, the classroom and the individual student.





**FIGURE 4:** Integrating literacy provision across three levels.

Focusing on literacy education at the whole school level may include, for example, carrying out a school literacy audit, developing school literacy policies and strategic plans, and organising quality ongoing opportunities for teacher professional development in literacy.

Focusing on literacy education at the classroom level may include, for example, targeting students' literacy development in a particular key learning area at a particular year level in order to provide additional support. This may involve a combination of teacher professional development tailored to the needs of the key learning area, collaborative planning and peer mentoring in professional learning teams, and support teaching in selected mainstream classes in that key learning area from a specialist literacy teacher or coordinator. Meeting students' literacy and learning needs more effectively *within* the mainstream classroom context has the additional benefit of reducing the number of students requiring support in the form of intervention or special assistance outside the mainstream context.

Focusing on literacy education at the individual student level may include, for example, providing additional assistance to students with literacy needs through support teaching in mainstream classes and sessions and working in small groups outside the mainstream context to support students in meeting the literacy demands and learning expectations of the curriculum.

As part of the process of developing school literacy plans, schools:

- audit students' literacy and learning needs and school literacy practices
- identify students requiring increased support in literacy through intervention or special assistance
- consider the school context and resources available for literacy teaching and learning
- establish priorities for literacy teaching and learning

- establish clear roles, responsibilities and expectations in literacy teaching and learning
- design effective approaches for literacy teaching and learning at the whole school, classroom and individual student levels
- evaluate literacy and learning outcomes and review school literacy plans.

The *NSW State Literacy Strategy: Implementation Guide for Schools* (1998) provides literacy coordinators and school leadership teams with a model for implementing a whole-school approach to improving literacy education, based on a series of eight key elements. This material provides a planning model that could well be adapted by education systems or sectors and schools for the Victorian context.

#### 4.6.6 The Design Elements – Enabling Best Practice in Literacy Education

The brief for the *Middle Years Literacy Research Project* was to take the *General Design for a Whole-School Approach to School Improvement* (Hill & Crévola, 1997) as the starting point for advice to schools on literacy education in the middle years of schooling. This Design was used, along with materials elaborated in *The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5-9* (DEET Victoria 1999), as a focus for data gathering and discussion in the research project, and also in professional development activity offered to schools. Each of the design elements for effective schooling was seen to be significantly *enabling* of effective literacy teaching and learning.

The table, 'Design Elements and their Application to the Middle Years' (adapted from Hill & Crévola 1997) is used in *The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5-9* (DEET Victoria 1999) to identify a General Focus and a Middle Years Focus for each of the nine design elements.

As part of this research project, an additional column titled Middle Years Literacy Focus. was added to the table (see table below) This attempts to provide a 'nutshell' statement about literacy in the middle years aligned with each of the design elements. These statements, reinforced by the findings from all the elements of the research, can be used as a basis for discussion in education sectors and schools, and adopted or adapted as required to suit particular emphases and needs in middle years literacy education. A further column provides a 'checklist' of features that are essential if the middle years literacy focus for each design element is to be effective in improving the literacy and learning outcomes of students in the middle years of schooling.

**Table 4: GENERAL DESIGN FOR A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING – A FOCUS ON LITERACY**

DESIGN ELEMENT	GENERAL FEATURES	MIDDLE YEARS FOCUS	MIDDLE YEARS LITERACY FOCUS	IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY TEACHING AND LEARNING
<b>Beliefs and Understandings</b>	Teachers believe in their capacity to make a difference to the literacy and learning outcomes and achievements of every student in their care.	Teachers understand the developmental needs of young adolescents and appreciate the importance of engaging them in all aspects of their learning.	Teachers understand the relationship between literacy and learning and have high expectations for the literacy development of students in the middle years in all curriculum areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers believe that, given the right conditions and support, all teachers can be teachers of literacy, and all students can achieve improved literacy and learning outcomes.</li> <li>Teachers recognise the specific teaching and learning needs of students in the middle years and base literacy-focused teaching within a context of engaged and constructivist learning.</li> <li>Teachers understand the literacy demands and learning expectations in each key learning area.</li> <li>Teachers accept responsibility for teaching knowledge about language and curriculum literacies in all curriculum areas.</li> <li>Teachers understand concepts such as multiple literacies and the need for students to develop a broad repertoire of literacy knowledge, skills and capabilities.</li> <li>Teachers have ongoing opportunities to share beliefs and understandings and to extend knowledge and expertise as literacy educators.</li> </ul>
<b>Standards and Targets</b>	Emphasis is placed on rigorous and realistic challenges for all students, and on persevering with those for whom there is evidence of under-achievement.	Given the wide range of student learning behaviours in Years 5-9, teachers aim to establish individual learning targets within CSF II.	Teachers understand the different literacy and learning needs and pathways of diverse groups of learners, and are committed to providing the scaffolding and support required for literacy progress and achievement in all curriculum areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers are informed of school and system standards and targets for literacy education, and aware of the different needs and pathways of diverse groups of learners.</li> <li>Teachers collect reliable and comprehensive baseline data on student literacy levels in order to monitor and assess student progress and achievement.</li> <li>Teachers have a broad repertoire of literacy teaching practices and strategies for supporting students in meeting literacy standards and targets.</li> <li>Teachers provide increased support for students 'at risk' of not meeting minimum literacy standards through additional assistance and individual learning plans.</li> </ul>

DESIGN ELEMENT	GENERAL FEATURES	MIDDLE YEARS FOCUS	MIDDLE YEARS LITERACY FOCUS	IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY TEACHING AND LEARNING
<b>Monitoring and Assessment</b>	Teachers systematically check student achievement and provide regular progress reports with a view to facilitating the next phase of student learning.	Particular attention is paid to diversity in learning styles in order to ensure that all students experience success and meet learning outcomes in academic, creative and other pursuits.	Teachers collect information about students' literacy development in all curriculum areas, and use this information to assess student progress and achievement and to inform curriculum, teaching and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers have opportunities to share understandings and expectations of student achievement, and to work towards consistency of teacher judgement.</li> <li>Teachers collect data on students' literacy development at the start of a teaching year or cycle to establish starting points for literacy teaching in key learning areas.</li> <li>Teachers collect ongoing information that provides a balanced picture of students' strengths and needs in literacy in reading, writing, listening, speaking and viewing. Teachers work with each other and with students to develop a language for talking about literacy development.</li> <li>Teachers work with each other and with students to develop a language for talking about literacy and improvement in literacy and learning outcomes.</li> <li>Teachers monitor students' development in curriculum literacies and include literacy assessment criteria for assessment tasks in key learning areas.</li> <li>Teachers cater for different learning styles in providing students with a variety of ways of demonstrating their learning.</li> <li>Teachers involve students in developing appropriate assessment procedures that are authentic and purposeful.</li> <li>Teachers provide ongoing opportunities for student reflection and self-/peer assessment of literacy and learning.</li> </ul>
<b>Classroom teaching strategies</b>	Teachers draw on a repertoire of teaching and learning strategies to meet the identified needs of students at both individual and collective levels.	Democratic learning environments are created with a view to involving students in structured programs as well as decisions about curriculum, assessment and reporting.	Teachers create classroom learning environments that provide opportunities for students to develop a broad range of literacy capabilities, building on what students bring to learning, and the literacy demands and learning expectations of the curriculum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers embed literacy-focused teaching in engaged and constructivist learning through the CSF.</li> <li>Teachers are equipped with a broad repertoire of literacy teaching practices that and strategies that cater for a diversity of literacy needs and an understanding of the purposes of each.</li> <li>Teachers aim to extend students' capabilities in reading, writing, listening, speaking and viewing, as well as in critical literacy and literacies associated with information and communications technologies.</li> <li>Teachers ensure that students are informed of the literacy and learning requirements in each key learning area and connections to wider community contexts and purposes.</li> </ul>

DESIGN ELEMENT	GENERAL FEATURES	MIDDLE YEARS FOCUS	MIDDLE YEARS LITERACY FOCUS	IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY TEACHING AND LEARNING
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers recognise the gap or mismatch between 'school' and 'out-of-school' literacies, value what students bring to learning and build on prior knowledge as a basis for new learning.</li> <li>Teachers support students' development as independent readers and writers of the texts in their key learning areas and in transferring literacy knowledge and skills to other learning contexts.</li> <li>Teachers support students in developing a language to talk about texts and language, and about ways that texts are shaped to serve particular purposes and interests.</li> </ul>
<b>Professional learning teams</b>	Working in small groups, teachers engage in high quality learning experiences that result in high-level impact on their work practices.	A multidisciplinary team plans, implements and evaluates a comprehensive series of learning experiences for a defined group of students.	Teachers work collaboratively in professional learning teams, with support from school organisation and structures, to enhance professional practice in literacy and to incorporate effective literacy teaching and learning in all curriculum areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers plan collaboratively in teams to improve students' literacy and learning outcomes in all curriculum areas.</li> <li>Teachers share professional practice in literacy, and create teaching and learning environments that foster the literacy development of all students.</li> <li>Teachers develop cohesive approaches to literacy teaching and learning across key learning areas based on similar approaches to classroom teaching, learning and assessment.</li> <li>Teachers are professionally skilled and supported in addressing the literacy demands and learning expectations of the curriculum. through quality professional development tailored to their particular needs.</li> </ul>
<b>School and class organisation</b>	Flexible approaches to the use of staff, facilities, time and other resources are established to maximise opportunities for effective learning and teaching.	Young adolescents feel safe, valued and part of a school community in which a culture of learning is demonstrated in multiple settings and contexts.	School and classroom organisation create learning environments that support teachers in their professional practice in literacy, and maximise opportunities for literacy-focused teaching and engaged learning in all curriculum areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers have increased contact with groups of students and develop comprehensive knowledge of their literacy and learning needs in different key learning areas.</li> <li>Teachers maximise opportunities within extended classtimes for literacy teaching and learning.</li> <li>Teachers use flexible groupings of students to allow for both mixed ability and targeted literacy teaching to meet specific learning needs.</li> <li>Teachers share professional practice and plan collaboratively to meet students' literacy and learning needs with support from school organisation and timetable structures.</li> </ul>

DESIGN ELEMENT	GENERAL FEATURES	MIDDLE YEARS FOCUS	MIDDLE YEARS LITERACY FOCUS	IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY TEACHING AND LEARNING
<b>Intervention and special assistance</b>	Targeted support for students who are not making satisfactory progress in their learning is provided in an integrated and holistic framework.	The nature, location, timing and other details associated with the provision of targeted support are negotiated with identified 'at-risk' young adolescents and those with additional learning needs.	Schools establish age-appropriate intervention and special assistance in literacy which is informed by the needs of adolescent learners, and linked to mainstream curriculum and assessment processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers recognise the diverse literacy needs and learning pathways of students requiring increased support in meeting minimum literacy standards.</li> <li>Teachers in all key learning areas provide increased scaffolding and support for students requiring additional assistance in meeting CSF outcomes.</li> <li>Teachers work collaboratively with literacy specialists to provide 'in class' support teaching for individuals or groups of students requiring special assistance in meeting literacy demands and learning expectations in curriculum areas.</li> <li>Teachers maintain ongoing contact with literacy specialists providing intervention and special assistance to ensure links with mainstream curriculum and assessment processes and CSF outcomes.</li> </ul>
<b>Home, school and community partnerships</b>	Effective relationships are established between teachers, parents and community members in order to support and extend student learning.	Adults other than teachers are encouraged to participate in learning that generates benefits for young adolescents, the school and the community.	Schools recognise the role of home and community in supporting students in developing a broad repertoire of literacy capabilities, and work in partnership with parents/caregivers to support the literacy development of all learners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers communicate with parents/caregivers about students' literacy development in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate and inclusive.</li> <li>Teachers communicate expectations of literacy development to parents/caregivers and families, and ways that they can give support.</li> <li>Teachers to support parents/caregivers in extending students' literacy practices at home and in the wider community.</li> <li>Teachers pursue productive community partnerships that extend students' literacy and learning opportunities.</li> <li>Teachers keep parents/caregivers informed about student progress and achievement in literacy in each key learning area, focusing on positive events related to literacy development as well as on needs or concerns.</li> </ul>

DESIGN ELEMENT	GENERAL FEATURES	MIDDLE YEARS FOCUS	MIDDLE YEARS LITERACY FOCUS	IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY TEACHING AND LEARNING
<b>Leadership and coordination</b>	Executive staff led by example, while providing moral and practical support designed to achieve common and agreed goals and outcomes.	A coordinator of middle schooling is appointed to drive the process of redesigning the middle years and achieve improved learning outcomes for all adolescents, supported by a professional learning team.	Schools provide active leadership and co-ordination which establishes clear roles and responsibilities in literacy education, sets clear directions and targets, and supports all staff in developing the specific knowledge, skills and strategies required for effective literacy teaching and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers plan for literacy and learning with support from literacy-informed leadership and coordination, school literacy policies and school literacy plans.</li> <li>Teachers are supported in developing shared knowledge and understandings of the educational needs of adolescent learners and of the literacy demands and learning expectations of curriculum areas.</li> <li>Teachers are given access to ongoing professional development in literacy tailored to specific roles and needs in different key learning areas.</li> <li>Teachers have clear roles, responsibilities and expectations regarding teaching knowledge about language and curriculum literacies in each key learning area.</li> <li>Teachers are kept informed about literacy education through appointment of key personnel with literacy responsibilities and through a raising of the profile and status of literacy education within the school community.</li> <li>Teachers are provided with opportunities to share professional practice in literacy and to evaluate outcomes in all curriculum areas.</li> <li>Teachers are encouraged to share success and achievements in literacy education.</li> </ul>

## 4.7 CONCLUSION

The following extract was written by a School Research Coordinator from a case study school which had been chosen to participate in the project because it was ‘well on the way’ in middle years literacy reform.

*The twelve-month period of the research project represented a culmination of many years of effort by individuals and smaller teams of teachers to address the issue of student literacy in all KLAs of the curriculum. The long-term nature of this endeavour needs to be emphasised, as this project has been an attempt to put into practice the adage that “literacy is the responsibility of every teacher”. The project documents the final stages of a whole school cultural shift, where teachers have really come to grips with taking on the responsibility for the development of student literacy in their own subject area. In terms of professional development, teachers have moved from a situation of viewing the literacy teacher as a useful resource to deal with students with low levels of literacy, to perceiving the literacy teacher as colleague who can promote teacher self reflection and empower them to act on their own critical insights to affect change in their classrooms.*

These comments provide a powerful reminder that to undertake the changes essential in the implementation of improved literacy teaching and learning in the middle years of schooling, requires both time and support. The challenge, for systems and schools, is to ensure that teachers are given the ongoing professional development and support in fulfilling their roles as literacy educators in the mainstream classroom context.



