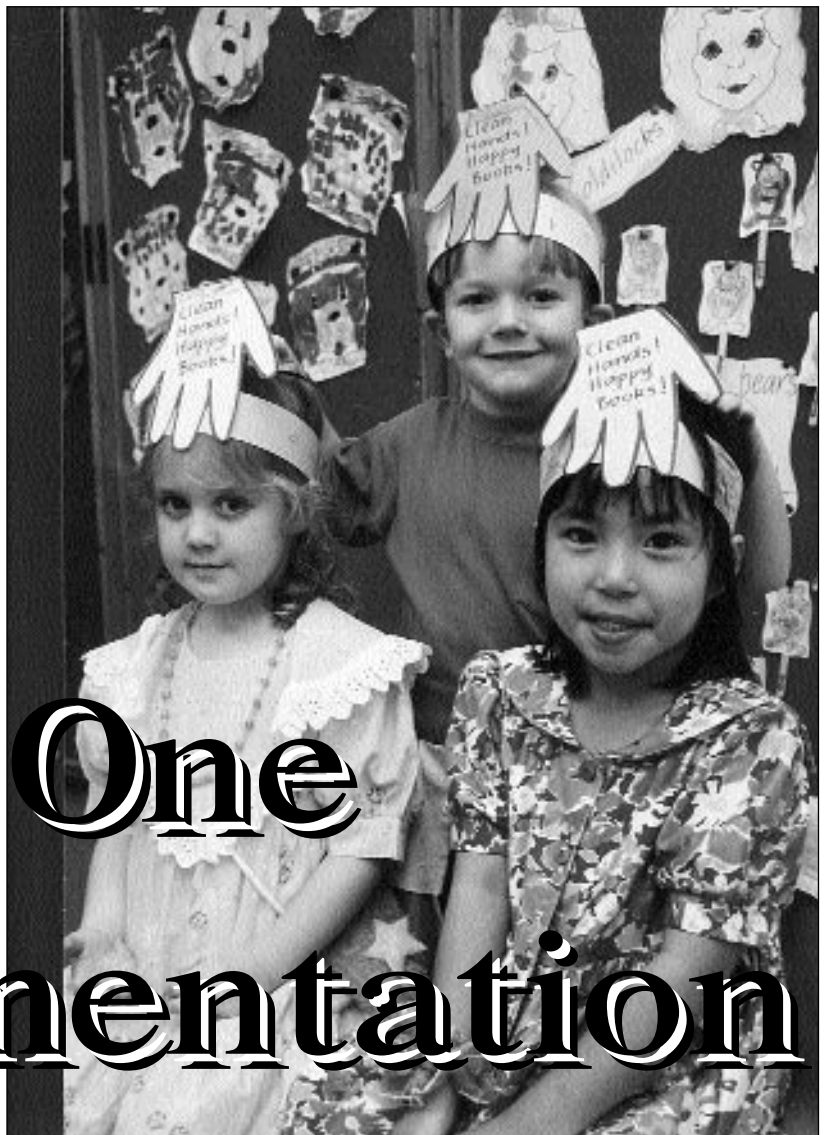


"Shaking Our Story"

- *Student Characteristics*
- *Teaching and Learning*
- *Curriculum Integration*



Stage One Documentation

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Stage One

Introduction

As with all NSW curricula, *Sharing Our Story* is structured around six stages of schooling.

Individual students differ considerably in their backgrounds, abilities and general characteristics. However, students in any particular stage share a developmental pattern and have much in common. One of the great challenges confronting the teacher is to provide learning experiences that are *developmentally appropriate*, responding to the emerging capacities of the students themselves.

This section provides a description of students in one particular stage of schooling. The descriptions it offers are, of necessity, quite general and should be used with some caution. Teachers would readily recognise that the stages overlap and that not all the observations made here would apply to every student in this stage.

For this reason, a summary of characteristics of the pre-school child and a synopsis of Stage 2 characteristics have been provided.

Teachers are invited to reflect on the content of this section in the light of their observations and knowledge of their own students. This reflection can form an essential basis for the selection of appropriate teaching and learning activities.

On Starting School

Children come to their first day of schooling from a wide range of cultural, religious and social backgrounds.

Differences in child-rearing practices, and the variety of child-care and pre-school provisions that families may have used, have all provided different kinds of learning experiences.

All children have passed through a period of rapid maturation in which they have acquired mobility, language, socially acceptable ways of expressing emotions and skills in relating to those around them. They have developed vitally important concepts about themselves and their own worth, about their families and about the world in general.

Learning has been fostered by imitation, manipulation, exploration and the asking of endless questions in the context of everyday family life, and through play which has included the impromptu dramatising of lived experiences. Most children have developed a love of story and their lives have been given structure by routines which on many occasions have taken on the elements of ritual.

