

Submission No. 284



The Teaching of Literacy in Sydney Catholic Schools -

A submission to the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy.

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Summary

The Catholic Education Office (CEO), Sydney and its system of 148 schools has had a long term commitment to literacy teaching and learning.

This submission to the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy has drawn upon available literacy performance data, system reviews and reports and position statements to describe key features of teaching literacy and their effectiveness.

Literacy teaching in Sydney Catholic schools is effective and there is significant evidence to support this.

The teaching of literacy is a complex undertaking and the highly multicultural and diverse nature of Sydney Catholic schools adds to this complexity. The diversity of students in Sydney Catholic schools has required a diversity of approaches and programs to adequately address the literacy learning needs of the students. This requires diversity in teaching approaches to best support student learning.

A balanced, whole school approach to literacy teaching in both primary and secondary schools is a key feature of literacy teaching and learning in Sydney Catholic schools. Within classrooms a focused, explicit approach is adopted. Tracking and monitoring of student development has been essential. Students requiring additional assistance having specific programs designed to meet their needs. These programs include regular assessment and closer tracking and monitoring of development and progress.

Understandings of literacy are changing. The emergence of non-linear, non-print based texts demands new approaches to literacy teaching and learning. These changes present schools and school systems with challenges and opportunities. These challenges and opportunities include:

- Addressing the literacy needs of a culturally, linguistically and educationally diverse group of students;
- Meeting the emerging new literacy demands associated with the development of Information and Communication Technologies and non-linear texts;
- Ensuring the literacy needs of all students are met within a comprehensive classroom;
- Supporting beginning teachers in the development of sound literacy teaching practices;
- Developing National Benchmarks that reflect the higher literacy requirements for student literacy proficiency;
- Developing more sophisticated understandings and skills in teachers to assist them in teaching to meet the literacy needs of students as identified through more finely tuned identification processes.

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The Teaching of Literacy in Sydney Catholic Schools -

A submission to the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy.

This submission to the National Inquiry into the teaching of literacy explains the Catholic Education Office (CEO) Sydney's position on the teaching of literacy, particularly reading, within the context of its primary and secondary schools.

The Catholic systemic schools of the Archdiocese of Sydney have had a strong history of focusing on the teaching of literacy to ensure the achievement of high standards for all students. Literacy has been and continues to be a priority for the systemic schools and the CEO, Sydney.

The context of CEO, Sydney system of schools

This submission is a response from the context of the system of Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of Sydney. Over 63, 000 students are educated in Catholic systemic schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. It is a comprehensive school system of 148 schools. It is a highly multicultural system with its students including 325 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, 52% of students from non-English speaking backgrounds, as well as students from English speaking backgrounds. The schools represent the socio-economic status spectrum. Students represent the full range of educational abilities, with 4.2% being identified as students with disabilities, which is above the national average.

Understanding literacy

CEO, Sydney and its system of schools have adopted and promoted an understanding that literacy includes the ability to read and use written information and visual information and to communicate in a variety of contexts. It involves the integration of speaking, listening, viewing and critical thinking with reading and writing, and includes cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, reader or writer to recognise and use language appropriate to different situations (CEO, Sydney, 2002a – Appendix 1). This understanding has informed and shaped literacy practices within CEO, Sydney schools.

CEO, Sydney also recognises that the notion of literacy has evolved, and continues to do so. Understandings and experiences of literacy are changing. As far back as 1978, Br. Kelvin Canavan, Executive Director of Schools, CEO Sydney, recognised that education needed to be attuned to media that used the three symbols of words, images and sounds. This “expanded concept of literacy” resulted in schools needing to teach students to be literate in all three, developing in students “the skills, attitudes and knowledge necessary for them to become critical, discriminating and appreciative consumers of the modern media of social communication” (Canavan, 1978). Traditional

understandings, whilst remaining important, are limiting. It is acknowledged that for students to be literate they require skills in reading and writing, as well as skills in talking, listening, viewing, and in creating and reading non-linear texts. There are emerging literacies that are being shaped by social influences and technological advancements (CEO, Sydney, 2002b – Appendix 2). Developments in understandings of literacy and its teaching within school continue to inform practices within Sydney Catholic schools.

Influences on policy and practice

The priority given to literacy teaching and learning within Sydney Catholic systemic schools is reflected in the strategic management plans of the system and each school. This is in keeping with the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First century*.

Literacy position papers have been developed for both primary and secondary sectors of the system. These papers inform and guide literacy practices across Sydney Catholic schools, ensuring a systemic approach with flexibility for schools to address the literacy needs of their students.

Approaches to literacy in Sydney Catholic schools have been informed by a range of contemporary theories and research. These include Luke and Freebody's *Four Resources Model* (1999), Crévola and Hill's *Model of Whole-School Improvement* (1998) and Clay's *Broad-Band Theory of Literacy Learning* (2001).

Practice has also been guided by syllabus developments in New South Wales and the understandings of literacy expressed in those documents, particularly the specific strategies and skills for reading, writing, spelling and the use of grammar in spoken and written language across the Stages.

The approach to literacy in Sydney Catholic schools values the acquisition and use of literacy skills and understandings within a learning context, such as a Key Learning Area, and an understanding of the literacy strategies needed for different curriculum areas.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Many students in Sydney Catholic schools commence school with very little if any spoken English. This situation has resulted in CEO, Sydney being significant in developing programs that support students in English language acquisition and in developing their literacy skills to be able to successfully access the curriculum. The explicit practices used in classrooms to address the needs of ESL students have been informed by the research work of Gibbons (2002, 1991) and Cummins (2000), with the *ESL Scales* providing a framework for diagnosing and supporting English language acquisition.