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## APPENDICES

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1. ***DART* - Sample of indicators describing the literacy skills (writing – language) typically displayed by students at each level of achievement**
2. **Sample Literacy Audit**
3. **Sample Literacy Transition Passport**



**Writing: Descriptive Report-Language****APPENDIX 1**

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Language

- Shows control of grammatical structures and punctuation in complex sentences. Content is organised into a coherent whole appropriate to the context (eg. paragraphs for a narrative, notes under heading for a report). Vocabulary is precise and spelling correct. That is
- 14
    - control of complex sentence structures
    - coherent and appropriate organisation of whole
    - control of spelling and punctuation
    - precise vocabulary
  - 13
  - Contains a variety of simple and complex sentences, with generally appropriate use of punctuation and conjunctions. The writing is shaped with a clear beginning and end and possibly paragraph divisions. Vocabulary is appropriate.
  - 12
    - Most words are spelled correctly. That is
    - a variety of sentence forms
    - clear shape to piece as a whole
    - appropriate vocabulary
  - 11
    - generally appropriate punctuation and spelling
  - 10
  - Shows control of simple sentence structure and attempts more complex structures. There is some evidence of an attempt to shape the whole piece (eg' notion of beginning and end). Many common words are spelled correctly. Handwriting is clear.
  - 9
    - That is
    - control of simple sentences
    - some notion of overall structure
    - correct spelling of many common words
  - 8
    - clear handwriting
  - 7
  - Uses basic conventions. Is constructed of simple sentences using some linking words, and uses common punctuation such as capital letters and full stops some or all of the time. High frequency words are usually spelled correctly. Handwriting is readable. That is
  - 6
    - simple sentence forms
    - common punctuation
    - correct spelling of high frequency words
    - readable handwriting

# Writing

## Language

- 15 Shows control of grammatical structures and punctuation in complex sentences. Content is organised into a coherent whole appropriate to the context (eg. paragraphs for a narrative, notes under heading for a report). Vocabulary is precise and spelling correct. That is
- 14
- control of complex sentence structures
  - coherent and appropriate organisation of whole
  - control of spelling and punctuation
  - precise vocabulary
- 13 Contains a variety of simple and complex sentences, with generally appropriate use of punctuation and conjunctions. The writing is shaped with a clear beginning and end and possibly paragraph divisions. Vocabulary is appropriate.
- 12 Most words are spelled correctly. That is
- a variety of sentence forms
  - clear shape to piece as a whole
  - appropriate vocabulary
- 11
- generally appropriate punctuation and spelling
- 10 Shows control of simple sentence structure and attempts more complex structures. There is some evidence of an attempt to shape the whole piece (eg' notion of beginning and end). Many common words are spelled correctly. Handwriting is clear.
- 9 That is
- control of simple sentences
  - some notion of overall structure
  - correct spelling of many common words
- 8
- clear handwriting
- 7 Uses basic conventions. Is constructed of simple sentences using some linking words, and uses common punctuation such as capital letters and full stops some or all of the time. High frequency words are usually spelled correctly. Handwriting is readable. That is
- 6
- simple sentence forms
  - common punctuation
  - correct spelling of high frequency words
  - readable handwriting

Level 5

Level 4

Level 3

Level 2

DART English

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## EXTRACT FROM A SECONDARY SCHOOL LITERACY AUDIT OF WRITING IN KEY LEARNING AREAS

Year 7

KLA	Genre	Type/Form	Purpose	Linguistic Structures and Features
Science	Report	Imaginative Information brochure  e.g. "Tourist Brochure for a visit to another planet"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To describe the way things are in our environment in an entertaining manner.</li> </ul>	<b>Text Structure:</b> General Classification – opening statement often includes a definition and/or a classification and may also clarify which type of report the text is. Facts – about the subject of the report grouped in paragraphs and/or subheadings according to the questions (labelled illustrations, diagrams, figures and tables may accompany the text to make the facts clearer). <b>Language Features:</b> Tense – usually tense Processes (verbs) relating (is, are, have, has) some action processes Person – Second (you) and third, so that the report is objective Conjunctions – additive and comparative
Science	Procedure	Experimental Procedure/ Investigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Detailing the process for conducting and the results of an experiment.</li> </ul>	<b>Text Structure:</b> Aim – what will be achieved by the following steps. Materials & equipment (optional) – listed in order. Method – steps which may be numbered or represented in diagram or flow chart form to tell the reader what to do. Results – may be presented in a table or in sentences and can include an explanation. Discussion – if required, highlight difficulties with procedure and give explanations or answer questions as required. Conclusion – was the aim achieved? <b>Language Features:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present tense (imperative mood) and past tense.</li> <li>Processes (verbs) relational (is, are, have, has) action processes.</li> <li>Person – often omitted (passive voice, The water is/was placed...).</li> <li>Conjunctions – often none (numbered steps do not require connecting). Discussion may use additive, consequential, comparative, temporal.</li> </ul>
SOSE History	Recount	Personal Historical Recount Students adopt the persona of a young roman teenager and produce a series of diary entries, relaying information about Roman life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To retell historical events for the purpose of informing and entertaining</li> </ul>	<b>Text Structure:</b> Orientation – providing background information. Events – relating what happened in a temporal sequence. Personal Comment (Optional) – on the events, at any stage in the text. Re-orientation (Optional) – summary statement/comment. <b>Language Features:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Past tense</li> <li>Processes (verbs) – all types: action, saying sensing (thinking and feeling), relating (is are, have has etc.)</li> <li>Person – first (I, we), third (he, she, it, they)</li> <li>Conjunctions – temporal (when, after, before etc), consequential (as, since, because, in order to etc) other types also possible.</li> </ul>
English	Response	Literary Response  "Character Study"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To respond to an artistic work, or an aspect of a work, for the purpose of describing and evaluating it.</li> </ul>	<b>Language Features:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present tense for evaluation, past tense when describing events that occurred in the past.</li> <li>Descriptive language – large nominal groups (nouns and descriptive adjectives).</li> <li>Person – third (the novel, the character, the author, the reader etc).</li> <li>Words and phrases that express value judgment (awful, excellent).</li> <li>Words that show cause and effect and conjunctions (because, therefore, so as, then, if, but etc).</li> <li>Use of high modality (could, should, must, might, would).</li> </ul>

*NOTE: This form need be completed only once per year by each Year 6 or 5/6 class teacher and photocopied for associate secondary schools.*

### SCHOOL LITERACY TRANSITION PASSPORT

The purpose of this information is to communicate information from your school to associate secondary schools about approaches to literacy teaching and learning in Year 6 or 5/6 classes. This provides a basis for promoting curriculum continuity, and continuity in literacy education, in the middle years of schooling (Years 5–9).

Primary School: \_\_\_\_\_

Suburb: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Organisation of Year 5 and 6 classes at this school

☐ Years 5 and 6 combined

☐ Mixture of combined and separate classes

☐ Years 5 and 6 in separate classes

2. Classroom teaching practices and strategies that support literacy and learning.

Practices/Strategies	Frequency of Teacher/Student Use		
	Used Often	Used sometimes	Used rarely or never
Activating prior knowledge, making predictions			
Cooperative learning in pairs/small groups			
Structured opportunities for oral language development			
Higher order thinking, problem-solving and metacognition			
Bloom's taxonomy or other learning taxonomies			
Brainstorming, concept maps or mind mapping			
Explicit teaching of reading strategies for different texts and purposes			
Explicit teaching of knowledge about language, text structure and grammatical features			
Modelling and Joint construction of text			
Data charts, grids and graphic organisers			
Note-making, summarising, independent learning strategies			

3. Approaches to Reading

Fiction and Non-Fiction texts covered	Teaching Approaches and Strategies (include details of strategies students are familiar with i.e. graphic outline, guided reading, reciprocal teaching etc.)

## 3. Approaches to Writing

Text types or genres covered	Teaching Approaches and Strategies (include details of aspects studied i.e. text structure, grammatical features and relevant key learning areas)

## 5. Approaches to Viewing

Texts covered	Teaching Approaches and Strategies (include details of aspects studied i.e. visual literacy)

## 5. Approaches to Speaking and Listening

Texts covered	Teaching Approaches and Strategies (include details of aspects studied i.e. visual literacy)

## 6. Particular literacy teaching practices and strategies used with learners requiring increased literacy support (e.g. ESL or Indigenous students, or students with special learning needs)

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# LITERACY AND LEARNING IN THE MIDDLE YEARS

## The Case Studies

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### INTRODUCTION

While common principles of effective literacy practice underpinned the research project as a whole, the specific research focus undertaken by the 12 case study schools was, as indicated previously, different in each school. As discussed in the body of the report, the twelve schools were selected in order to be broadly representative of the diversity of school communities in urban, regional and rural Victoria, and also reflective of a range of social, cultural and other variables.

Overall the schools have been very positive about the impact of the research project on both their students and their staff and the role the project has played as a catalyst for change.

The following provides an outline of the activities undertaken in each of the case study schools, both at the classroom level and the broader school level and the impact that it has had on the school as a whole, the teachers and the students. The case studies generated a very rich collection of ideas, strategies, and materials developed by the case study schools. It is hoped that opportunities will arise in the future which enable this collection to be somehow shared with a far wider range of schools.

The following information on each school has been grouped under a number of common headings:

- School Profile
- School Research Focus
- Student and Staff involvement in the Research
- Strategies and Outcomes
- Overall Outcomes
- The Future
- Key Learnings

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## SCHOOL A

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### School Profile

Located in an inner western suburb of Melbourne, this all girls secondary school has a student population of 360 and a teaching staff of approximately 30. Sixty percent of student families are eligible for income support Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and five percent of students live independently from their families. The student population is culturally diverse, with a large proportion of the students from Language Backgrounds Other than English (80%) Thirty-five percent of students are considered English as a Second Language (ESL) students whose language needs are addressed within the school's ESL program.

A new organisational structure in the middle school (years 7-9), implemented at the beginning of 2000, has enabled significant changes to the curriculum and to the teaching and learning within the classroom. These changes have included:

- a reduction from 6 periods a day to 4 periods of 72 minutes each
- the establishment of middle school classes with 2 core teachers who teach English/SOSE and Math/Science for two thirds of time-tabled periods
- the introduction of home rooms where the students spend the majority of their time
- greater integration of the curriculum across KLAs

The new structure has also meant that teachers of years 7-9 are involved in 'partnership' teaching in that they are part of year level teams and, as such, have been allocated time to plan curricula together and have been offered additional pay incentives. The appointment of a senior teacher as middle school coordinator and another as middle school leader was also an important aspect of the new school restructure.

### School Research Focus

Literacy has only just emerged as a priority area for the school. There is general acknowledgement by teachers that literacy is a problem for many of their students and it was recognised that many teachers of KLAs other than English had little understanding of the ways in which they might begin to assist students' literacy development. In consultation with the research coordinators, it was agreed that the middle school teachers need to develop fundamental knowledge about literacy and the ways in which literacy strategies could be incorporated into KLA content. The main focus of the project was to:

- assist teachers develop a broader view of literacy
- assist all KLA teachers recognise their responsibility as teachers of literacy
- develop teachers' knowledge about literacy teaching strategies which they could incorporate into their classroom practice.

In addition, however, the research also focussed on the extent to which the structural and organisational changes in the middle year's area enabled the implementation of the literacy strategies being trialed.

### Student and Staff Involvement in the Research

Two of the three year seven classes, each containing approximately 14 students were involved in the research project. Two Year 7 English/SOSE teachers were the key teacher-

researchers in the project, sharing the role of School Literacy Coordinator. Both teachers also hold coordination roles, one being the junior sub-school coordinator and the other the Middle School coordinator and as such, were instrumental in implementing the major changes to the middle school structure. During the life of the project, more teachers in the year seven team became involved in trialing strategies at various times and attending the PD sessions.

### **Strategies and Outcomes**

As part of this research, the teachers chose to trial a number of the literacy strategies which were modeled during the PD sessions.

#### **Wordsplash**

This strategy activates and builds on the prior knowledge – of both content and language – that students bring to learning by involving students in using clues to make predictions about unseen text. Students then attempt to reconstruct the text and then compare their versions with the original, discussing and analysing similarities and differences

When *Wordsplash* was trialed with a Year 7 SOSE class using a text about Ancient Egypt, the teacher reported that the activity was highly successful, the students were thoroughly engaged and they successfully cooperated in groups. There was a sense of ‘*safe competition*’ as well as an environment in which class leaders took on supportive roles. As indicated in the teacher’s comment below, the activity was believed to be particularly valuable for the vocabulary development of ESL students who are often overwhelmed by pages of print text, enabling them to guess at meaning, something they are often reluctant to do.

*‘Even if the ESL kids depended on more capable kids to work through the process, they became aware of that process of breaking the text down, making more links and constructing a piece of text rather than it simply being in their faces, being expected to deal with a whole heap of vocabulary’.*

The activity was considered to be very motivating. ‘*Students cheered with excitement when we read the passage and they had interpreted it correctly/ accurately*’. The activity was easy and quick to prepare and could be adjusted according to level of difficulty or sophistication required. *Wordsplash* was also trialed in a Year 8 and a year 9 class, both with equally successful outcomes.

#### **Read and Re-tell**

This strategy involves students in listening, reading and writing and develops students’ abilities to focus on recalling the sequence of meanings in a text and to approximate in their retelling the schematic structure and grammatical features of written text.

*Read and Re-tell* was incorporated into the pastoral care component of Year 7 Health. The activity prompted a good deal of discussion about the text and the teacher described the level of reading by students as “intense” and detailed. The activity resulted in much greater levels of comprehension than would normally have been achieved by the previously used strategy, where the reading text and a set of comprehension questions were provided.

#### **Data Charts**

This strategy provides a cognitive organizer for researching a topic as well as a framework for structuring the writing of an information report.



As a result of the new middle years structure, many topics of study had been integrated across the curriculum. *The Sydney Olympics*, for example, was covered in English, SOSE, Maths, Science, Health and Physical Education, Art, and Textiles, with the year seven team teachers planning the unit collaboratively. The unit required students to complete oral presentations, samples of creative and informative writing as well as problem solving and the interpretation of diagrams and tables. An important aspect of the unit was a research component which provided the opportunity to trial *Data Charts*. Although the idea of a data chart, existed previously in a document called *Learning Technology Research Guide*, the PD days renewed the teachers' interest in the strategy. The activity was highly successful, helping to focus students' attention on key issues and terms in their research. Both teachers said they would not have previously thought of this as a literacy strategy but now see its worth.

### Overall Outcomes

The School Research Coordinators reported enormous benefits from participation in the project. They believe their research focus was useful, practical and inspirational.

The professional development was considered key to the success. The school was committed to the provision of professional development which provided teachers with the knowledge, understandings, skills and strategies to assist them to achieve improved outcomes in literacy development for their students. A session for all staff was conducted at the school which introduced the ideas and understandings about literacy, as well as literacy strategies, which could be incorporated into their teaching. A decision was then made to send a team of five teachers from across a range of KLAs to the 2 day professional development program at Deakin University.