While all of these have laid the foundation for religious education, the great precursor of religious faith has been a powerful orientation towards trust, love and acceptance fostered by the child's parents and other care-givers.

The Catholic school's task is to build on these experiences.

The Stage 1 Student (Kindergarten and Years 1-2)

In this period of early childhood, children are led by a natural curiosity to engage in a direct, hands-on exploration of their world, expressing themselves through talking, drawing, creating, moving and, above all, playing.

As they develop, they learn to separate fantasy from reality and to understand the meaning behind symbols. Social skills become more sophisticated and there is a progressive recognition of the significance and nature of rules and boundaries.

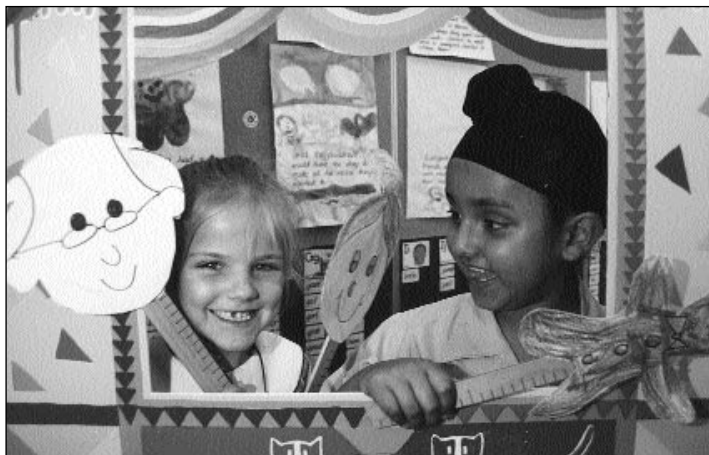


Social and Emotional Aspects

The movement from home to school, which marks the beginning of Stage 1, brings a number of significant challenges into the social and emotional lives of the children.

Teachers may reasonably expect their students to exhibit some of the following characteristics:

- displaying a predisposition to trust and thriving in a climate of acceptance and praise;
- focusing on themselves but becoming increasingly aware of the requirements of belonging to a class and group;
- accepting adult-imposed boundaries;
- imitating respected and powerful adults, as well as children;
- possessing a driving curiosity and a great capacity for awe and wonder;
- liking routines and rituals;
- struggling with the tension existing between a natural drive for independence and autonomy, on the one hand, and the need to retreat at times to positions of safety, reassurance and predictability, on the other;
- resolving many internal problems through play, fantasy and the imagination.



Intellectual Aspects



Children's reasoning ability takes a significant step forward during this stage which marks a gradual movement away from the world of the pre-school child where fantasy and an extremely ego-centric perspective exercise important influences on children's thinking.

Teachers may expect Stage 1 students to exhibit some of the following characteristics:

- a growing competence in the application of such intellectual skills as sorting, classifying, combining, comparing and establishing relationships between objects and ideas;
- improving language competence by using language in different contexts and for different purposes;

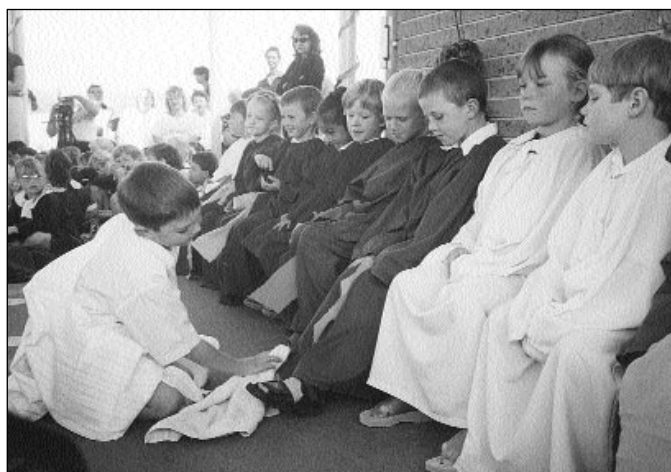
- learning through play, imitation, exploration, interaction with others and the manipulation of solid objects;
- growing in understanding of cause and effect, and gradually mastering the art of sequencing ideas;
- developing the capacity to think symbolically and to use symbols, including words and images, in communication;
- focusing on one aspect of something at a time; thinking very literally.

Faith/Moral Judgement Aspects

School builds on the religious experiences of the home, including the pre-images of God and the concepts of *good* and *bad*, *right* and *wrong* that are taught by various child-rearing practices.

Teachers may expect Stage 1 students to exhibit some of the following characteristics:

- imitating the behaviours and expressing the attitudes of the significant adults in their lives;
- displaying a vivid imagination which gives rise to lifelong religious images and concepts; incorporating images of God from loving and powerful adults, and from stories and symbols;
- seeing rules governing behaviour as 'owned' by adults who are the arbiters of what is right and wrong;
- moving progressively to greater clarity about what is real as opposed to what is make-believe; this movement giving rise to an increased capacity for religious understanding.