CEO, Sydney regards ESL – New Arrivals students as a priority. Primary schools have access to Primary New Arrivals Itinerant Services and Secondary new arrivals are provided with intensive English language support through the Catholic Intensive English Centre. The on-going support from ESL and classroom teachers ensures that appropriate learning activities are planned for and implemented, with progress and development being monitored, after the period of intensive support. Most recently, the new arrivals students enrolling have been refugees from the Sudan. These students bring with them a range of issues that add to the complexity of developing literacy skills in mainstream classrooms.

Effectiveness of literacy teaching in CEO, Sydney schools

There is strong evidence that the systemic approach and focus on literacy is perceived by Principals and senior staff of the Catholic Education Office as having an impact on improved literacy standards (CEO Bulletin 77). This perception is supported by strong quantitative evidence that the literacy initiatives of the Catholic Education Office Sydney and Sydney Catholic schools have been effective. There has been an increase in the literacy standards of Year 3 and Year 5 students as measured on the NSW Basic Skills Test during the period 1998 to 2004 (See Table 1 and Table 2).

**Table 1 Trend Data: NSW Basic Skills Tests – 1998–2004
Sydney Catholic Parish Primary Schools**

LITERACY	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Targets
								2005
Year 3: Bands 3, 4, 5	74%	82%	83%	83%	85%	87%	89%	87%
Year 5: Bands 4, 5, 6	84%	86%	86%	88%	93%	92%	90%	93%

(CEO Bulletin 78).

Table 1 indicates an overall increase in the percentage of students scoring in the top three performance bands in Year 3 and Year 5. The 2005 system targets were established in 2000 and confirmed in late 2003.

Table 2 National Reading Benchmark: Year 3

	Students	% Achieving Benchmark
2003	5038	97.3
2004	5090	97.2

Table 2 indicates that over 97% of Year 3 students in Sydney Catholic Parish Primary schools achieved the National Reading Benchmark in 2003 and 2004. Programs of targeted support and resourcing for students not reaching the benchmarks, as well as programs for students identified as requiring additional assistance in the early years of schooling are in place.

Recent reviews of Reading Recovery (Walsh, 2002) and ESL programs (system review of ESL programs, 2000; External Review Panel, 2004) have indicated the effectiveness of these programs for students in Sydney Catholic Schools.

Key features that have contributed to the effectiveness

There are several key features that can be identified as having contributed to the effectiveness of literacy over the last decade in Sydney Catholic schools. These include:

- A targeted and system-wide response to addressing literacy teaching and learning in Sydney Catholic schools;
- A strong culture of review and development that has supported schools in focusing on the learning gains for all students, particularly those identified as being most at-risk;
- Recognition and understanding of the cultural, linguistic and educational diversity of the students within a school;
- The development of whole-school literacy plans that focus on the cultural and linguistic diversity of students, their literacy skills and understandings and that draws upon the best available knowledge about how children learn and acquire literacy;
- A balanced, structured, cross-curricular approach to teaching literacy;
- Explicit focused teaching of reading and writing particularly in the primary years;
- The development of strong links between the home and school, particularly in the early years;
- The collection of appropriate and meaningful data which is used to track and monitor students' literacy learning;
- The analysis of assessment data to identify literacy needs of students and to focus on literacy learning;
- Targeted use of financial and advisory services to schools in greatest need to improve literacy teaching and learning;
- Priority being given to teacher professional development.

Teaching literacy in the primary years

Explicit, focused teaching that is carefully and appropriately supported and scaffolded by the teacher has become a key feature of the daily literacy block in Sydney Catholic primary schools. Schools have been innovative and creative in their use of available personnel and financial resources to maximise the effectiveness of the literacy block. Regular focused assessment, the monitoring of student progress and the tracking of student development are essential components of sound planning and teaching for literacy. The NSW *K – 6 English Syllabus* describes the learning outcomes and performance standards required for students in the primary school. Reading, viewing, writing, talking and listening are all seen to be inter-related and essential to the development of literacy. Teaching them in isolation from each other can lead to fragmented or segmented literacy learning which is decontextualised.

Teaching reading in the early years

Teaching reading in the early years of primary school is a highly complex undertaking. Kindergarten students bring with them a range of prior-to-school understandings, abilities and experiences of literacy as well as a range of cultural, linguistic and educational diversity. These, when combined, make classrooms highly complex places, with the demands of teaching requiring a range of complex knowledge, understandings and skills about literacy learning and literacy teaching.

Within these classroom environments students are taught to integrate semantic, graphological, phonological (which is inclusive of phonics), and grammatical information to make meaning of texts. Phonic skills, phonemic awareness and word recognition strategies are taught within a context. Different levels of literal, inferential and critical comprehension are embedded within the tasks. These aspects of reading are taught within the understanding of the Luke and Freebody's *Four Resources Model* (1999) where students develop capabilities in being a code breaker, a text participant, a text user and text analyst. These four aspects are not hierarchical or linear. The extent of emphasis for each depends on the needs and skills of the student.

A range of strategies are used to teach reading within this understanding. These strategies include the use of modelled, shared, guided, reciprocal and independent reading. Each of these strategies is used to support the development of reading. Teachers draw upon their repertoire of strategies to best address the identified needs of the students in an explicit, focused approach to teaching. This repertoire of strategies has been developed through system wide professional development programs focused on reading, as well as school and individual professional development undertaken to meet the needs of students with a school community. Assessment of learning, the tracking of student development against the learning continuum and monitoring of progress are essential. More regular assessment and closer tracking and monitoring are used in supporting learning of students identified as being at-risk.