The professional development increased their knowledge about literacy, provided them with effective literacy teaching strategies and knowledge and confidence to build on and expand their repertoire of strategies. They believe there were huge benefits to the teachers in the school who may not have been a part of the data collection but had attended professional development. They had developed a heightened awareness about literacy, embraced the notion of being teachers of literacy and had trialed strategies in their own classes.

*'I would say there's a significant increase in the general perception that there's a responsibility for all people to deal with literacy across the curriculum and that is a direct result of the day you came down and spoke to them all and the reason that's been a success is because it's been very practical and achievable'*

Teachers of subjects other than English appreciated the opportunity to participate in professional development, which they saw as traditionally being only available to English teachers but which had direct relevance to them and their KLA. In the past, resistance to literacy across the curriculum had arisen because teachers had not felt that they had been given sufficient guidance and professional support.

*'We talk all the time about literacy across curriculum but only English teacher go to things and/or the presenters are only talking to English teachers - they give examples of activities that can be adapted to Maths and Science or whatever but they don't use actual science or Maths examples and people have thought that it's English teachers off-loading the responsibility'*

*Although it is hard to identify the specific cause and effect relationships, particularly when a broad range of aspects had changed in the school it was pleasing to note a significant move forward in CSF levels as reflected through the DART data.*

### Facilitating Factors

- The restructuring of the middle school area to include year level teaching teams and longer blocks of time has resulted in a range of broad curriculum changes such as integrated units of work.
- The team structure is considered to be conducive to developing improved literacy practices because the teachers work together, plan together and integrate the curriculum.
- Professional development for all middle years' teachers was a stimulus to creating a common literacy focus and supporting changes to teaching and learning across key learning areas.

#### **Barriers, Issues and Concerns:**

- Insufficient time for consultation between research coordinators and the school consultant.
- High numbers of staff 'in excess' at this school meant that some of the staff who were beginning to really embrace the notion of being responsible for literacy development of their students, were leaving the school on transfers and this meant that there would be a 'knowledge gap'.
- The levels of Professional Development which they had received needed to be maintained if there was to be a growth of knowledge.

#### **The Future.**

The middle years team approach will continue and the strategies trialed will become part of the approach to literacy across the curriculum areas. A number of changes, however, will take place in 2001 as a result of their participation in the project.

- The year 7 team teachers have decided to adopt Literature Circles rather than set a class novel
- *DART* will continue to be used as an assessment tool for all Year 7 students
- Year 7 teachers have identified student writing as a key area of concern and will target this development in 2001.

#### ***Key Learnings***

*The extent to which middle years restructure and reform are enabling of more effective literacy pedagogy.*

*The effectiveness of integrating literacy teaching and learning strategies into key learning areas.*

*The need for ongoing professional development and support for teachers establishing changed teaching and learning cultures and different pedagogic approaches in their classrooms.*

*The value of a developmental literacy assessment instrument linked to the mainstream curriculum.*

*An understanding that change to school structure and culture is a long-term process requiring commitment and ownership of staff.*

*Instability of staffing and wider industrial issues can impact on school initiatives.*

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## SCHOOL B

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### School Profile

This school, situated in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, has a culturally diverse student population of approximately 630 students from a variety of ethnic groups. The school abuts both the public library and the local sports centre which are frequently used by the students.

Literacy was a school priority on the 1996-1998 charter. Considerable funding was put into literacy professional development, including strategies for dealing with the literacy demands across the curriculum. The school appointed a Literacy Coordinator during this period. By the beginning of the project the school had already implemented organisational structures in the middle school years (7-10) in which the following are key characteristics:

- cross-level or vertical groupings or Units at Years 7/8, Years 9/10 to facilitate both middle years and transition peer support and team teaching
- 5 period day of 1 hour periods
- home groups and home rooms
- each middle school Unit, has core teachers with timetabled periods for curriculum planning across the KLAs.
- English, Maths and Homegroup teachers are on 4 hour per week allotments, LOTE on three, and the rest of the KLAs on two,
- teachers in the Unit teams double up on their roles eg English/Teacher Librarian and Home Group teacher is one such combination, Maths/IT and Homegroup another. Middle years students can have 8-12 hours per week with the one teacher as a result of this team structure
- a descriptive assessment policy exists across the middle school years and across KLAs.

During 1998-1999 the school had participated in the *Good Learning On the Web* (GLOW) project through a partnership with Deakin University. This project explored the use of a dedicated web-site in the teaching of argumentative discourse at Year 9/10 level. The results of the GLOW project and the submission of school applications for funding meant that by 2000 the school was equipped with a new 25 station computer lab, with each machine linked to the school server, plus eight additional computers in the Library with internet access.

### School Research Focus

Given the commitment of the school to literacy education, and its more recent commitment to implementing a learning culture/learning technologies focus on its current priorities charter, it was decided that the main focus of the research would be to investigate whether the use of email, the internet, and a dedicated website would lead to younger students in Years 7/8 becoming more engaged, fluent and confident readers and writers.

In addition, the impact of the organisational structures in the middle school area both on the specific technology focus and on the literacy education in general, would also be examined.

### Student and Staff Involvement in the Research

The original research plan was to investigate the differences between IT/English integration and English taught without such integration, to find out whether there were differences

between an experimental group and a control group over a school year. However, for a number of reasons the control group did not go ahead, and instead the research focussed on the impact on students of the use of technology to improve literacy outcomes for students.

The School Research Coordinator was the Assistant Principal, who worked closely with the Year 7/8 Homegroup teacher in the conduct of the research.

### Strategies Undertaken and the Resulting Outcomes

Students were involved in a range of tasks, which were 'conferenced' over an established website. These included:

- a short biography for an online tutor
- a letter to the editor on a current social issue of the students' choice
- a response to an issue in a class novel
- the making of a magazine on a self-chosen topic

The group had access to computers for their English work in accessing the world wide web for information on current social issues, for email and for use of a dedicated website for conferencing their writing.

A group of student teachers from Deakin University took on the role of on-line tutors, supporting the students in their work on the computers. Each of the student teachers was responsible for writing a short biography and then conferencing a small group of two to three students, chosen from across the ability range for writing as identified by the *DART* pre-assessment. They were also responsible for site management for their group. Weekly email contact on a set day each week was maintained, with the classroom English teacher identifying any problems children or student teachers were having with the web site.

The student teachers were instructed to respond to the student's meaning, to expect some surface feature errors as students composed online, and to model good spelling by using the student's words spelt correctly in any response made to meaning. A further requirement was to find web information on the students' self-chosen topics for both the letter and the magazine, and upload it to the students' folder. Web addresses could also be exchanged on topics of student interest, as could pictures gleaned from web sources.

The idea behind students writing for an unseen audience was to share a technologised virtual classroom space, and to see whether students became more explicit in writing for an audience outside the immediate school community, more confident in technological literacies, and more confident in themselves as writers.

The teacher based her assessment of student abilities in writing on the final drafts of their letters-to-the-editor and their magazines. Of the magazine project she said:

*They don't see the task as onerous if it is being written on a computer to someone else. I think it is linking writing projects to something that is a little different from what they do ordinarily that makes a difference. You don't have to rewrite the whole page. Your spelling errors aren't permanent. Even if we put the wrong letters up, we can go back and edit them.*

This freedom from the permanence of committing errors to paper combined with ongoing writing tasks on self-chosen topics are two strategies which the teacher saw as supportive of younger writers developing confidence in the Middle Years of Schooling. However, offering

students choice of pen and paper and/or computers as composing tools when publishing their work was considered important.

Although it is difficult to know whether the result is attributable to the middle years' strategies already in place or to the technologising of the English curriculum, the teacher had this to say about children writing for an online partner:

*They also do a little better because there is someone else reading it. It's an argument we have talked about. They write a little tighter, a little better and a little more fluently and can be a little more adventurous in what they talk about if it is written in that chat line. And they'll chat and chat and chat... we do magazines at other times and kids quite enjoy doing them, but they really get into discussing it with someone else, someone unseen. If you put them on a chat line I think the technology is seductive. It is impersonal and it is less onerous than picking up a pen and writing.*

Her understanding was that technologising her English curriculum made writing more enjoyable for students even if, as in a small proportion of cases, their writing showed no measurable improvement.

*Can you measure enjoyment in learning? And that is a really important thing. That is what happened with the project. They enjoyed doing what they were doing. Go back to all the research that says you get a kid to Year 5 and then you start dampening that enthusiasm. I can't measure that enjoyment.*

### **Overall Outcomes**

A key outcome of the project was the impact of using *DART* materials. The school's evaluation of the *DART* implementation was very positive, despite initial reluctance to use any assessment instrument which had the potential to rank students competitively. Part of the school ethos is non-competitive assessment, so there were initial fears that the implementation of *DART* would undermine the school's commitment to a collaborative middle years learning environment. Once it was understood that the assessment arose out of the curriculum and could give indications as to where learners were achieving in terms of CSF outcomes, the school became more enthusiastic.

The *DART* results for this school did in fact show one of the highest numbers of students who moved up a level over the period of the research, in particular in writing. Of significance also, was the fact that of these students who showed marked improvement there were more boys than girls, unlike the trend which was discussed in Section 3.3. The technology focus within literacy may have influenced this result.

### **Facilitating Factors**

The reorganisation of the school to include cross-level groupings or Units at Years 7/8, longer periods and core teachers for the Units all contributed to the ability to work on this technology focussed project, and enabled some of the necessary structural decisions, such as the need to allocate block times for computer access, more achievable.

### **Barriers, Issues and Concerns:**

A concern was how generalisable the teaching strategies were for the on-line aspect of the project. The focus on literacy and technologies was undertaken by one willing English teacher devoting half her English allotment a week for a school term without the benefit of cross-KLA or inter-faculty collaboration. It required on-line partnerships with student English teachers, and mentoring support from outside the immediate school community.

This raises questions about the willingness of English teachers more generally to explore on-line literacies with their pupils, their abilities to structure online partnerships, their willingness to change from more traditional teaching and learning paradigms to more interactive ones, and the additional workload involved.

*As a teaching and learning tool its fantastic, but as an assessment tool I think it creates workload. In an on-line classroom the teacher's accustomed roles of surveillance and control over discourse is hard to maintain. It takes hours to download all the exchanges from a dedicated website for assessment purposes.*

The lack of available time and the conflicting demands of being involved in a range of projects made it difficult to give as much time as they would have liked to the project.

### **The Future.**

Further professional development will be provided for the school in 2001 to assist with the implementation of the *DART* across all year 7/8 unit teams. This will include the Grade 6 teachers in the primary feeder schools as the project further investigates the possibilities of using *DART* as a catalyst for developing a common language and common processes to assist with literacy in transition.

#### **Key Learnings**

*The value of a developmental literacy assessment instrument linked to the mainstream curriculum.*

*The extent to which a vertical middle years structure allows the teaching and timetable flexibility to support this kind of interactive on-line project.*

*The potential for enhancing literacy through technology using a combination of access to world-wide web, email and dedicated website for student projects.*

*The impact of technology when combined with choice in topic selection, authentic purpose and genuine audience on students' enjoyment, motivation and engagement in learning.*

*The key role of the teacher in exploring innovative opportunities for interactive learning involving technology and establishing and maintaining on-line partnerships.*

*The need for ongoing professional development and support for teachers integrating technology into classroom teaching and learning cultures.*

## **SCHOOL C**

### **School Profile**

This secondary school, situated in the industrial area of a large regional city, has a diverse student population of approximately 750. A New Arrivals Program is located at the school, and large numbers of students are the children of immigrants, speaking a second and sometimes third language at home. Many students come from single parent families and

families which include grandparents. Large numbers of parents are shift workers. The school does its best with limited resources to cater for the huge range of academic ability. A large and innovative integration program operates.

The staff is stable and experienced. There is a relaxed, friendly and supportive atmosphere among both staff and students. Students are supported by integration aides and parent volunteers. Professional development in language and literacy is encouraged and many staff have participated in programs such as *ESL in the Mainstream Teacher Development Course*, and *Writing in the Subject Areas*. Staff have also participated in a wide range of Middle Years professional development.

Middle Years initiatives include the EASE program in which a single teacher takes Year 7 students for 11 periods a week in integrated English and Social Education. There is a well-developed transition program which includes information sharing with primary teachers, a common transition form, a buddy system and school visits. PEEL strategies are implemented across all Key Learning Areas.

### **School Research Focus**

There is a general belief among the staff that students' writing abilities lag behind their abilities in other areas, and that students are disadvantaged in the upper levels of schooling by poor writing skills. Teachers were concerned about inaccurate grammar in students' written expression, but also about their inability to manipulate and revise language and their lack of a metalanguage to discuss writing. This concern was also shared by teachers of ESL and LOTE. Although traditional grammar had been taught in an incidental way, this seems to have had little impact on students' writing or knowledge of language.

For these reasons it was decided that the main focus of the Middle Years Literacy Research would be on the teaching of grammar and language awareness. The aim was to develop this on a small scale with a view to wider implementation as a school-wide systematic program across year levels. It was also intended that the research project would be a catalyst to the development of a broader and more cohesive literacy strategy within the school.

### **Student and Staff Involvement in the Research**

This research activity was formally undertaken in two year 7 classes - a specialist ESL class for more recent arrivals, and another class taught by the literacy coordinator. A third class followed a conventional program to serve as an informal control group. Remaining classes were free to adopt the grammar program or not as they chose. Teachers chose to manage the program in different ways - as a single block, as units once a term, or as weekly lessons.

### **Strategies and Outcomes**

It was decided that the grammar program would be based on the first *Collins School Grammar Workbook*. This workbook uses the COBUILD grammar, which is based on computer-assisted analysis in a corpus of 250 million words of correlations of pattern and meaning. COBUILD is widely used in second-language English teaching.

The workbook consisted of a series of worksheet exercises which included labelling and analysis, manipulation, and student explanation. Emphasis was placed on the manipulation of sentences by joining, editing, simplifying and rearranging, and on students verbalising their own understanding of grammatical concepts.

Importantly, the teachers adapted the workbook activities to meet the specific needs of the students at the school. Combined with this was the need for a range of strategies which reflected 'best practice' in teaching and learning for students in the Middle Years of Schooling.

A general theme which ran through all teaching in the project was to make students more metacognitively aware, to give them analytical and reflective skills, and to help them to become independent by learning to reflect on their own performance. The aim was to make teaching explicit and structured in order to give students a sense of security and to ensure that they did not lose confidence because of failure to understand what they had to do and how they were going to be judged.

The principles, approaches and strategies specifically for teaching grammar and language, were then extended more broadly into other areas to help students put to work the understandings they had gained in work on language awareness.