Implications for Teaching and Learning in Religious Education

1. In the effective teaching of R.E. one would expect to see a range of developmentally appropriate teaching and learning strategies. These include play (both in dramatic form and in manipulating materials), 'hands-on' experiences, experimentation, gathering and displaying information, sorting and classifying, connecting facts and ideas, expressing oneself by means of drawing, painting, constructing, modelling, role-playing, singing, dancing, and so on.

2. The integration of Religious Education with other learning areas is particularly appropriate at this stage. Such integration can focus on key concepts, processes, skills or values that cut across Key Learning Areas.

3. Story-telling is a powerful teaching strategy. It stimulates the children's imagination and can help them to form religious images that are appropriate to their age.



4. Stories and symbols should be allowed to make their own impact, touching the imagination without becoming too quickly 'rationalised' by logical explanations.

5. This is a particularly appropriate time for cultivating a sense of wonder and appreciation of a world that reflects the presence and goodness of God.

6. Plenty of opportunities should be provided for the children to work cooperatively and to develop skills of negotiating and planning.

7. Children can be encouraged to take some responsibility for their own learning by being given some choice in activities, or in the order in which they will complete set tasks.

8. At this stage, it is important to recognise the children's tendency to imitate the expressions and behaviour of significant people, especially teachers.

9. This is the time, too, for a strong response to the children's natural appreciation of rituals and symbols, and their liking for repetitive stories, poems, rhythmic sounds and movements.

The Classroom of a Stage 1 Teacher

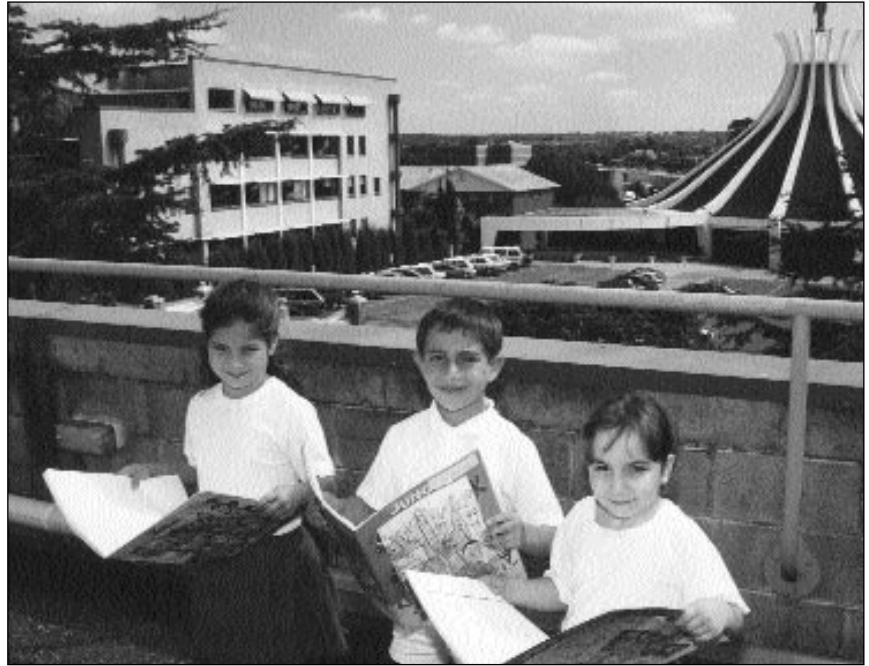
I find story-telling to be a great way of touching the imagination of children in my class. While relevant right across the curriculum, this has a particular impact in Religious Education. The children have their favourite stories and like to hear them again and again.

I also use simple religious symbols (eg candles, Bible, books on nature) to raise interest, sometimes relating them to special stories, particularly those that stir the children's natural sense of wonder.

Anne Easton
St Michael's Primary School, Baulkham Hills

Stage 1 in Context

Because individual differences amongst students are so great and stage descriptions must, of necessity, overlap, the following summary of Stage 2 is provided. Teachers may wish to consult the expanded description of student characteristics for this stage.



Stage 2 (Years 3 and 4)

Again, the dominant form of learning is hands-on experience: collecting, matching, contrasting, grouping, predicting, drawing conclusions. Language, a major tool of learning, now displays greater variation in vocabulary and syntax. There is growing interest in what is literally true (as distinct from 'just a story'). While some children see rules as unchangeable and established at the whim of adults, a growing proportion sees reciprocal fairness as a core moral principle.

Consider Your Own Students

1. Which of the *characteristics* listed for this stage are most obvious amongst the children you are teaching?
2. Which characteristics do you consider most significant *in relation to teaching and learning in Religious Education*?
3. What particular *implications* seem to you to be most valid and useful?
4. What *specific teaching practices* or arrangements flow naturally from the implications you have identified?