Early identification and intervention

Early identification of literacy difficulties and effective interventions, particularly in reading, are recognised as key factors in successful literacy learning. Sydney Catholic schools have a strong focus on early identification and intervention. The majority of schools use *The Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (2nd Edition) (Clay, 2002) to inform their teaching in the early years and to identify students in need of early intervention. More than 90% of Sydney Catholic schools have chosen to implement Reading Recovery as their preferred early literacy intervention method. This program has been very successful for the majority of students. Annual data collected at the system level demonstrates that over the past fourteen years there has been a steady increase in the percentage of students who have successfully completed Reading Recovery. The trend data indicates that between 85% and 90% of Reading Recovery students reach the average band of literacy achievement for their class and return able to more fully participate in the class literacy program. Sydney Catholic schools see Reading Recovery as an effective intervention, but also acknowledge that it is only one

intervention for a particular group of at-risk students. Reading Recovery is not intended or used for students with special needs.

Continued literacy development requires that the intervention programs be supported by classroom programs throughout the day that continue to reinforce, support and develop literacy in the students. These programs are best planned collaboratively by those teachers with responsibility for teaching literacy. Assessment and student performance data are analysed, interpreted and used to identify student needs to develop programs that utilise the most appropriate and effective strategies to assist the students in being meaning makers of the texts with which they engage. Following the conclusion of the Reading Recovery intervention students are supported in their literacy learning through comprehensive programs and sound teaching to ensure progression continues in all aspects of literacy learning. CEO, Sydney tracks students who have been on Reading Recovery to ensure development and progress.

Assessment

Sydney Catholic schools have the responsibility of ensuring a range of relevant assessment instruments and approaches are used to support student progress in literacy. Systematic assessment of students' literacy at the critical points of schooling is significant. These key points include the transition points of starting school and starting secondary school, as well as closer monitoring of students in the first two years of primary school. Teachers have been trained to monitor and assess the need of individual students at the point of need and to follow procedures for referring students with special needs to specialists.

The range of assessment instruments and materials includes the use of the Observation Survey and Running Records. Standardised tests such as TORCH, Neale Analysis and BURT word recognition are frequently used by schools. Other useful assessment materials used by primary schools include *Starting with Assessment* kit (DETYA, 2000), *Classroom Assessment Resource Stage 2* (AGQTP, 2002) and *Classroom Assessment Resource Stage 3* (AGQTP, 2002). The *ESL Scales* (Curriculum Corporation, 1994) are used in the assessment of ESL learners. Sydney Catholic schools also participate in state-wide cohort testing of literacy through the NSW Basic Skills Test and the Primary Writing Assessment in Year 3 and Year 5, as well as English Language and Literacy Assessment in the first year of secondary school (Year 7).

The use of targets based on whole cohort literacy testing for Year 3 and Year 5 is used across Sydney Catholic schools. Archdiocesan, regional and school targets are set each year for Year 3 and Year 5 cohorts. The targets are used to evaluate and monitor the performance of schools, regions and the system in literacy learning. This has allowed for the identification of highly effective literacy practices to address the literacy needs of specific groups of students. It has also allowed for the identification of areas and schools requiring specific attention and the targeting of resources and personnel to address specific literacy needs to ensure high literacy levels for all students. Teachers

and leaders in schools have developed their skills in analysing and interpreting available data from a range of sources. The results are used by teachers to create a profile of the school and of students. Programs are designed and teaching practice modified to address the needs of students across the learning spectrum to ensure success for all in literacy learning.

Teaching literacy in the secondary years

The development of literacy is on-going and doesn't end at the completion of the early years of primary. The literacy demands of students as they progress through their schooling become increasingly more sophisticated and complex. Within Sydney Catholic secondary schools there has been a significant focus on the development of literacy across the curriculum. This has been achieved through a focus on types of texts encountered and developed in each Key Learning Area as described in the relevant NSW syllabus documents. This requires all teachers in the secondary school to be teachers of reading, viewing, writing, talking and listening within the context of their Key Learning Area and subject. Luke and Freebody's *Four Resources Model* (1999) is used as a useful framework to assist teachers in teaching students how to read and construct texts.

Language acquisition and Literacy for ESL learners

CEO, Sydney has had long term commitment to supporting the language and literacy needs of ESL learners with a significant number of its teachers having been trained in ESL methodology. Effective programs for ESL learners are in place in Sydney Catholic schools to support the English language acquisition and literacy needs of English as Second Language learners. These programs recognise the importance of developing strong oral language in the first phase of the ESL learner. The continued development of English language is required to support ESL learners in developing appropriate academic language so that they can engage with the demands of the curriculum. Teachers understand that ESL learners are developing English language proficiency, as well as learning in the medium of English. Teachers program appropriate learning tasks to support student development.

The Basic Skills Test results of Non-English Speaking Background students indicate the success of the programs in place across Sydney Catholic schools. These students achieve results that are on a par with the English Speaking Background students within the cohort. This is in large part due to the support within CEO Sydney for programs that address the needs of the ESL learner. The quality of these programs was acknowledged in the recent external review of the system (External Review Panel, 2004).

Literacy and Students with Disability (SWD)

Within Sydney Catholic schools 4.2% of the student population has been identified as having a disability. Some of these disabilities are recognised as leading to educational needs in literacy and the requirement of additional support and intervention.

This support and intervention is developed at the school level through learning support teams that include the classroom teacher, special education teacher and teacher's aide (where available) working collaboratively to develop and implement Individual Education Plans (IEP) that address the literacy needs of students with disabilities. System personnel are available to offer support and advice. The parents/caregivers are included in the development and implementation of the IEP. Assessment is designed to assess the student's development more closely and more regularly, allowing for closer tracking and monitoring and the on-going development of a program that ensures that the child is developing literacy skills.