Strategies that proved effective included:

#### **Specific teaching of difficult vocabulary**

Often difficult spelling patterns in a sentence provided a major hurdle for many ESL students. Teachers found that using the names of students in the class in example sentences had a major impact on engagement and understanding in the lesson. Visual highlighting and discussion of vocabulary and sentence structure was also effective.

#### **Role play**

Teachers made extensive use of role play to assist in the understanding of concepts. Action verbs were taught by miming sentences, for example. Reported speech was taught by a role play in which two students had a conversation and a third student had to report what they said with suitable tense modification.

#### **Use of cards**

One lesson dealt with the 'being' or 'relating' class of verbs, and how to put a pronoun in front of the verb, by shuffling rows of students holding flashcards in front of the class. They also learned, through card activities using the names of students in the class, how pronouns can be substituted for nouns.

#### **Debate and discussion**

Students verbalised and made explicit their understandings about language through formal and non formal debate and discussion about the inevitable anomalies which occur in any system of grammar.

#### **A 'Bundling' Activity.**

Students' sentences about the Olympics were sorted by topic into four categories. These bundles of sentences were then turned into paragraphs. First the teacher modelled the process and then students, working in mixed-ability groups, used the sentence-combining and simplifying strategies they had learned in their workbooks to combine sentences into the coherent text of a paragraph. This task engaged students because it used their own language, it modelled writing strategies which often remain covert, and it promoted transfer of



grammatical concepts into students' own writing. Finally, students individually organised 'left-over' sentences into a paragraph as an assessable task.

#### **Using detailed criteria sheets for written assignments**

As a way of helping students to become independent of the teacher and to learn to make judgments about their own writing, students were asked to self correct using these sheets and to make predictions about what their grade will be. It is planned in future that explicit grammatical criteria will be incorporated into these sheets as a way of encouraging students to transfer their grammatical knowledge into writing in all subject areas. These criteria sheets were also used as a stimulus to revision and redrafting.

#### **Overall Outcomes**

The grammar activities achieved substantial levels of student engagement. One such example was cited where a class worked actively and constructively on the passive voice for almost 80 minutes.

Students who were reluctant writers were often able to write more in a structured context. One very reluctant reader, for example, was able to write two lengthy paragraphs, one in first person present tense and the other in third person past tense.

Teachers claimed that there were a number of reasons for this increased level of engagement. Students enjoyed the manipulative, problem-solving aspect of the grammar activities, which meant that it was possible to reason out and defend a correct answer. The different format of these grammar exercises allowed some students, who were usually frustrated by their poor writing skills, to experience success in English.

Students also enjoyed involvement in debate and discussion about language which highlighted the conceptual quirks of English grammar. Student experience of bilingualism and the learning of multiple languages meant there were rich resources to draw on in these debates.

When interviewed, students all expressed a positive attitude to the activities.

#### **Facilitating Factors**

Recognising the specific needs of their students and a willingness to put extensive effort into making appropriate modifications and adaptations to 'off the shelf' programs to meet these needs is crucial to the success of the work conducted at this school. Further enhancing this situation is the established teamwork demonstrated amongst the teachers, in part due to the PEEL model of professional learning which had been established in the school over many years.

#### **Barriers, Issues and Concerns**

A recognised major challenge for the program is to ensure retention of the concepts learned. Unless work is followed up and reinforced it is lost very quickly by students. Grammar teaching needs to be part of a cumulative program over a number of years. It is very demanding of time in a crowded curriculum.

Students also need assistance in transferring their knowledge into other areas of their own learning. This means that teachers in all curriculum areas must be familiar with the grammar program and able to build on it in the writing tasks that they set.

### The Future

The program was sufficiently successful that staff have decided to redesign the Year 7 integrated EASE program for 2001 to include grammar activities.

#### **Key Learnings**

*The need for developmental literacy assessment instruments linked to the mainstream curriculum to be inclusive of students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and experiences, and able to be adapted for new and recent arrivals.*

*The impact of specific teaching of grammar using activities that engage learners in analysing, discussing, manipulating and experimenting with linguistic structures and features.*

*The importance and value of metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness for literacy development of middle years students.*

*The importance of facilitating student transfer of knowledge about language and literacy from one learning context to another.*

*The importance of adapting materials and resources to ensure that it suits the context of the school and the needs of its students.*

### SCHOOL D

This Year 5-8 campus of a non-government boys' school has a population of 212 students drawn from a range of middle class suburbs. Nearly all boys come from English speaking backgrounds. The school offers a number of supportive programs that focus on catering for individual differences and extending students. Approximately 3% of the students have learning difficulties as defined by the school.

The school has coordinators for both the primary and secondary section of the middle school. Years 5 and 6 students have a homeroom teacher while Years 7 and 8 each have a team of 4 teachers who are responsible for pastoral care, discipline, academic progress, reports etc. There are vertical Tutor Care groups for all the year levels with 3-4 boys from each level under a tutor. The Tutor Care groups meet fortnightly and are structured to incorporate the peer support program. The Year 8 boys are trained to run the tutor groups under the supervision of the Tutor.

The school does not have a literacy policy as such, although reading has been a priority for a number of years and the extra curriculum programs are seen as focussing on and supporting literacy. An Individual Differences Program works with students on individual learning programs and contracts, small group activities in different subject areas plus programs such

as Future Problem Solving, Tournament of Minds, Horizon's Satellite Programs, and the Night of the Notables. In addition students participate in philosophy classes, debating and public speaking.

The school emphasises the autonomous learning model and uses integrated study units across three subjects. A literature program operates with three groups, with the class teacher, the librarian and individual differences teacher taking a group each.

For the first five weeks in term 1 of Year 5 the curriculum involves a language based program which operates across the whole year level. The boys are grouped on a needs basis for this program. The program is designed to develop a sense of unity among the boys who come from various schools, and for teachers to develop a strong understanding of the students' needs. The program focuses on language and literacy skills using an inquiry model based around a unit of work.

The parents are very supportive and involved in the school. There is an annual forum for parents based on a literacy topic.

### **School Research Focus**

The focus of the research at this school was primarily to trial strategies for extending boys' engagement in, and comprehension of, a range of texts and more broadly investigate the impact of the extra curriculum literacy-focused activities conducted in the school.

### **Student and Staff Involvement in the Research**

The Individual Differences coordinator was the School Research Coordinator while a Year 5 teacher, together with his Year 5 home group of students were involved in the specific trialing of classroom strategies.

### **Strategies and Outcomes**

A professional development session on Reading and Writing, and the two professional development days held for the project were major factors in determining the direction of the research and providing the teacher involved with the necessary impetus, understanding and ability to adapt the strategies to his particular context and to implement them effectively.

The *DART* training provided and the moderation process which followed the assessment of students was also considered vital in initiating activities which would meet the specific needs of the students.

The following activities were trialed:

#### **Data Charts**

As part of the Literature Studies on the novel, 'Rowan of Rin', the students were asked to complete a Data Chart. The purpose of the exercise was to list the seven characters who embarked on the journey, identify their fear, explain the circumstances in which each had to face his/her fear, describe the character's reaction to this fear and consequently the reactions of the remaining characters. Students initially completed these requirements in pairs. Two pairs then worked together clarifying and justifying their answers. One more partnership of pairs was established generating further extensive discussion. The teacher made the following comments:

*'A fantastic process enjoyed by all. In fact, Year 5 has been studying Rowan of Rin for four years now and I would say that the Data Chart has been the most comprehensive way in which students have gathered the relevant information needed for their journal entries. In particular, the idea of working in pairs when researching was extremely successful. Combining the groups then really consolidated their understandings as they had to justify their responses which generated great discussion'.*

### **Read and Retell**

The teacher approached this activity from a listening point of view. A number of passages were chosen for the current theme and a range of questions were prepared. The amount of scaffolding offered in the process was decreased gradually over the three weeks of using the strategy. As reflected in the teacher's comments *'the improvement noted has been remarkable'*.

### **The Gathering Grid**

This strategy assists students to document, collate and summarise information on a topic. It was used with substantial success for a unit with an Olympic Games theme in which students collated some information about the host city and compared it with their own home town.....*'It was a great tuning in activity for the unit'*.

### **Overall Outcomes**

The Year 5 teacher believed that the additional literacy refocusing he had in his classes, the scaffolding he provided and the specific strategies he used were very effective. The students were more engaged and more interested, as was he. He made expectations more explicit in the different areas of the curriculum. In Maths he was more aware of language and allowed for more discussion and use of concrete materials and activities. He believed that the student growth had increased as a result, reinforced by parents and the students themselves who indicated a greater enjoyment of reading and writing.

The school found the use of *DART* the most influential part of the project. The assessment tool provided a common understanding of reading, writing, listening, speaking and viewing. The results of the pre-assessment also affirmed what they had learned about their students through the introductory program at the beginning of the year and the advances made by the students, as indicated in the post assessment were considered to be a direct result of the changes inside the classroom.

### **The Future**

Strategies to further raise the profile of Literacy in the school will be investigated. Involving all staff in increased professional development in the literacy area will be a focus, along with a greater emphasis on working in teams at every level, will also assist in more effective literacy teaching and learning throughout the whole school. *DART* will also be used more extensively in the future.

### **Facilitating Factors**

The impact of the professional development was considered to be immense

### **Barriers, Concerns and Issues**

Finding appropriate times in the crowded curriculum and co-curriculum for the additional professional development required to maintain the momentum created through the project, was difficult.

The need to expand the work to more class levels and teachers was recognised. In particular, more work was considered necessary to encourage teachers other than English to extend their understanding of literacy in the different subject areas.

It was also recognised that, although literacy development was a key focus in the school there was a need for an explicit literacy policy to ensure that literacy education was a priority across the whole school.

### **Key Learnings**

*The value of a developmental literacy assessment instruments linked to the mainstream curriculum.*

*The impact of specific teaching of reading strategies focusing on comprehension of deeper levels of meaning in text.*

*The importance of professional development in literacy for teachers in all curriculum areas.*

*The challenge of promoting continuity of literacy education across the primary to secondary transition and of bringing primary and secondary schooling cultures into closer alignment, even where these share a common campus.*

## **SCHOOL E**

### **School Profile**

This primary school, situated in an outer eastern suburb of Melbourne has 312 students. Approximately 27% of students are from a language background other than English. There is an Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) recipient population of 32%, an increase of 9% in the past 6 years resulting in a greater number of welfare and related issues and leading to assumptions about the level of literacy achievement and student outcomes in other key learning areas.

Literacy is a School Charter priority that is actively monitored and addressed by the leadership team, the teaching and non-teaching staff and the School Council.

During 1999, the School Council also established a Special Purpose Literacy Committee, comprised of both parent and teacher members, to support and monitor the implementation of Literacy P-6.

During 2000, the School Council also established a Special Purpose Middle Years Committee to support and monitor involvement in the MYRAD initiative. There were

obvious links between the focus and direction of both committees in the provision of literacy issues for Middle Years students. Importantly both committees provided written reports for tabling and discussion at School Council.

The school has a designated Level 2 teacher as Literacy Coordinator.

Other elements that supported literacy education at the school have included:

- Individual Learning Improvement Plans with a literacy focus
- Parent helpers and community support personnel with a literacy focus
- Web page development by Year 6 students incorporating students' written work
- Implementation of a Homework policy designating desirable home reading and reading for research
- Deakin University undergraduate students, retired teachers and other staff assisted small groups of students and individuals with literacy related areas of concern P-6
- Introduction of Special Education Teacher - Literacy in Term 2 of 2000 to work with students at risk, particularly with students in Years 4-6. This person also provided professional development to a large number of teaching staff.

### **School Research Focus**

The research had two levels of focus. Firstly, investigating the impact of specific classroom strategies which were based on:

- raising the consciousness in the school that Level 4 students needed to be reading to learn rather than learning to read, reflecting this in the materials used, the strategies employed; and the assessment and gathering of data related to reading across the curriculum
- the impact of structured talk promoting writing skills and text construction development
- sharing of approaches and strategies used in level 4 and 5 classrooms.

Secondly, investigating the impact of a teacher exchange arrangement between the primary and secondary school.

### **Student and Staff Involvement in the Research**

The School Research Coordinator was the Grade 6 teacher. Other key personnel involved included the Years 4-6 teachers, the Middle Years of Schooling Coordinator, the Learning Technologies Support Office, the Literacy Support personnel (retired teachers, and Deakin student teachers) and the primary and secondary teacher directly involved in the exchange project. The strong support and involvement from the leadership team at the school was an important factor.

### **Strategies and Outcomes**

A range of strategies designed to increase the level and enjoyment of reading were trialed over the year in the Year 6 classroom.

### **Literacy Learning Rotations**

This involves students working in small self managing groups through different oral, reading and writing activities matched to their ability levels. Some of these activities are guided reading, literature response, researching a topic and preparing an oral presentation. The

teacher works with each group in turn, which enables explicit teaching of particular literacy knowledge and skills. Within this structure students are able to read narrative and factual texts matched to their needs, interests and abilities.

#### **Exposure to a wide range of texts**

Through increased resourcing and appropriate teaching strategies, students were given the opportunity to deal with a range of texts and the skills and understanding to gain the most from these texts. This involved:

- fiction texts (suspense, mystery, action)
- non-fiction texts, (books, research texts, encyclopedias, thesaurus, dictionaries)
- multimedia and electronic texts (CD Roms, internet, videos, audio cassettes) with support from Learning Technologies Support Officer and Regional Curriculum Computer Consultants
- everyday texts (junk mail, magazines, pamphlets)

#### **Teacher Exchange between the Primary and Secondary Schools**

During 1999, discussions were held between the Year 5 teacher and the Year 7 Coordinator about the possibility of a teacher exchange for one term. Both principals strongly supported this initiative and in Term 2 the Year 5 teacher (Middle Years Coordinator) swapped with Year 7 Coordinator for one term.

The aim of the initiative was:

- to support the ongoing professional development of those concerned
- to support the development of common and shared understanding of curriculum continuity across Levels 4 and 5 in all areas, including the over arching literacy
- to support the implementation of innovative and best practice
- to create ongoing links between the two schools to enhance student transition not only in relation to literacy but also other Key Learning Areas.

It was strongly supported by:

- the School Consultant
- the liaison between Deakin University and staff and school council from the secondary and primary schools
- the willingness of both principals to release staff involved from classroom duties
- the commitment from the teachers involved
- a range of appropriate professional development.

A selection of thoughts, as recorded in the journal of the primary teacher in involved (attached), highlight various aspects of the impact of the exchange.

#### **Overall Outcomes**

The research at the classroom level and at the exchange level led to an increased awareness and understanding of where Level 4 students are placed in relation to literacy and CSF levels and a greater understanding of the issues and areas of concern that need to be addressed with a number of students.

Consequently by the end of 2000, the school was able to identify specific requirements for Year 5 students in relation to suggested and appropriate content for their development in Year 6. The following is a selection of these.