Teacher development

A strong feature of the effectiveness of literacy teaching and learning in Sydney Catholic schools has been the sustained focus on the professional development of teachers in literacy. This development has seen a variety of models of professional learning being adopted. System-wide professional development connected with regionally and school-based professional development has strengthened a consistent understanding and approach to literacy teaching and learning across Sydney Catholic schools. These system-based professional development provisions are further supported through CEO Sydney sponsorship of post-graduate certificate courses offered in TESOL and Literacy through Australian Catholic University. These courses have been developed through collaboration with CEO, Sydney and Australian Catholic University.

A focus on whole school professional development has been a part of the focus on a whole school approach to literacy. This whole school approach has been supported further through the development of key teachers within the school to strengthen both the breadth and depth of understandings and skills in teaching literacy. These key teachers include Reading Recovery teachers, literacy coordinators as well as teachers in leadership positions who become literacy leaders as well as change agents in their schools. The professional development has focused on system-wide professional development as well as school based professional development.

Over the past decade both primary and secondary teachers have developed greater understandings of the developmental nature of literacy, the place of literacy across the curriculum, literacy learning and the teaching of literacy. There is a greater recognition of the need to teach literacy skills within a context. In Sydney Catholic schools teachers have developed more complex pedagogical understandings and skills to teach literacy in a contextualised way, meeting the diverse needs of students with demonstrated effectiveness.

Multiliteracies

The area of multiliteracies is one that poses a challenge for teachers of literacy. The concept of multiliteracies is seen as being two-fold. Firstly, it refers to cultural and linguistic diversity of its school communities that it serves. Secondly, it refers to the different literacy requirements of non-linear, multimedia texts.

Cultural and linguistic diversity

The cultural and linguistic diversity of students, the community and of teachers is emerging as an issue. Whilst effective programs have been developed to address the needs of the ESL learner, there is greater awareness that diversity exists amongst ESL learners. Factors such as literacy levels in a student's first language, a student's prior-to-school experiences, the stress and trauma experienced by a refugee student contribute to the diversity that exists. Cultural and socio-economic factors have a significant influence on the nature of the learner.

There is an increase in awareness of the need to address cultural and linguistic diversity within those students who speak non-Standard Australian English.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the emergence of non-linear texts

The literacy demands of today are much greater and more sophisticated than those of a decade ago. Literacy today requires students to not only have to deal with traditional literacy and print-based linear texts but also to deal with forms of non-linear texts that have emerged as a result of the use of ICT. These non-linear electronic and digital texts require sophisticated viewing and visual literacy skills and understandings that are essential for the students of today.

Looking forward: challenges and opportunities

Teachers are faced with a challenge of ensuring that all students have high levels of literacy that allow them to participate fully and actively as citizens. The emerging multiliteracies present teachers and systems with challenges and with opportunities. These do not displace the need for traditional literacy but add to what is already a complex undertaking.

Our students need literacy understandings and skills that are founded on traditional linear print-based text but that go beyond these understandings and skills to include literacy understandings and skills to engage with non-linear, non-print based texts. Such understandings and skills will serve our students well in their learning and will serve them well in taking their place as adults in the world. A range of approaches and programs needs to be used to support the learning needs of a linguistic, cultural and educational diverse cohort of students.

Whilst identification and intervention programs are in place that meet the educational needs of most students there are some students for whom the educational provision is less than satisfactory. There are students who are border line in being eligible to access additional support through specific intervention programs. Meeting the needs of such students in a comprehensive classroom can be difficult for a teacher. The difficulty lies in ready access to effective approaches that are reasonable and practical to implement within a classroom context within given teacher-student ratios.

Beginning teachers are important to ensuring that teaching is a strong and vibrant profession. Teacher education can provide student-teachers with foundations for understanding literacy, literacy acquisition in children and effective pedagogies to meet the range of student needs that can be encountered in the classroom. Teachers commencing their career require specific support and opportunities for professional learning, in their first years, that equip them to become competent and effective teachers.

Students require higher and more sophisticated literacy levels to effectively engage with the demands of learning today and into the future. The minimal satisfactory levels described in the Benchmarks may not be sufficient in ensuring adequate and proficient literacy levels desired for all, particularly in Reading.

As more and more relevant data is being collected, analysed and interpreted the identification of the literacy needs of students (individually and as groups) is becoming more finely tuned. This demands more sophisticated approaches to addressing the literacy learning needs of the diverse range of students in Sydney Catholic schools. As a system of schools, CEO Sydney is committed to the development and identification of best practices in literacy teaching and learning and incorporating these into the literacy teaching and learning programs across the systemic schools of the Archdiocese to ensure that all students receive the gift of literacy that will serve them well in their learning today and as citizens of an increasingly globalised and technology-driven world.

Concluding remarks

CEO, Sydney and its system of schools have had a long term commitment to ensuring the highest quality of literacy teaching and learning. There is recognition and understanding that literacy is essential for successful learning and that teaching and learning literacy is highly complex. The high quality and effectiveness of the range of literacy programs in place across the 148 Sydney Catholic schools is supported by strong evidence from a range of sources.

The diversity of students and their literacy needs means that a range of approaches to literacy teaching need to be implemented. The approaches should reflect world's best practice, be consistent with a Catholic view of education and lead to improved literacy learning for all students.

A whole-school, balanced approach to literacy teaching and learning has been a key feature of literacy programs in Sydney Catholic schools. This balanced approach recognises the importance of reading, writing, viewing, talking and listening. It needs to be inclusive of linear print-based texts as well as non-linear, non-print based texts and the emerging and rapidly developing information communication technologies.

Representatives from CEO, Sydney would be happy to meet with members of the inquiry committee to further discuss aspects of this submission and the inquiry.

Appendices

Appendix 1: *Literacy K-6 Position Paper*. Catholic Education Office, Sydney. 2002.