- use of descriptive language – adjectives, adverbs
- use of variety of simple and complex sentences
- effective punctuation
- effective and accurate spelling in a written context
- developing narrative – introduction, complication, resolution
- 3-4 genres of writing (recounts, report writing, narrative, argumentative)
- use of persuasive writing

Some Level 4 students made significant progress consistent with CSFII expectations whilst others improved marginally and will need further concentrated attention throughout 2001

The exchange in Term 2 and the frequent teacher visits to the Level 4 classrooms facilitated an understanding that more appropriate strategies could be followed on from Level 4 into Level 5 classrooms, particularly in regard to reading rotations and use of varied texts for a range of student abilities and interests.

The research also had the effect of raising the profile of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) with the Level 4 team. The staff at that level and beyond became increasingly aware of the enormous challenges presented by the emerging literacies associated with ICT. Furthermore, this new awareness of ICT became evident in the secondary school. This was symbolically represented by the provision of two IT Community Scholarship for students in Year 6. One of the school's Year 6 students became a recipient.

#### **Facilitating Factors**

The commitment of the leadership and the staff to improving the opportunities for students to further develop their literacy skills and understanding was vital in the work being carried out in the school. The extensive and continuing professional development in both the middle years area and in literacy education was also important.

#### **Barriers, Issues and Concerns**

Insufficient time to reflect and effectively implement change to teaching strategies and to accurately correct and moderate on *DART* assessment was considered to be a major hindering factor to successful implementation of the innovations.

The exchange was highly effective and gained considerable support from most parents of Level 4 students. There was, however, concern amongst some parents who felt that these innovative practices and the associated changes were disrupting the stability of their children's learning environment. This was further exacerbated by the unexpected promotion to another school, of the Year 5 teacher involved and also the fact that the Year 6 teacher was on Long Service Leave for a Term. This was highly unfortunate but very real in terms of what can happen in any primary school.

Because of strong leadership and a general acceptance and trust by the school community, the school managed what could potentially have been a very difficult situation. It did,



however, highlight the need to ensure as much as possible that stability is maintained throughout the Middle Years particularly when change is being implemented.

### The Future

In 2001, the English faculty from the secondary college and the Level 4 teachers from the primary school will review their literacy provision through Years 5-9 to facilitate curriculum continuity and planning.

The decision to commence with the literacy area was a highly considered one, given the gains developed between the two schools in 2000 and the need to involve a manageable number of staff at the secondary school. This will then provide a model for the review of curriculum which could be assessed in 2001 and used for other KLAs in 2002 and beyond. There has also been agreement by the principals of other neighbouring primary schools to become involved in this process. Potentially this means that the Level 4 and 5 teachers across these schools would seek to develop a literacy provision that would have greater commonality, cohesion and sequential development.

The review of the data on individual students has resulted in teachers at all levels becoming more aware of the individual needs of our Level 4 students and the need to review curriculum practices in response to this data. Already provision has been made in the 2001 budget for an intensive literacy intervention program for students in Years 5 and 6 that addresses issues borne out by the assessment carried out during the year.

#### **Key Learnings**

*The value of a developmental literacy assessment instrument linked to the mainstream curriculum.*

*The enhanced literacy outcomes for students of literacy-focussed teaching within an overall learning context that promotes choice, flexibility and independent learning.*

*The importance of strategies such as teacher shadowing and teacher exchange for expanding the professional knowledge, understanding and experience of primary and secondary teachers, and the need for this to be encouraged and rewarded through systemic support.*

*The vital role played by effective leadership, support and co-ordination in combination with extensive and continuing professional development of staff.*

*The tension for schools between participating in worthwhile innovative projects and educational research, and maintaining stability and continuity for students and parents at the day-to-day classroom level.*

### SCHOOL F

This government primary school, located in an outer southern suburb of Melbourne, has a student population of 407 in which 55% of families are from a language background other than English and 53% receive an Educational Maintenance Allowance.

The school has adopted an innovative structure for middle years learning with the establishment of the Year 5 and 6 Autonomous Learning Unit.

The unit was created as a contemporary learning environment and based on the work of Professor George Betts from North Colorado University, quoted as saying: 'Let's change the system, not the child. Let's do things with children, not to them'.

Five teachers work in a team teaching situation to provide all aspects of the curriculum (except for LOTE). A Leading Teacher 2 is responsible for leading and managing the unit for Grade 5 & 6 students.

The curriculum incorporates real-life experiences with a focus on open-ended tasks, problem solving, critical thinking and enabling skills. Students' preferred learning styles are identified and the concept of multiple intelligences explored. Children are encouraged to use their strengths and develop skills in areas in which they are less proficient. There is an emphasis on the development of children's passion as a basis for their learning and students are encouraged to negotiate individual in depth studies with their teachers.

The school's priority is for literacy to be undertaken as a component of an integrated curriculum. Students are involved in authentic, real-life tasks that involve them in research, information retrieval, presentations and publication. There is a focus on mixed ability groups and emphasis on reading skills development. The children maintain individual reading journals. There is a focus on developing a love of literature and immersing children in opportunities to engage in a variety of text genres and responding to it in different ways. Focus workshops include the development of skills required for research, writing, reading, listening and speaking. Spelling is undertaken daily with individualised spelling journals.

In the Grade 5 & 6 Unit, individual learning improvement plans are used for identified students at risk in reading. Weekly conferences are undertaken between Grade 5 & 6 students and their home teacher to negotiate work requirements, set goals for their current investigation and plan the next stage in their projects.

A Leading Teacher 3 is responsible for the literacy priority across the school. This teacher is also the Early Years Literacy Program Coordinator.

### **School Research Focus**

The focus of the research was on developing teacher understandings of literacy theories and, in particular, the development of literacy in an autonomous learning centre. The school's research plan identified the need for 'target teaching' of literacy skills such as writing genres, proof reading skills, cooperative group work strategies and speaking and listening skills. The emphasis on authentic literacy activities meant that teachers looked at moving activities they classed as 'fun' (producing a unit newsletter, Kids' Parliament etc.) from their position at the end of week as reward or extension work to the language block throughout the week.

### **Students and Staff Involved in the Research**

The six teachers working in the unit were all involved in this project (two teachers held 0.5 positions). This included the Assistant Principal and Year 5 & 6 coordinator. Twenty students of mixed ability were identified as participants in the research on the basis of their

results on the *DART* reading test. Teachers decided to assess all students in the Year 5 & 6 Unit on reading, writing and viewing. All the reading scripts were assessed, while the writing scripts of the twenty project students only were assessed.

### **Strategies and Outcomes**

Over the period of the project there were many examples of changes which were made to the practices and approaches taken and to the attitudes and understandings of the teachers involved.

### **Literacy Assessment**

Teachers were more stimulated to investigate and question their practices and to look at options which were most appropriate for their students. This led to the development of a literacy checklist or profile which was based on the Luke and Freebody Four Resources Model and which was stimulated by a similar model being used by another primary school which they had visited. The initial checklist trialed was for reading only with a checklist for writing and also for Maths being planned.

The checklist was also used by the students to assist them to increase the responsibility for their own learning as well as helping them to understand the expectations and plan to improve areas which were identified as needing improvement.

Student interviews indicated positive responses to the use of these profiles. One student for example recognised the range of reading in which he was involved, having spent 90 minutes on a website reading instructions for a Game Boy, information about new products, and facts about 'cheats'. After doing so, he thought of the checklist and realised he'd been 'reading' (even though his mother does not consider it such). He was able to locate the particular descriptor on the profile, firstly identifying that it was a 'text participant' skill and was described as 'I use a range of resources for research including newspaper, internet encyclopaedia, magazines, CD Roms'.

### **Development of Authentic Reading Tasks**

There were many examples of the ways in which teachers changed their notion about the authenticity of literacy tasks. The positive response from students to the new program was a significant influence on teachers changing beliefs. Children who had not engaged before were now showing enthusiasm about workshops and were demonstrating their improved skills. One boy for example, reportedly with a Grade 2 reading level, gave a well presented oral report about his team's work. One of the more hesitant teachers experienced a breakthrough with a Year 6 student who had acknowledged his literacy problems but then produced excellent language work in planning the Unit's Olympic Day.

The language skills that the students needed to complete authentic tasks were identified. These included:

- research and comprehension skills
- listening skills
- speaking skills (including telephone conversations)
- organising ideas and sequencing work tasks
- awareness of audience and purpose
- professional and business language for telephone, fax, email and letters

- understanding of the different standards required for different purposes
- spelling, punctuation, written expression and organisation of ideas
- effective searching of the internet and understanding of internet language
- checking reliability and suitability of facts and information.

Examples of some of the Authentic tasks carried out by students included:

- purchase of playground equipment
- organising a McDonalds Day
- writing articles to be published in the local paper
- organising a visit by the Melbourne tigers

### **Structural Changes**

Whereas Maths and language in the unit had been previously been planned and taught separately by different teams of teachers, the work on authentic tasks led to decision by the teachers to team up to design and conduct authentic tasks that explicitly required students to use both literacy and Maths.

### **Increased student ownership and responsibility for their learning**

Over the period of the project there was evidence of shifts in teacher control of literacy practices in the classroom. – they began to see evidence of the benefits of giving students more control of their tasks. Students were involved in a number of tasks, all of which required a range of literacy skills

### **Literature Groups**

Literature groups were introduced in Term 3. The groups were formed on the basis of the texts students selected. In these groups, students read together, wrote predictions before the group read on and so on. They were run every day for 15 minutes. In addition, teachers read a class book several times a week selected by the class from four or five options. Funding has been made available to the unit for the purchase of children's literature.

After hearing about the positive results at another school, where the students chose the books for their literature groups, the school is now organising that similar opportunities be given to their students.

### **Specific teaching of literacy skills**

It was recognised that there was a need for target teaching of genres and skills difficult to incorporate into authentic tasks.

Teachers in the unit introduced target teaching to small groups rather than the previous approach of teaching whole class sized groups. Instead, the target teaching is based on students' need and readiness for particular skills.

### **Overall Outcomes**

It was recognised that the research undertaken at the school resulted in a number of changes to the students' literacy skills and attitudes and to the attitudes and practices of the teachers in regard to literacy education.

Reflecting on the project one teacher listed the following changes to student's literacy development practices and attitudes:

- huge increase in level of engagement and enjoyment
- development of independent thinking and problem solving
- increased interest in choosing their learning and ability to generate ideas about real life tasks
- improvement in the ability to negotiate with each other – flourishing team work skills
- much higher standard of work and higher expectations
- increased ability to proof read their own work, correct and improve their own work from initial drafts
- more reflection about their learning and ability to identify their learning needs (this needs a lot more work)
- improvement in the content of their writing, becoming familiar confident and competent in writing everyday texts such as letters, proposals, procedural texts, notes, faxes and newspaper articles
- improvement in narrative, argument and report writing skills
- development in students use of spelling punctuation, sentence structure
- development of verbal and listening skills and ability to communicate with adults
- more continuity to their reading through the use of readers circles and serial reading and more diversity in reading, development of skills to read a variety of texts

More broadly, the changes have included:

- teaching programs in the Autonomous Learning Unit are now being developed in response to a strong belief in whole language,
- the concept of 'authentic' learning has had a marked influence on the total teaching program of students in the unit, and
- use of the Luke & Freebody model has facilitated of a more purposeful approach to the teaching of literacy.

#### **Facilitating Factors**

- Role and activity of the consultant in:
  - providing an objective perspective, therefore highlighting areas of need which may have been missed by those closer to the situation
  - providing suggestions for change drawn from a broad range of sources
  - stimulating much discussion and thought about the current practice
  - working alongside teachers and modeling new practices in their workplace
  - providing appropriate professional development where needed.

- Professional Development, including:
  - workshop sessions on specific areas for the staff involved,
  - the professional development sessions arranged for all research schools,
  - ongoing opportunities for discussions between teachers, the principal and the consultant, and
  - a very significant visit to another primary school to observe and discuss some of the literacy practices and to establish further continuing networks between staff.

#### **Barriers, Issues and Concerns**

- The lack of time for planning and implementation of ideas and to carry out thorough assessment of students
- Competing ideologies about literacy held by teachers in the school
- Difficulties in communication about the changes being made, sometimes due to the sharing of a position which meant a greater need for processes which ensured that both teachers were aware of the stages that students were at in their tasks.
- Dealing with the standardized testing and other requirements which must be met by schools

#### **The Future**

The school will continue to provide an autonomous learning environment in which students are encouraged to become independent learners in order to enhance and support the development of literacy skills and understandings. Opportunities to use literacy skills for the completion of authentic tasks will be an important feature of the literacy programs in the middle school.

#### ***Key Learnings***

*The value of a developmental literacy assessment instrument linked to the mainstream curriculum.*

*The enhanced literacy outcomes for students of literacy-focussed teaching within an overall learning context that promotes choice, flexibility and independent learning.*

*The value for middle years students of authentic purposes or 'real life' learning which combines learning-rich tasks with opportunities for 'targeted teaching' of specific literacy knowledge, skills and capabilities in response to student needs and readiness.*

*The impact of different or competing views and ideologies in literacy education on the programs and strategies developed in the school context.*

#### **SCHOOL G**

This small independent school situated in a remote area of Victoria, has two teachers and 37 pupils. The interest in improving literacy education and also the interest in further

developing and using the technology so necessary for communication in such a remote area provided a sound basis for involvement in the research project.

The teacher of Years 4, 5 and 6 students, who was also the Principal of the school, had implemented a range of independent learning strategies within his classroom which were proving to be both engaging and effective for students and allowed a greater degree of individualised learning for the class, which consisted of students with a wide age and ability range.

In recognition of the need to improve the literacy skills of the students, the teacher had investigated and commenced professional development in the *First Steps* program, a comprehensive Western Australian program which covers different aspects of literacy development, maps students' progress and achievement on a series of developmental continua and provides classroom strategies.

### **School Research Focus**

The research focused on the trialing of a range of strategies for explicitly teaching literacy skills that particularly emphasised metacognition and the development of a metalanguage – giving students a language for learning about language.

In doing this the importance of teaching skills and concepts according to the individualised needs of the students, as measured against the CSF outcomes, was considered paramount, as was the need to provide rich tasks, integrating other KLAs, which would assist students to move along the literacy continua.

### **Students and Staff Involved in the Research**

The principal/teacher of the Year 4/5/6 class in the school along with the 16 students within the class were involved in the research.

### **Strategies and Outcomes**

During the course of the year, the teacher implemented a range of strategies related to the research focus. These were implemented at various stages throughout the year and were recorded by the teacher through his term planning documents which were supplemented by personal journal entries. Strategies were based on those learned through the professional development undertaken by the teacher in Western Australian *First Steps*, *Bridging the Gap* and the research project. Importantly, all strategies trialed were adapted by the teacher to ensure that they were appropriate for the context in which his students were learning and their diverse needs and abilities.