Appendix 2: *Secondary Literacy Position Paper*. Catholic Education Office, Sydney. 2002.

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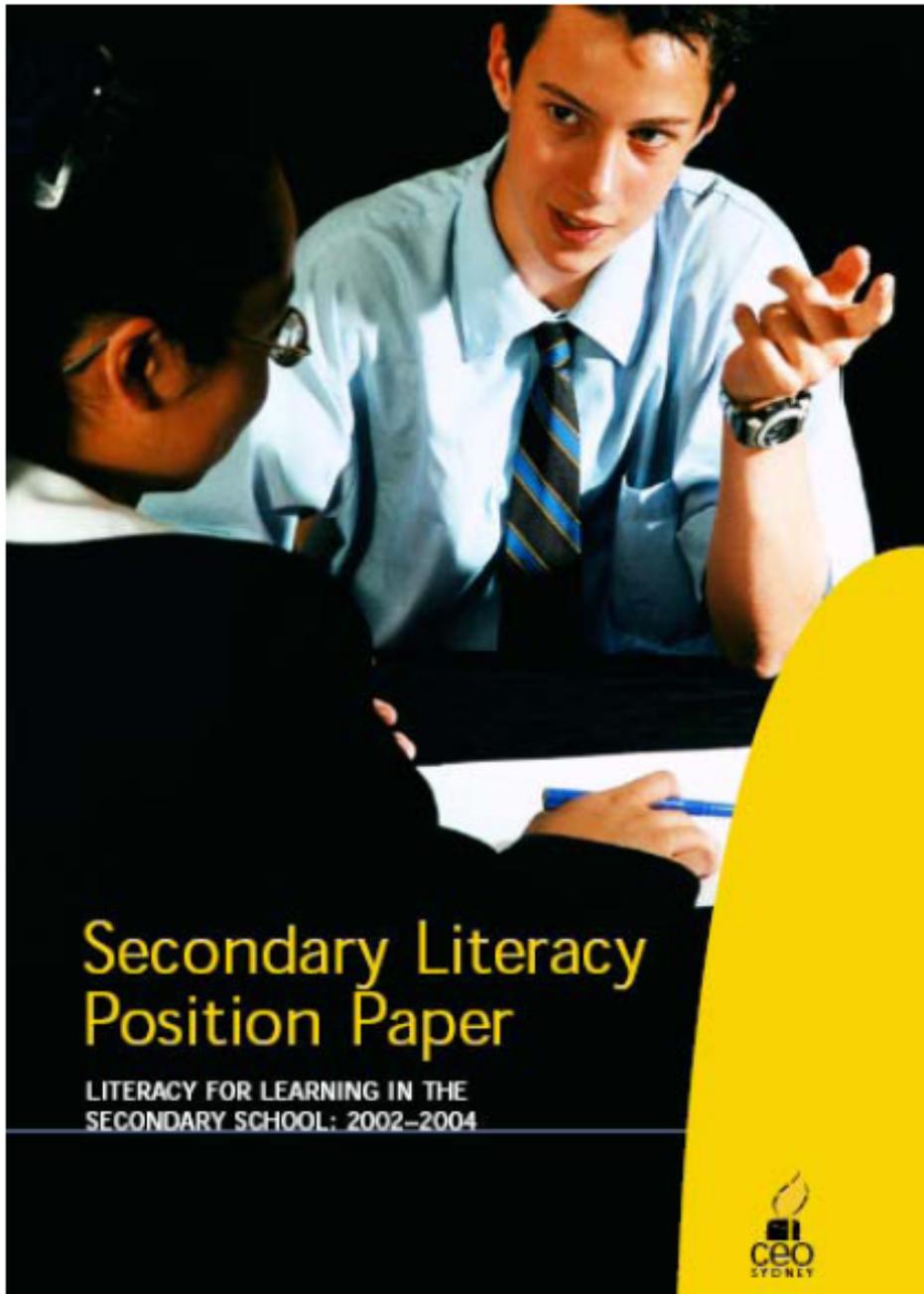
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Link to the first paper

The focus of the first Secondary Literacy Position Paper (1999-2001) was on writing, in particular the use and teaching of Text Types across the Key Learning Areas (KLAs). As a result of the professional development associated with that paper, the majority of Secondary teachers are now utilising Text Types as they build on students' learning in the Primary years and teach the writing activities appropriate to their subjects.

While acknowledging the importance of all aspects of literacy, this second Literacy Position Paper focuses on reading print and visual text, as well as on consolidating writing skills.

What is literacy?

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

An integrated model of literacy

No aspect of literacy can be taught in isolation

Writing, Speaking and Listening

Students need support to move to more sophisticated language use that is required in writing in the Secondary school, and student talk is an important component of this support.

Reading and Viewing

Students need to develop their skills in making meaning from words and images in print, visual and multimodal texts.

Critical Literacy

“Critical literacy is the ability to continually ask questions of a text (talking back to the text) in ways that enable us to look below the surface meanings to see how we are being influenced and affected. This critical ability helps us examine our values and attitudes and to consider alternative points of view.”

Reading

What are the reading demands in the Secondary curriculum?

Each KLA makes particular and specific demands of students in their reading. Students need to develop their skills in making meaning from words and images in a variety of context such as print, visual and multimodal texts – websites, CD-ROM and film.

How do we ensure that students learn from what they read?

Teachers need to explicitly teach students subject-specific reading skills. Teachers must also ensure that the texts they present to students are

accessible to them. **Just because students can read the words does not mean that they can comprehend and ‘use’ the text.**

To become effective readers, students must learn a range of ways of interacting with texts, that is, a set of ‘reading roles.’

Teachers of all subjects need to plan and implement explicit and systematic teaching of the skills required in reading.

Students need to be given:

- the tools to **‘break the code’** of print in text. This involves, for example, teaching students punctuation rules or conventions, word meanings, and book conventions such as index, chapters and subheadings.

“How do I crack this text?”

- The tools to **comprehend** what the text is trying to say. This involves understanding how the text relates to the reader’s prior knowledge, and how literal and figurative language is used.

“What is this text trying to say?”

- Purposeful and interactive opportunities to **use the text** in a variety of ways in their learning.

“How can I use this text?”

- The tools to **recognise** when a text is written from a **particular point of view** and to recognise the opinions and bias within the text.

“What is this text trying to do to me?”

How do we teach reading in each subject?

Before reading a text, students need to be actively engaged in thinking about:

- what do I want to know?
- What might this text offer?
- How might this link to what I already know?

Teachers need to use classroom activities which ensure that students have the background knowledge to link the text to what they already know, as well as the subject-specific vocabulary to make sense of the text. These activities may include **skimming and scanning, mind mapping, and developing structured overviews or graphic outlines.**

During reading, teachers need to use a range of activities to stimulate the students to think about and ask questions of the text. These might include activities such as **co-operative cloze** and **reciprocal reading**.

After reading, teachers need to use a range of strategies which ask questions at three levels of comprehension. This will promote comprehension at several levels – literal, interpretive (between the lines) and applied (making connections beyond the text). These activities could include using a **three level guide**, **dictagloss** and **guided note-making**.

Throughout all reading activities students need to be more than passive receivers. Lessons need to be structured so that students are actively involved in **critical thinking**. They need to be asking questions such as:

- who is saying what to whom, and for what purpose?
- Whose views are being expressed or not being expressed?
- How might a reader from a different context read this differently?
- What version of reality am I given here?

The current proliferation of electronic texts highlights the need for readers to be able to question who the author of the information is, where it comes from, and how reliable it is.

Writing

How can teachers build on students' writing skills developed in Primary school?

Because of the integrative curriculum in K-6 classes, students learn Text Types and how to use them appropriately in all KLAs.

Secondary teachers should consider ways of building on this experience by explicitly teaching students:

- what writers always communicate for a **purpose**. There is always a **context** in which the text is created, and another context in which the text is read. These purposes and contexts will determine the language choices writers make.

- How to handle an increasingly diverse range of writing tasks. Students need to be able to identify the purposes for writing and how to structure texts to achieve those purposes.
- How to compose texts with a particular **audience** in mind. When writing, students need to choose words and grammatical structures that are appropriate to their audience.
- The **language** features and specialist vocabulary of each subject.
- How different sorts of texts are typically **structured**, and how text structures vary according to the demands of specific tasks so that writers can achieve their purposes.
- How to challenge conventional text structures in order to write more sophisticated texts.
- How to write texts that **combine Text Types**, particularly where a text has multiple purposes. Students also need to be taught how to manipulate the typical features of texts in various ways.
- The **processes of writing**. For academic purposes the processes of writing consist of drafting, revising, conferencing, editing, proofreading and publishing.

How do we move students from the spoken to the written?

Talk can be seen as a bridge or staging point in a student's progress from oral to written language. It is important that teachers stage or sequence experiences so that, over time, students are able to move to independent use of spoken and written language across a range of subjects. We often talk our way to an understanding, and in a classroom this should ideally occur before writing takes place.

As students progress through Secondary school, there is a gradual shift along a continuum from informal spoken-like language towards the more abstract written-like language that characterises the subject areas of the Secondary school. The conceptual leap that is required to go from everyday experience and spoken language to technical (often written) language is considerable, and students often rely on spoken language to help them to take this leap.

Students need support to move to the more sophisticated language use that is required in writing in the Secondary school, and student talk is an important component of this support.

Teachers need to scaffold activities that help students to make this shift. Such scaffolding might include modelling, joint construction of texts and deconstruction of texts. As students develop confidence in the required skill, teachers can withdraw this support, providing further support for different or more complex tasks at a later stage.

Students need support to move to the more sophisticated language use that is required in writing in the Secondary school, and student talk is an important component of this support.

How will schools implement this approach to literacy?

1. One senior member of staff, such as the Curriculum Co-ordinator, should co-ordinate the school's overall approach to literacy development.
2. Programming documents should include reference to explicit teaching of Text Types, and a variety of literacy strategies including communicative activities. These should involve the integration of reading, writing, viewing, speaking and listening with critical thinking.
3. Students should be familiar with the Text Types most relevant to each KLA and its associated subjects, and be able to use these Text Types, or combinations of them, in writing tasks.
4. Schools should have a Whole School Literacy Plan (linked to their Annual Development Plan) that should be reviewed in the light of the advice contained in this Secondary Literacy Position Paper.

It is expected that schools will plan for improved literacy skills for all students.

Planning and Programming

Successful literacy learning grows out of sound planning and programming at whole-school and classroom level based on students' needs. It requires planning for whole class, small groups, pairs, and independent tasks for all students.

Planning and programming encompasses:

- classroom organisation and management that allows for flexible approaches in meeting the needs of all students, and that recognises and values student diversity, including social and cultural differences
- long-term and short-term planning, to develop skills in listening, talking, reading, viewing and writing, as well as learning about language and learning to use language
- use of significant strategies:
 - in reading: modelled reading, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, reciprocal reading
 - in writing: modelled/guided writing, independent writing
 - in talking and listening: guided and independent activities
- across-grade planning that involves resource teachers (eg the ESL Teacher, Librarian, Bilingual Support Teacher, Special Needs Teacher and Teacher's Aides)
- opportunities for developing literacy skills across Key Learning Areas, in social contexts, with practical and meaningful applications
- regular exposure to, and experience with, a range of technologies to support literacy learning
- timetabling in all grades to include a daily minimum of one hour uninterrupted time spent on explicitly teaching and developing literacy skills
- use of support personnel, where classroom helpers work with more competent students, and teachers work with students at risk
- establishment of consistent practices for literacy K-6 which support the learner, such as approaches to proofreading, guided reading, and group work
- design, reflection and sequence of teaching activities linked to specific outcomes indicated in the English K-6 syllabus.