### **Reading Journals**

As an early strategy, students were encouraged to write about their reading to highlight the different types of things they were reading, the reasons they were reading and the outcomes of their reading, thus engendering a greater awareness of the importance of reading in their lives and of the range of strategies which they utilise.

### **Reading Texts**

A series of processes were set in place to assist students to gain the most from their reading, assisting them to recognise the steps that they took in gaining knowledge and understanding. These steps, introduced over a period of time, together with discussion on their purpose included:

- shared reading, which always went hand-in-hand with group discussion on the texts
- revisiting the text to clarify and to gather specific data, considered to be an important start to the larger process of critical analysis of the text
- finding the facts, using a range of graded strategies such as highlighting words and writing them into sentences, note taking from the text and rewriting in their own words straight from the text
- revisiting and sharing information

### **Modelled reading**

Here the teacher read to the children from a novel they may not normally have chosen to read. The use of expression, timing, pace, characterisations were modelled by the teacher, and discussed with the students. This was also an opportunity to look more closely at aspects such as stereotype bias, author's viewpoint and the use of archaic language. Using big books the students then practiced reading with expression as a group with explicit teaching on the use of punctuation and altering intonation to add meaning and interest to a story. This led to public speaking using, for example, cue cards, and also play reading.

### **Developing comprehension skills using the three level guide**

Skills in comprehension were explicitly taught using the three levels of questioning. This strategy aimed to support students in reading for meaning by engaging students in thinking through statements about text at three levels: literal (or 'right there'), interpretive (or 'think and search') and applied (or 'on my own').

Students became very aware of the levels and were quick to verbalise the processes needed or being used in a variety of situations.

### **Guided Reading**

This was used initially to work through the 'before, during and after' phases of reading with the students and to highlight the various aspects of critical analysis when responding to a text.

### **Learning Journals**

The learning journal was designed to give children the chance to reflect on their learning in all areas, and to write any questions or problems they might be having. These journals also became the source of personal spelling lists and were used by the teacher to gauge the ability of students to write reflectively.

### **Explicit teaching of writing**



A range of specific aspects in relation to writing and the writing process were explicitly dealt with over the year. The whole editing process from first draft to final product was revised with clear guidelines and steps discussed and agreed upon by the whole class.

The purpose and audience was used as a basis for discussing text types and reasons for writing. They rated the text types into personal favourites, well-known and hardest and least used. The students then devised their personal writing goals for the second two terms of the year.

### **Reciprocal Teaching**

*'Reciprocal Teaching was brand new to me and I could immediately see that it was a powerful tool as a way to thoroughly explore a text for meaning'.*

This journal entry by the teacher, highlighted his commitment to the strategy. The strategy involved small groups of students working together to discuss and make meaning of a text. The students were each given one of four key roles - leader, predictor, clarifier, and questioner. As with all the activities which the teacher trialed he ensured that varying degrees of support was offered to the students until they were able to carry out the process unaided. This, for example, meant that he led the process initially before handing the leadership role onto the students, and when handing over the leadership he provided a guide for initial use by the student leader.

*'This activity turned several children on to making meaning simply because they were empowered and had some real input to give and the playing field was leveled. One very reluctant reader became very adept at providing lengthy and detailed predictions that had a solid basis in the text. he then went on to asking all three levels of questions and enjoyed thinking up very clever questions for others to answer. As a result his ability to summarise and clarify also improved considerably and this had a direct effect on his research and use of informational text and his keenness to read novels for pleasure'.*

### **Self Evaluation**

The involvement of the students in the discussion and development of the various strategies did in itself assist the students in understanding about literacy and language, its purpose and its structure.

They became adept at talking about the processes and the rationale for their own writing and reading. By Term 3. the students had enough metacognitive awareness and metalanguage language to write a reading rubric for self-evaluation of their current reading phase.

*'This rubric was totally devised by the children with suggested metacognitive wording from the teacher when they were stuck. Children put happy faces, ticks etc in the box next to where they were at. They were pretty spot on in their evaluations too!'*

### **Rich Tasks**

Throughout the period of the research, the teacher was keen to provide opportunities for using skills which the students had developed in authentic or rich tasks. These included, for example, the development of **Barrier Games** for the Years 3 and 4 children.

*'After the children had written scripts, produced the worksheet and put the directions on tape we decided to do a peer assessment before presenting it to the Years 3 and 4 children. This was most interesting as the children sat around and gave pointers for improvement to each group in turn. We took part in the activity ourselves first and then used the OHP to follow the directions so children could self assess and we could discuss the effectiveness of the directions. The students then produced a revised recording before giving it to the ¾ students'*

## Overall Outcomes

The impact of the research on the teacher and students was highlighted in many of the comments made in the teacher journal. The following are just a few:

*'Personally this has meant that while I thought I knew where each child was at and what they needed, and my professional instinct and record keeping gave me some insight, I now have more exact data in this area and the terminology to talk to parents and keep them more closely informed of progress and needs. As a staff, we now have a common language and methodology for implementing literacy in the school and this has resulted in a more unified approach to teaching which helps the children and the parents too'.*

*'Through explicit teaching children's sense of purpose value and understanding of the task is enhanced'.*

*'Learning to learn, the reasons why, the how to, this is what explicit teaching and metacognition is all about for me. I may not have it down pat and some university purists may turn grey at my definition but it works for me and my students are empowered'.*

*'If there was a problem area, I now have a means of providing a structured approach to overcoming it and can soundly identify strategies that would assist'.*

A video produced by the teacher, provides a powerful image of students discussing the impact of the various strategies that were implemented in the classroom, and most importantly highlighted the language they had developed for talking about language, literacy and learning.

## The Future

The teacher aims to consolidate what he has learned and implement structures and strategies that will make using these techniques more streamlined and make them available to other teachers. Implementing an individualised program for each student, a 'just in time' approach to his teaching which is enhanced by a comprehensive and ongoing data collection strategy, is also a priority and he is already taking steps to do this.

### **Key Learnings**

*The value of a developmental literacy assessment instrument linked to the mainstream curriculum.*

*The enhanced literacy outcomes for students of literacy-focussed teaching within an overall learning context that promotes choice, flexibility and independent learning.*

*The value for middle years students of authentic purposes or 'real life' learning which combines learning-rich tasks with opportunities for 'targeted teaching' of specific literacy knowledge, skills and capabilities in response to student needs and readiness.*

*The value of explicitly teaching reading and writing skills and strategies, and of promoting student reflection and metacognitive awareness of the range of reading strategies used with different texts and for different purposes.*

*The value of technology for engaging students' motivation and interest and in providing opportunities for focussing on the development of particular literacies.*

*The importance of a common language for talking about literacy development and unified approach to literacy teaching and learning.*

## SCHOOL H

### School Profile

This independent, coeducational, P-12 school is located in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Although Prep – 12 are located on the same campus, primary and secondary students and staff operate relatively separately. Literacy, and in particular boys and literacy, has been a major focus over a number of years, resulting in funding from AISV to support a project in which the impact of technology on boys' learning and literacy development was investigated.

While learning teams have been a feature in the primary area for three years, the concept of professional learning teams in the 7 and 8 area, where teachers have only recently been restructured into teams covering core subjects, was relatively new. In this structure, 40 minute periods have been replaced by 'learning zones' of 100 minutes' duration. Despite some hesitations about the implications of these changes, there was a general sense of enthusiasm and commitment to change from both the leadership team and teaching staff.

Curriculum development in the school has been influenced by extensive professional development based on Bloom and Gardners' work on Multiple Intelligences. The school also has a phonics program in place in the primary school, which they describe as an Australian version of *Spalding*.

The perception of staff is that there are a number of students requiring additional support and scaffolding of learning moving from Year 6 to Year 7 each year and the school is committed to enhancing continuity for this group in particular, but for all learners, through both curriculum and pastoral meshing, as they make the transition from upper primary to junior secondary schooling.

### School Research Focus

The research at this school aimed to develop effective literacy pedagogy, enhancing the continuum of literacy development in the middle years, across both the primary and secondary sectors of the school. It involved reflecting on ways to improve literacy practice, developing a common language and creating opportunities for regular dialogue between primary and secondary teachers, with a view to reshaping the curriculum and practice to better meet the literacy needs of the students and to ensure that students in the primary school were well prepared to cope with the range of genres that they would come across in their learning in the secondary area. A range of strategies to enhance literacy development in the classroom were trialed. These included activities designed to:

- engage and motivate students
- connect with student identity and community
- model effective literacy practices
- scaffold literacy development

- encourage reflection on learning and on literacy development

### **Student and Staff Involvement in the Research**

Twenty one students in the 5/6 area and 28 students in the year 7 area were involved in the research project, along with a Year 5/6 teacher and a Year 7 teacher, with extensive support from the head of the primary school who took on the role of School Research Coordinator.

### **Strategies and Outcomes**

Changes in the approach to teaching literacy in the Grade 6 classroom have revolved around increased opportunities for cooperative group work, greater choice and flexibility for students in topic and task selection and a focus on metacognition, reflection and self-assessment in learning.

#### **Increased choice and flexibility in task and topic selection**

Key elements in this approach have been the introduction of more choices and options, or 'electives', in Year 6, which also involves exposure to a range of different teachers, depending on the different choices students take up.

#### **Literacy and learning-rich tasks**

The creation of student magazines as an optional task within the media workshops unit was also a key feature where students designed a magazine and incorporated various segments within them representing a variety of genre eg articles, advertisements, poetry. The students were highly engaged in and very proud of their work in this unit. It was felt that the work done in this unit would be a good example to pass on to Year 7 teachers in order to show what students are capable of. There could also be scope for continuing this or another similar project from Term 4 of Year 6 into Term 1 of Year 7 to promote student confidence, familiarity and engagement in the primary to secondary school transition.

#### **Thinking skills and strategies**

The Six Thinking Hats was one of several activities incorporated into student work on the media workshops leading to the production of the magazine.

This was a strategy presented as part of the professional development in the research project but also in a program titled 'The Thinking Classroom' that staff had been involved in. The strategy was also used in units in The Human Body and The Olympic Games.

#### **Learning journals/reflective writing**

Students were encouraged to complete learning journals as a way of developing reflective thinking skills. These were still very raw and highlighted the need for students to have access to support in reflection and self-assessment of learning. A great deal of teacher scaffolding and support was required in order for students to have a language with which to talk about their learning.

Prompts and sentence stems, described as 'sample reflections starters', were experimented with as part of this strategy. This provides a window into students' thinking and points such as 'note what you have done well', 'note what you are feeling about the work you have

done' and 'note what you need to improve' can provoke some quite emotional responses, which the teacher needs to be prepared to deal with and follow up on in appropriate ways.

This strategy has been the stimulus for talking about their learning and has given them a language to talk about learning.

### **Compare and contrast using Venn Diagrams**

This strategy is a cognitive organizer consisting of a visual diagram used to assist students to identify similarities and differences in different texts or categories of texts.

Venn diagrams were used to assist students to think through and document different media texts, particularly magazines. The visual structure assisted students to identify and record different features of texts aimed at different audiences.

### **Data Charts**

These provide a cognitive organizer for researching a topic as well as a framework for structuring the writing of an information report.

Data charts were used to assist students to organise information in a unit on Early Australian Exploration around selected key headings and then write summaries of the information.

### **Dictogloss**

Dictogloss supports students in listening to a text and retelling the text, in pairs or small groups, through reconstruction from key words noted down in the first reading. It builds confidence in students' abilities to blend their own words with the language of the text and to approximate the schematic structure and grammatical features of written language.

Dictogloss was used in this school as part of the Early Australian Exploration unit on the topic of Communication.

### **Overall Outcomes**

The school feels it has gained enormously from involvement in the research which has accelerated the changes they were working towards in the middle years of schooling. The communication between the Year 6 and Year 7 teachers, particularly the English Coordinator, has been effective in building increased understanding of ways the classroom learning cultures of the primary and secondary campuses can be brought into closer alignment for the benefit of staff and students.

Classroom strategies trialed, particularly those focusing on reflection, metacognition and self-assessment of learning, have been found to be effective in developing students' capacities for more independent learning and enhancing literacy development.

The use of the *DART* enabled teachers to address perceived weaknesses in students' listening and speaking capabilities which has led to a stronger focus on the development of oral language skills through structured opportunities for classroom talk and oral presentations.

### **The Future**

The school plans to set in place changes to the way the Year 6 and 7 teachers plan and work together. This will include incorporating specific strategies for continuing the work being done in Year 6 to avoid the 'secondary dip' and to build curriculum continuity and cohesion.

The school also plans to formalise teacher exchanges between the upper primary and junior secondary teachers. In addition, it intends to continue to use the *DART* as an instrument for assessing literacy, along with AIM as it is believed these will work in complementary ways.

### ***Key Learnings***

- *The value of a developmental literacy assessment instrument linked to the mainstream curriculum.*
- *The enhanced literacy outcomes for students of literacy-focussed teaching within an overall learning context that promotes choice, flexibility and independent learning.*
- *The importance of creating structured opportunities for reflection, metacognition and self-assessment of learning within the curriculum, and providing scaffolding and support for students in developing a language to talk about learning and literacy development.*

*The need for ongoing professional development and support for teachers establishing changed teaching and learning cultures and different pedagogic approaches in their classrooms.*

- *The challenge of promoting continuity of literacy education across the primary to secondary transition and of bringing primary and secondary schooling cultures into closer alignment, even where these share a common campus*

## **SCHOOL I**

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### **School Profile**

This large non-government, boys' secondary college situated in the outer Northern Suburbs of Melbourne has a population of 1513 students. Approximately 50% of the students are from LOTE backgrounds and approximately 31% of Year 7 students are considered to have specific literacy needs.

The school has, over the past number of years, placed a strong emphasis on professional development for staff, with ongoing and varied opportunities provided during a regular time each week and an expectation that each staff member will, over the course of the year, undertake a set amount of these offerings. In particular an extended program which focused on 'Boys and Literacy' was offered during 1999.

Structural changes implemented to better meet the needs of the Middle Years students include:

- providing the same teacher for homeroom, Maths, English, Science and Religious Education
- establishment of a Year 7 wing and home room for each Year 7 class
- team teaching and planning

The school has a Literacy Coordinator who is responsible for supporting teachers in the development and implementation of literacy approaches and practices across all KLAs.

### **The School Research Focus**

The research focused on the investigation of ways to better meet the needs of students who have such diverse levels of proficiency in literacy. While the major emphasis was on strategies and approaches in the English KLA, the structure in which teachers taught the same students over a range of KLAs enabled this investigation to extend into additional curriculum areas.

### **Student and Staff Involvement in the Research**

A class of 33 Year 7 students was involved in the research. The two key teachers involved were:

- the Education Support Services Coordinator, who was also the Literacy Coordinator as well as teaching English
- the homeroom teacher of the research group, who also taught these students English RE, Maths and Science and in addition held the position of IT Support Teacher.