Catholic Education Office Support for Schools 2001-2003

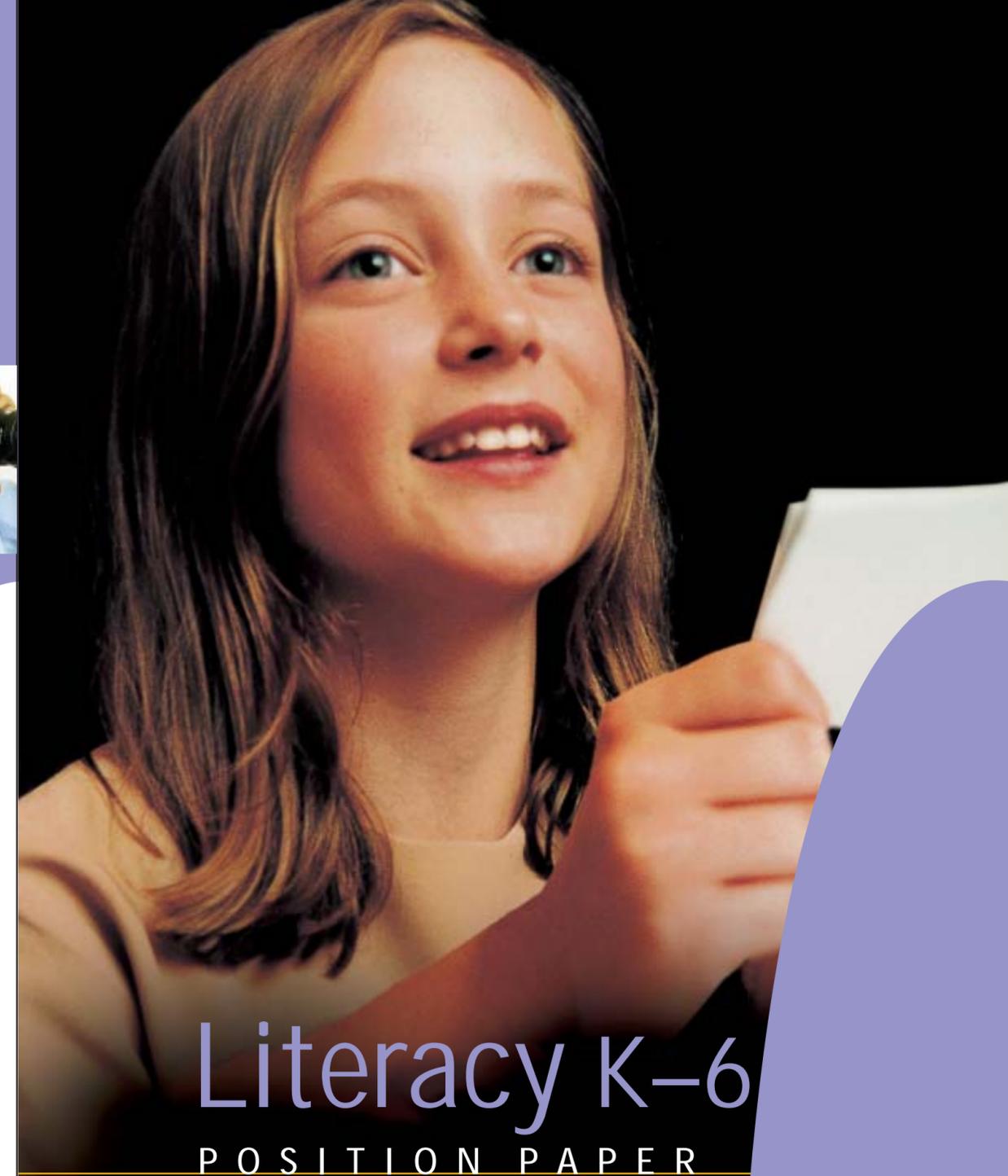


The Catholic Education Office (CEO), Sydney will continue to give high priority to supporting the development of students' literacy skills and to supporting teachers in implementing sound literacy programs.

During 2001-2003 this support will include:

- professional development for:
 - literacy learning in the Primary school
 - Literacy Key Reference Teachers
 - classroom teachers in the implementation of the Visual Literacy and Media Studies program
- ESL teacher allocations
- Language Features of Text Types for ESL Learners Project
- assessment materials: Foundation Outcomes, Starting with Assessment, Assessment Resources for Stages 2 and 3
- continued support for Reading Recovery
- teacher training in the ESL Scales
- Literacy Advantage supplementary support for targeted literacy/numeracy projects in schools with high numbers of educationally disadvantaged students
- professional development to link the Basic Skills Tests and the Primary Writing Assessment to the syllabuses
- opportunities to analyse and interpret Basic Skills Tests and Primary Writing Assessment Reports
- posting support materials on SchoolsNet
- sponsorship for relevant Tertiary courses.

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Literacy K-6

POSITION PAPER





Definition

The very notion of literacy has evolved; in addition to reading and writing and numeracy skills, people now also require technological and computer literacy, environmental literacy and social competency. OECD, 1996

Introduction

This Position Paper provides a framework for literacy teaching and learning in Primary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. It provides a foundation for system-wide understanding of informed practice and direction for accountability to students, parents and the wider educating community.