However all the Year 7 teachers were involved at a broader level, participating in much of the professional development provided, forming part of the professional learning team which was established, and trialing some of the strategies and approaches.

### **Strategies and Outcomes**

A far greater focus on cooperative group work and student choice and flexibility was the starting point for much of the work trialed in this school. The importance of these practices in more effectively catering for a wide range of abilities had been emphasised in the initial work with the consultant and, as a result, the literacy strategies for trialing were chosen to provide greater opportunity to implement these practices.

In addition, underpinning the literacy work in the classroom was a greater awareness of the need to focus on teaching more specific literacy skills and on providing varying degrees of scaffolding for students in the development of their literacy skills.

### **Literature Circles**

The trialing of Literature Circles in the Year 7 class, as a practice which would take the place of the former study of the 'class text', had significant impact. The increased levels of engagement of the students involved was particularly noted, as was the effort they were putting into the task, the cooperative teamwork which was taking place and the degree of support they were giving one another.

Literature Circles involves grouping students into small, temporary discussion groups comprised of students who have elected to read the same text. Each member of the group prepares to take on specific responsibilities (or roles) in the discussion of agreed sections of the text and each member brings notes to the discussion to support him or her in this role. The circles have regular meetings with discussion roles rotating each session and plan ways to share highlights from their reading with the wider group once the text is finished. Some of the key roles used included:

- Literacy Luminary – responsible for choosing some “special sections from the reading, worthy of being read aloud to the whole group
- Summariser – responsible for preparing a brief summary of the day’s reading
- Illustrator – responsible for developing some sort of visual presentation of one of the scenes from the day’s reading
- Vocabulary Enricher – responsible for choosing a few important, novel or puzzling words from the day’s reading and finding definitions
- Connector – responsible for finding connections between the book and the world beyond
- Travel Tracer – responsible for keeping a record of the movement in the book and where the scene takes place.

Literature Circles requires the purchase of a range of books and therefore a commitment of funds as well as the time to choose the most appropriate books for the students. It was however seen by teachers as a far easier and more rewarding task than *‘trying to choose one text that would suit all students’*. Teachers recognised that it enabled them to *‘take kids into consideration’*.

The strategy was introduced in a staggered fashion with the initial degree of support high, for both the students and the teacher, and decreased gradually over the period of the trial. Following some initial professional development on Literature Circles, the research project consultant for the school then worked with the students in the classroom to introduce the new method for the study of novels, modelling the strategies and processes involved.

A level of commonality was provided by the focus on a particular theme – in this case the theme of fantasy. The use of a unifying theme meant that although each small group of 5-6 students was studying a different novel from the other groups, there were still opportunities for whole class discussions on elements of the novels (e.g. characterization, narrative elements, the role and representation of “good” and “evil”, etc) and there were opportunities to reorganise students into heterogeneous groups for a particular focus.

Within the theme, students were asked to choose from a number of books of varying complexity. They were (in descending order of “difficulty”):

- Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone
- The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe
- Matilda
- Rowan and the Zebak
- Deltora Quest: Forests of Silence
- Star Wars Jedi Apprentice: The Dark Rival



The two simpler novels were also made available on tape.

Each novel was introduced in class, with an examination of the cover, blurb, and opening pages of the book. Colour photocopies of the cover of each book were produced as posters and put on the walls in the classroom. Based on this, students completed a selection sheet listing (in order of preference) three of the novels they would like to read. The teachers then allocated each student to a particular novel based on a combination of the student's preference and the teachers' assessment of which of the books would be most appropriate for the student.

The literature circles process was introduced carefully. Even before the students chose their particular books, they were introduced to, and given opportunities to practice, the different roles. For example, when the "illustrator" role was introduced, the whole class read part of a short story and then each student undertook the activities associated with this role. Each student chose part of the story and drew a visual representation. Working as part of a pair, each student then showed his partner his representation, gave the partner an opportunity to speculate about the representation's meaning and significance, and then explained what the representation meant, which part of the story it represented and why he chose to draw that particular visual. This provided opportunities for modeling, practice and debriefing on the role before students were expected to take it on independently as one part of a group. For example, as some students initially wanted to take a very long time to produce an elaborate picture and some were hampered by their concern about a lack of "drawing skills", the debriefing focused on the need for a quick "sketch" and on the range of visual representations that may be appropriate. The debriefing also focused on some of the skills and language necessary to effectively share and comment on another student's representation.

Once the students were prepared and the novels allocated, the literature circles operated a couple of times each week, with students often completing some of the reading and the responsibilities associated with their role at home. The roles were rotated for each meeting of the circle so students undertook all the roles several times over the course of the novel study. The school purchased a 'botany book' for each student which consisted of a combination of lined and blank pages. The blank pages were to be used for the illustrator role. These books not only assisted students to keep track of the process but also enabled teachers to assess student progress.

It was noted by the teachers involved that, apart from greater engagement in their reading, students became more aware of the reading process and the approach to understanding and critically analysing what they were reading. They were far keener to read the text prior to the class, to ensure they were well prepared to contribute to their group. Although in each group activity they would be given a specific role or task, they generally became confident and keen enough to take on the range of tasks.

The success of the strategy has led to a decision at a school level to introduce Literature Circles for all Year 7 English classes next year. It was recognised by the staff and the administration of the school that this would also necessitate significant changes to the budget allocation for literacy, the assessment format, the report format, and the course of study for next year.

#### **Use of Technology**

The school had recently commenced a Learning Technologies Project, a school based incentive to develop skills and strategies in Learning technologies across all KLAs. Looking at the possibilities for improving literacy, using technology was therefore a natural follow on from this project.

The introduction of some laptops – iBook computers in the classroom rather than in the whole class moving to a computer laboratory was a strong incentive to use the computers as a tool to enhance student learning rather than being seen as a separate curriculum area.

The students were encouraged to use the computers to research and collect information as well as to record and present their work. The literacy skills required to locate sort and read the information, and to write for a variety of reasons and audiences became a discussion point for the teacher and students. The need, for example, to summarise collected information into dot points became crucial when students used Powerpoint presentations to present their work. Drawing out the key information following web searches on a specific topic also provided the stimulus for specific literacy focussed teaching.

Focussing on the literacy skills required to make most effective use of the computers in their learning further highlighted, for both teachers and students, the literacy skills required across all KLAs. It also highlighted to teachers how effective computers are in motivating boys, particularly those who have specific learning difficulties.

Providing opportunities for working in pairs on the computers and enabling student focussed and student directed learning also increased the students' engagement in the activities as well as catering more appropriately for their mixed abilities.

### **Overall Outcomes**

Involvement in the research project has significantly lifted the profile of literacy in the school. Teachers are enthusiastic about using the strategies and approaches that have been trialed this year. The students are more engaged in their learning and have demonstrated increased supportive and cooperative teamwork.

Assessing students using *DART* was considered enormously helpful in identifying specific areas of literacy need, and in planning what is needed to address these needs through a professional development session and through whole school and whole faculty approaches. It was also seen to assist in implementing the CSF II.

The positive impact of the strategies trialed has resulted in substantial changes to the curriculum in general and more specifically to the course of study, the approach to assessment and reporting and to classroom practices in general.

### **Facilitating Factors**

The professional development provided for staff and the ongoing work with the consultant have provided the knowledge, understandings and confidence to make the planned changes to literacy education in the school.

In addition, however, the structures which had already been established in the school, including the allocation of one teacher to a group of students for a significant part of their learning, the team teaching and the new Tutor Group structure, all added to the success of the strategies trialed. These factors combined to provide opportunities to use time more flexibly. While the literature circles process can certainly be used within a typical secondary

“50 minute period”, the opportunity provided by the longer chunks of time that invariably are created when a teacher has the class for a range of subject areas, meant that time could be more effectively arranged to provide for debriefing, or for making sure that each student had his turn in the literature circle, or that the group had appropriately and carefully planned for the next session.

Vital to the success was the role of the Literacy Coordinator. She was able to support teachers in their planning and implementation of new strategies and approaches, she was very much a hands on person, working alongside the teachers in the classroom as they tried new approaches, providing and often developing new resources as they were needed, developing worksheets, providing professional development and leading professional learning teams in discussion and planning. The fact that someone was allocated to the role and given time and budget to carry out the role did, in itself, signal the importance of literacy in the school.

### **Issues, Concerns and Blocking Factors**

Time, as with other schools, was the major issue with teachers. In particular, the desire to use *DART* in the future would need to take into account the time required for the assessment and moderation.

The need for continued professional development was seen as important but care needed to be taken to ensure that the timing and the amount did not create teacher overload.

### **The Future**

As discussed, the school intends to make significant changes to the teaching of literacy in the English KLA in particular, expanding the use of Literature Circles as well as introducing greater use of cooperative group work strategies and learning technologies.

*DART* assessment will be used for all year 7 students and the results will form the basis for future professional development and support.

The increased focus on literacy and the continued allocation of a literacy coordinator in the school should assist the school to continue the momentum it has gained through involvement in the research.

#### ***Key Learnings:***

*The value of a developmental literacy assessment instrument linked to the mainstream curriculum.*

*The need for professional development and support for English and other key learning area teachers in trialing innovative middle years practices, particularly where these involve large-scale curriculum and/or classroom re-organisation.*

*The importance and value of pedagogical practices that provide opportunities for challenge and success for the diverse range of students in the middle years classroom.*

*The importance of the role and professional knowledge of the literacy coordinator in supporting teachers in the implementation of effective literacy teaching and learning.*

*The value of technology as a means of engaging students, promoting cooperative learning and enhancing students' literacy development*

## SCHOOL J

### School Profile

This co-educational college is situated in a relatively remote area in western part of rural Victoria. At present the school has an enrolment of approximately 280 secondary students, however, it is currently in the process of amalgamation with its main neighbouring primary school. The two schools are still occupying separate sites and will not be brought together until 2002. Most of the students come from small towns and farms, though a considerable number travel from the closer major towns because of the school's successful reputation and smaller size. While there are relatively few students with language backgrounds other than English, approximately 10% of students in Years 7 and 8 experience difficulties with literacy. Over 40% of students are recipients of the Education Maintenance Allowance or Austudy.

The College is part of an active cluster which includes the main associate or feeder primary schools. There is close collaboration between the schools in this cluster through regular network meetings, resource sharing and an extensive transition program.

Owing to the size of the school, most teachers take classes at the Year 7 and/or Year 8 level. The school is keen to limit the number of teachers teaching any one class as a way of consolidating teacher/student relationships. In 2000, the school established the position of Middle Years Coordinator.

The College was included in this research project partly on the basis of its involvement in the previous *Successful Interventions Research Project*. In this prior project, the school researched the effectiveness of a particular literacy intervention program for students in the junior secondary years called *Making a Difference*. This program, which had been found to be successful in addressing the needs of students requiring additional assistance with reading, has a component linked to the mainstream classroom context. Having already organised professional development for staff on these strategies, the school was keen to monitor the effectiveness of classroom approaches to literacy and also to research the effectiveness of newly established professional teaching/learning teams sharing classes for English and SOSE in Year 7.

Having also trialed the *DART* in the earlier research project, the school was eager to continue to build on this valuable experience and to participate in the consensus moderation training offered in this subsequent research project.

A literacy rotation program for students in all year levels and involving all staff runs for 30 minutes per week. These short sessions engage students in a variety of activities designed to develop their literacy skills and independent learning strategies. Units covered at Year 7

include thinking games, public speaking, read and retell and spelling games. Year 8 includes general knowledge, six thinking hats and listening activities. In Year 9, students participate in selected Bright Sparks thinking games, analysis of children's literature and values exploration.

### **School Research Focus**

While student engagement in learning in the middle years was a general focus for the school, the research focus for this project involved trialing collaborative planning and teaching in Year 7 English and SOSE classes and working as a professional learning team to integrate literacy strategies into these key learning area classes.

### **Students and Staff Involved in the Research**

Two Year 7 classes were involved in the research, along with the teachers who were taking these classes for English and SOSE.

### **Strategies and Outcomes**

Two professional development sessions were held at the college to which all associate or feeder primary schools were invited to send Years 5 and 6 teachers. The aim of the first day was to build continuity of literacy education through exploring common approaches and strategies for supporting students reading in key learning areas.

The second session involved a discussion of current transition documents and practices, curriculum mapping and some discussion of student writing samples according to the CSF levels.

The following strategies were trialed by teachers in the professional teaching/learning team in English and SOSE classes.

#### **Wordsplash**

This strategy activates and builds on the prior knowledge – of both content and language – that students bring to learning by involving students in using clues to make predictions about unseen text.

This activity was trialed in a SOSE unit on Earthquakes. Words were randomly selected from a newspaper article on the new topic, which was not known to the students. Students used the words to reconstruct the article, which was then compared with the original. The task increased students' engagement and interest in the topic, and they enjoyed comparing versions of the text and discussing similarities and differences.

The task also enabled teachers and students to discuss new language and specialised terminology, such as 'seismology', within a more meaningful context and to value the prior knowledge students' drew on in making connections between words and their meanings.

#### **Four Corner Debate**

This strategy involves students taking up different positions in relation to a central issue or proposition and developing arguments orally in preparation for writing an argumentative text.

This was used in a highly successful unit trialed with Year 7 English classes entitled *A Taste of Shakespeare*. In this unit, which involved engaging students with issues and demystifying medieval forms of English language, the Four Corners Debate was used to develop students' ability to think independently and to justify a point of view, using their own judgement supported by evidence from the text. Students enjoyed the physical movement involved in this activity and the way it builds on structured classroom talk.

### **Read and Retell**

This strategy involves students in listening, reading and writing and develops students' abilities to focus on recalling the sequence of meanings in a text and to approximate in their retelling the schematic structure and grammatical features of written text.

Trialed as part of a SOSE unit, this strategy required students to listen to a narrative (*The Burnt Stick*) and to list significant moments in the text. Students were given optional ways of retelling the story including storyboard, narration, written text and mime/freeze frame. Care was taken that weaker students were not threatened by attempting a response beyond their capabilities.

*'The students produced some terrific responses. The variety of interpretations was interesting and led to a great discussion of why some retellings varied and why some styles of response were easier or more difficult'.*

### **Three Level Guide**

This strategy aims to support students in reading for meaning by engaging students in thinking through statements about text at three levels: literal (or 'right there'), interpretive (or 'think and search') and applied (or 'on my own').

Students read selected short stories from their text (*Top Drawer*) and responded by completing the three level guides prepared by the professional teaching/learning team.

*Students appreciated the different levels and understood that the first level answers would be in the text, while the third wouldn't. We had great discussion on the questions in the third level and students were able to draw on their own experience. Students found it more interesting than basic comprehension (more challenging).*

### **Data Chart**

This strategy provides a cognitive organizer for researching a topic as well as a framework for structuring the writing of an information report.

A research project as part of a SOSE unit used the data chart, which suited the research nature of the activity and encouraged students to consult and document a range of sources of information.

*Students knew specifically what information had to be found and where it was to go on the chart – this also helped them organise their ideas into paragraphs. When we were doing a later activity, which also required research, some students commented that they would like to use a data chart because it made it easier for them.*

### **THRASS**

This program was used to develop the spelling skills of students by promoting phonemic awareness based on a chart of all 44 phonemes and many of the graphemes. While a particular phoneme is concentrated on each week (eg sh, ch, ti), students use their dictionaries to select the particular twenty words with that phoneme that they would most like to learn, thus creating an element of individual choice. Students do a variety of activities with these selected words and then test each other.

The effectiveness of this is still being evaluated. The program is integrated into the English curriculum and has been taken up enthusiastically by both students and staff.

### **Overall Outcomes**

A major outcome for this school was the professional satisfaction and success of working as a professional teaching/learning team, which involved collaborative planning and teaching across Year 7 English and SOSE classes. The increased access to students not only fostered better relationships but created a more effective environment for learning in general and for supporting students' literacy development in particular. It was noted that 'teams' do not happen automatically and that leadership and co-ordination are vital elements as are shared values among the staff.

### **Facilitating Factors**

The consensus moderation process for *DART* ensured that teachers had a picture fairly early in the year of the range of student abilities and of those students requiring additional support both within and outside of mainstream classes. This process also developed the confidence of the teaching/learning team in making consistent judgements about student performance in a variety of aspects of literacy. This process was felt to be one that would be of benefit for teachers of all year levels.

Having the same group of students for more than one key learning area allowed timetable flexibility to pursue curriculum tasks or projects, thus increasing student motivation and engagement, and opportunities for more cross-curricular projects thematically linking different key learning areas.

### **Barriers, Issues and Concerns**

While *THRASS* is still being evaluated, staff at this school noted the number of students in Year 7 with a need for some explicit teaching and/or revision of the structure of the English language and spelling strategies.

### **The Future**

As it is currently in the process of becoming a P-12 college, it is likely that the school will continue to work closely as part of the local cluster, particularly with its main primary school. The school is interested in monitoring the literacy outcomes of continued work with *THRASS* as the major strategy for promoting phonemic awareness within an overall curriculum context of engaging students in learning. This program was selected, after close examination of similar alternatives, as lending itself to integration into classroom activities.

The professional teaching/learning team has elected to continue to build on the relationship and learning gains for students by following students through to Year 8 in 2001, with additional teams being established for the incoming Year 7s.

### **Key Learnings**

*The value of a developmental literacy assessment instrument linked to the mainstream curriculum*

*the value for middle years curriculum and pedagogy of establishing professional teaching/learning teams who take students for more than one key learning area*

*the effectiveness of selected literacy teaching and learning strategies in English and SOSE key learning areas*

*the importance of active commitment and support of school leadership teams and effective co-ordination of literacy education.*

*the need for middle years teachers in all key learning areas to have professional development and guidelines on different approaches and resources for developing phonemic awareness and spelling strategies that can be integrated into teaching and learning in all key learning areas*

## **SCHOOL K**

### **School Profile**

This government secondary school, situated in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne has an enrolment of 950 students. Approximately one quarter of the student cohort are from single parent families. Almost half the students have a language background other than English, with half this number again speaking a language other than English at home. Approximately one third of students are on Education Maintenance/Youth allowances.

Also involved in the MYRAD project, the school has a history of fostering good relationships with associate or feeder primary schools, and attend regular network meetings with these schools, focusing on transition issues and processes. Staff participation in professional development courses is encouraged. In 1999, a number of teachers participated in the Deakin University module, *Middle Years of Schooling* along with colleagues from associate primary schools. All Years 7 and 8 classes have a teacher teaching at least two subjects and are situated in home rooms with a separate courtyard.

The school has been promoting literacy across the curriculum through its Key Learning Area Leaders meetings. It also uses Corrective Reading as part of its Reading Extension and Intervention program. A reading support group of parents exists and there are a number of parent volunteers in the school.

### **The School Research Focus**

The school has pursued two main initiatives - a teacher exchange with a neighbouring primary school for Term 2, 2000; and trialing Literature Circles in two year 7 classes with a view to full-scale introduction in Year 7 in 2001. Within the context of the teacher exchange, the Year 5 teacher moving into Year 7 was interested to trial strategies for enhancing student engagement in learning, through building into key learning area classes more opportunities



for oral language development and structured talk as preparation for reading and writing tasks.

### **Students and Staff involved in the Research**

The research involved the Middle Years Coordinator, the English Key Learning Area Manager and three Year 7 teachers, all of whom take a Year 7 class for English as well as other key learning areas.

### **Strategies and Outcomes**

#### **Teacher Exchange**

The teacher exchange was highly successful and facilitated discussion in both schools on a wide range of related issues including similarities and differences in school cultures, in staff and student expectations, in the role and status of literacy, in responsibilities for literacy education, in education of middle years students, and many more.

This exchange program also prompted discussion about the different ways of teaching reading in the junior school compared to the usual secondary processes. The teachers were keen to find ways of teaching more than one text at a time.

This initiative was featured in a workshop presentation at the Middle Years of Schooling Conference in August, 2000, where it generated much interest and discussion, and inspired other schools to investigate its feasibility in their own contexts.

#### **Literature Circles**

This strategy involves grouping students into small, temporary discussion groups comprised of students who have elected to read the same text. Each member of the group prepares to take on specific responsibilities (or roles) in the discussion of agreed sections of the text and each member brings notes to the discussion to support him or her in this role. The circles have regular meetings with discussion roles rotating each session and plan ways to share highlights from their reading with the wider group once the text is finished.

After attending the project professional development days at the University, two of the Year 7 English teachers were keen to trial literature or reading circles, as an alternative to the whole class novel. The school is using a series of resources based on a lexile framework for identifying students' capabilities as readers and drawing on this data in the establishment of literature circles which enable all students to be matched with texts appropriate to their needs and interests.

The school saw benefit in a number of aspects relating to literature circles. Cooperative learning techniques are used, students are taught how to learn rather than what to learn and intrinsic motivation is encouraged, as distinct from teacher directed learning. Literature Circles also enable students to use different learning styles. These were all considered by the school to be important in improving student engagement, and they sat well with the general focus of the professional development conducted over the year.

#### **Overall Outcomes**

The school has been enthusiastic, despite initial hesitation, about the experience of using *DART* as an assessment instrument and will continue to use it in the MYRAD project.

During the *DART* training provided to case study schools, teachers from the secondary and the primary school (including the teachers from the two schools to be involved in the teacher exchange) worked together as a moderating team and were particularly positive about the benefits of opportunities for professional analysis and discussion of student work samples as a basis for consistency of judgement. The school is interested in using *DART* as a model for developing similar school-based assessment instruments linked to the curriculum in year levels beyond Year 7, and particularly for Year 8.

Professional development for the school staff was highly successful and motivated teachers to continue to explore strategies for focussing on students' literacy development in key learning areas other than English.

### The Future

The school intends to build on the work undertaken this year by pursuing a focus on literacy through the MYRAD project in 2001. This will also involve continuing with the *DART* assessments.

Literature circles will be launched in all Year 7 English classes and their effectiveness monitored using a number of strategies, including the lexile framework..

Literacy across the key learning areas will continue to be the focus of staff professional development.

#### **Key Learnings**

*The importance of strategies such as teacher shadowing and teacher exchange for expanding the professional knowledge, understanding and experience of primary and secondary teachers, and the need for this to be encouraged and rewarded through systemic support.*

*The need for professional development and support for English and other key learning area teachers in trialing innovative middle years practices, particularly where these involve large-scale curriculum and/or classroom re-organisation.*

*The value of middle years teachers working in inter and intra disciplinary groupings as professional teaching/learning teams*

*The value of combining effective approaches to reading with strategies for monitoring and assessing student progress and development.*

## SCHOOL L

### School Profile

This all girls, non government secondary school is located in the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne. It has approximately 620 students, 75% of whom come from a range of 40

different language backgrounds other than English. Approximately 25% of students in Years 7 and 8 are considered to have low levels of literacy.

Literacy is a school priority. This is reflected in their literacy policy that promotes “literacy for all” through a whole school approach. Teachers are supported in their efforts to achieve this goal as follows:

- The college organises professional development courses for staff in the area of Literacy teaching and actively encourages as many teachers as possible to participate by offering time release and providing the courses on site whenever possible
- Teachers are given time release to attend literacy professional development activities offered by organisations outside of the school
- Support is available in the classroom from specialist teachers to enable subject teachers to implement strategies for developing students’ literacy in their subject areas
- Specialist teachers are available to assist with course and lesson planning and materials development to incorporate literacy strategies into curriculum materials
- Resource materials are available to provide teachers with background information on Literacy teaching as well as specific strategies to assist in developing student skills in subject areas across the curriculum

Support is offered to students via a variety of avenues:

- Collaboration between specialist staff and subject teachers for the development of literacy and learning including support in the classroom.
- Parallel classes are offered for second language literacy students
- Elective classes and tutorial groups are offered for mainstream and second language literacy students
- Newly arrived second language students with special literacy needs receive intensive one to one assistance and support in subject classes.
- Students who are eligible for ESL in VCE are given support in years 11 and 12 by specialist teachers using second language literacy development strategies

The school has a Literacy Coordinator and a strong ESL program combining small group work and support teaching in English, SOSE and Science.

The school has a strong history of participation in professional development programs such as *ESL in the Mainstream Teacher Development Course* and *Writing in the Subject Areas (WISA)*. In 1999 four teachers, including the Literacy Coordinator, participated in a project called *Writing and Reading in Teaching English (WRITE)*. This project involved using genre theory and systemic functional grammar in Year 7 Religious Education and SOSE classes.

### **School Research Focus**

The research aimed to

- build on and refine the work already being undertaken in the classroom to implement the Genre approach to writing across the curriculum
- to provide support for teachers to implement strategies from ESL in the Mainstream, *WISA* and *WRITE* professional development programs
- to involve teachers in all KLAs at one Year level (Year 7) in a cross-curricular project

- to develop a common approach to teaching writing across the curriculum through teacher collaboration
- to teach Functional Grammar to students in Year 7 English to support the teaching of genres in all KLAs

### Students and Staff Involved in the Research

While one Year 7 class operated as the research group and participated in the *DART* assessment, all Year 7 classes were involved. The Curriculum Coordinator, who had been the Literacy Coordinator in past years, was the School Research Coordinator.

A Literacy Working Party was established to lead the project. It comprises the English teachers of the five Year 7 classes and the Special Education Co-ordinator. These teachers provided support to KLA teachers as necessary to teach writing in the subject areas.

### Strategies and Outcomes

The ten year history of involvement in literacy professional development provided a strong foundation for the work undertaken as part of this research project. Through a curriculum audit of literacy practices across key learning areas, teachers identified the written genres required in each subject area. Year 7 teachers used this curriculum mapping as a basis for collaboration and planning to introduce focussed teaching on text structure and grammar in their key learning areas.

Particular key learning areas focused on teaching selected genres, for example, the report and explanation genre in Science and the artistic response genre in Art. This involved scaffolding the writing of these different text types through explicit teaching of schematic and linguistic structures, modelling and joint construction of text.

As part of this process, teachers were encouraged to think more carefully about the writing tasks they set for students, to structure writing tasks more carefully and to be more explicit about assessment criteria.

KLA teachers were paired with the English teachers according to the homeroom group that they teach. The English teacher provided support to the KLA teacher as necessary to work through the Genre Teaching Plan and advise on the explicit teaching of the structural and grammatical features of the text.

The research has led to the consolidation of teacher knowledge about language and to the development of a model that can be applied in a range of curriculum learning areas including English, Personal Development, Art, Science, SOSE and Religious Education.

In relation to student outcomes, one teacher made the following observation on the quality of student writing.

*'By comparison with written reports in previous years it's the best I've ever seen'.*

Another teacher emphasised the importance and effectiveness of transferring knowledge about language and explicit literacy teaching into areas other than English.

*'They were able to carry learning into other areas. It never occurred to me to apply these strategies in Geography, but they did it and it worked quickly and it worked well'.*

### Overall Outcomes

There were two main dimensions to the outcomes of the research at this school. The first related to the consolidation of knowledge about language and the development of a model for explicit teaching of text structure and grammar in Year 7 and the second related to the positive effects on the school as a whole which led to similar work at other year levels, including VCE.

The project was also very significant in acting as a catalyst for creating a culture amongst different faculties of shared professional dialogue and curriculum planning. One faculty with a history of working individually, began to operate much more as a professional learning team, planning an entire semester unit that incorporated the model developed as part of the project.

It is evident that teachers involved in this research and previous literacy initiatives have developed a shared language for talking about text, language and literacy. An example of this was a discussion amongst the Science KLA teachers about when and how best to teach passive voice. Teachers commented that the project increased their overall awareness of linguistic structures and features and led to more professional dialogue about these issues at their meetings. It promoted more teacher collaboration and sharing of resources within and across Key Learning Areas.

A rich selection of materials and resources across all KLAs has been generated by staff over the life of the project. Ways to share these resources with others are being considered.

#### **Facilitating Factors**

- The history of school commitment to literacy provision under the leadership of the Literacy Coordinator and the Curriculum Coordinator
- The school based professional development provided by the consultant
- the involvement in a previous project with similar focus and key personnel
- the development of professional learning teams who met under the leadership of the school research coordinator

#### **Barriers, Issues and Concerns**

- It is important to adjust expectations according to the range and variety of text types being covered in any key learning area. For example, English KLA teachers were implementing the model with a variety of genres throughout the year which meant that they were not able to concentrate on one text type with the same depth and repetition as others who were able to concentrate on a narrower range.
- Some teachers felt that the model did not necessarily have the same impact where students were involved in more creative writing with a more affective dimension.
- The English teachers had the task of teaching functional grammar to provide the linguistic background for the teachers in other subject areas to build on. Some of these teachers felt that they lacked sufficient knowledge about functional grammar to carry out the task to their satisfaction.
- It was felt that there were very few resources to draw on and the task of good materials development needed much more time than was available
- The validity of using *DART* as a test instrument for establishing literacy levels in the project as undertaken at this school is questionable as the instrument did not take into

consideration the Genre specific nature of literacy which was the central focus of this project.

***Key Learnings***

*The value of a shared model for teaching text structure and aspects of grammar as a means of scaffolding student writing in key learning areas*

*The role of teacher and student knowledge about language, including a language to talk about text and language, in enhancing the literacy outcomes of middle years learners.*

*The need for facilitating student and teacher transfer of knowledge about language and literacy from one learning context to another.*

*The importance of the role, status and professional knowledge of the literacy coordinator in supporting teachers in the implementation of effective literacy teaching and learning*

*The value of middle years teachers working in inter and intra disciplinary groupings as professional teaching/learning teams*

*The importance of focused professional development in the area of literacy professional development*