It is informed by the English K-6 Syllabus, the English as a Second Language Position Statement (CEO, Sydney 1992) and 'Visual Literacy and Media Studies in the Sydney Catholic Primary School' (CEO, Sydney 1998).

Aims

This Position Paper sets out to:

- recognise and strengthen quality teaching practices in schools
- provide direction for the systematic, explicit teaching of literacy
- endorse the principle that all teachers are literacy teachers
- inform school literacy policies and plans
- reinforce the application of quality literacy teaching practice across all Key Learning Areas (KLAs)
- promote the importance of visual and media literacy in teaching/learning programs.

An effective literacy program in a Catholic school will enable students to:

- express fully the dignity and meaning of being human
- develop literacy practices for transforming social and educational needs
- understand that knowledge about language assists all aspects of literacy
- develop effective literacy, according to their abilities and needs, ranging from foundational literacy through to critical literacy
- understand increasingly complex literacy codes and multiple codes of communication
- develop visual and media literacy
- establish a pattern of literacy for life-long learning
- find enjoyment in literacy activities
- participate confidently in society in a way that contributes to their own welfare and that of others
- be people of hope and justice.

Such a program will determine schools' decisions regarding classroom discourse, texts used in class, perspectives adopted, access to and use of information technology, intervention programs, and the assessment and reporting of literacy achievement.

The School Literacy Plan

It is expected that all schools will develop and implement a school-based Literacy Plan that includes:

- a statement expressing the schools' commitment to literacy improvement as a priority
- a whole-school approach to literacy, inclusive of different learning needs, language backgrounds and skills, and reflecting best knowledge about how children acquire and learn literacy
- realistic targets which reflect students' progress in the light of the Commonwealth Benchmarks and the Archdiocesan Agenda
- intervention procedures which identify students' literacy learning needs in the early years of schooling
- planned programs to meet identified needs
- daily time allocation for explicit literacy learning, involving focused teaching and engaged learning
- provision of a wide variety of literature, information and media texts
- an understanding of the place of communication and information technologies in literacy programs
- key strategies for teaching and learning reading (including viewing), writing, talking and listening in purposeful situations
- analysis of the needs of ESL students, and the provision of support as required
- assessment and monitoring procedures which provide information for planning and reporting purposes
- opportunities for staff members to interpret and analyse Basic Skills Tests and Primary Writing Assessment data that will inform teaching/learning programs across the school
- reporting procedures which provide students, parents, teachers and other members of the educating community with relevant information regarding student progress
- definition of the role of the executive member designated to provide leadership of the literacy program
- provision of focused professional development in literacy for teachers
- parent involvement in students' literacy acquisition.

The challenge for schools is to provide a comprehensive, integrated approach to professional development at the interface of literacy, technology and learning, in principled, informed and educationally effective ways.

Lankshear, Snyder and Green, 2000



Intervention Approaches

The importance of early intervention, when required, to meet the learning needs of individual students is recognised as a key factor in successful literacy acquisition.

Therefore, it is expected that schools will ensure:

- sound first teaching informed by the Archdiocesan Early Literacy Strategy
- implementation of an appropriate intervention program, such as Reading Recovery
- professional development of teachers in early literacy assessment
- regular assessment and monitoring of literacy progress
- quality English language activities for Kindergarten students enrolling with little or no English competence
- ongoing focused observation based on the stages of development outlined in the English K-6 Syllabus and ESL Scales
- ongoing support for low-achieving students beyond Year 2.



Assessment and Reporting

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning cycle, and should inform literacy programming and planning. The focus of assessment is to improve student learning outcomes and to ensure that teaching is matched to the student's learning needs.

It is expected that in Sydney Archdiocesan schools:

- all assessment strategies are systematic, efficient and clearly related to the stated literacy outcomes
- assessment procedures ensure that student performance is regularly monitored using both formative and summative procedures, including the application of system-wide assessment procedures in designated grades (eg Basic Skills Test, Primary Writing Assessment, and the Observation Survey)
- running records are used as a tool to gain specific information on reading strategies used by the student in order to inform future teaching
- interpretation of writing samples is guided by the English K-6 Student Work Samples: Writing and the ESL Scales
- reporting to parents and students of the results of external assessment measures is undertaken with the confidentiality protocols laid down in the agreements surrounding the use of the test instruments
- assessment and reporting are carried out with reference to the English outcomes achieved by students as outlined in the English K-6 Syllabus, with reference to the ESL Scales for the English language development of students from a language background other than English
- procedures for reporting to parents provide information about what students can do against a standards framework of syllabus outcomes
- students have opportunities to evaluate their learning and are provided with detailed knowledge of their progress as literacy learners
- procedures are in place to track student progress in literacy across the stages.

The New Millennium

Literacy is being redefined in a postmodern world characterised by globalisation, multiculturalism and ever-increasing access to information through technology and multimedia. Students are challenged to live by ageless Christian values in a world of accelerating change. Teachers are challenged to provide literacy programs for students who will be adult members of society in a world beyond 2001.

The Sydney Catholic Schools 'Towards 2005' Strategic Management Plan: Mark 2 identifies the provision of high-quality teaching and learning programs as a priority. In particular, Outcomes 3.1 and 3.4 identify Performance Indicators regarding literacy outcomes for students.

Archdiocesan Targets have been set for 2003 as follows:

- *At least 24% of Year 3 students will be in Band 5,* and 84% in Band 3 and above*
- *At least 27% of Year 5 students will be in Band 6, and 89% in Band 4 and above.*

Schools therefore need to demonstrate a whole-school focus on literacy development.

* 'Band' refers to the skill level group of students represented in the annual State-wide Basic Skills Test. The higher the band, the higher the skill level. Year 3 has 5 bands, Year 5 has 6.