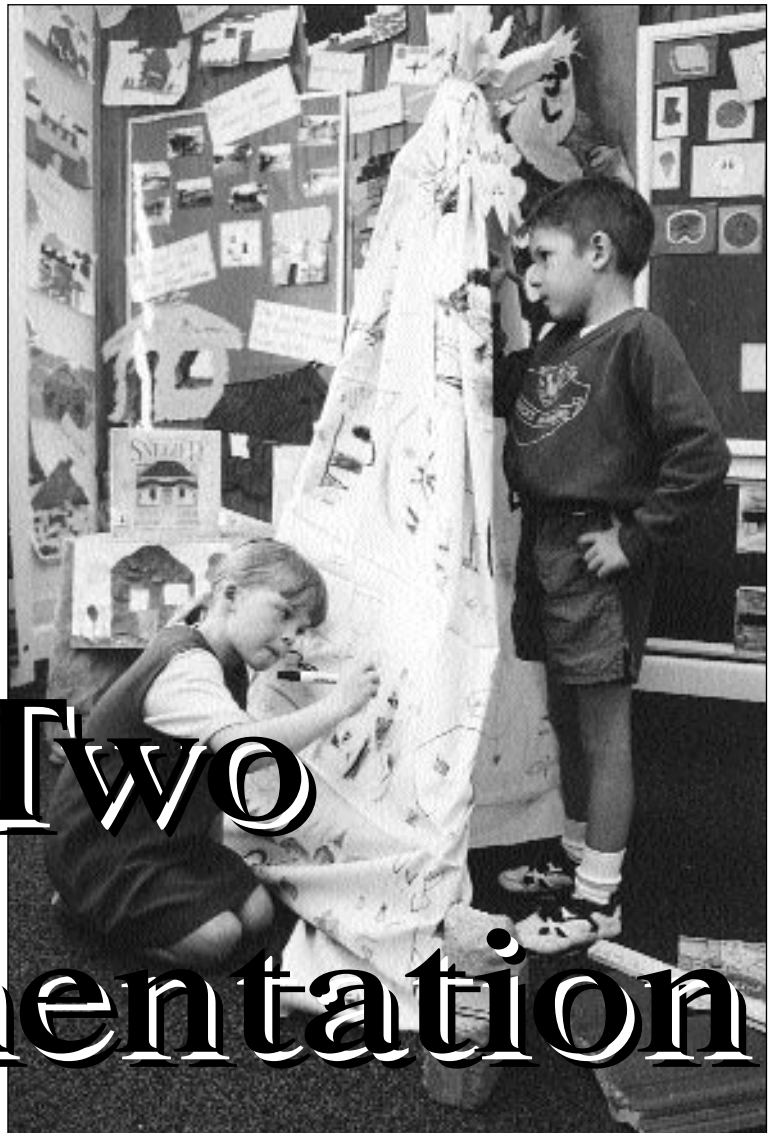


"Sharing Our Story"

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



Stage Two

Documentation

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Stage Two

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 synopsis of the stage on either side of the one being addressed has 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.

The Stage 2 Student (Years 3-4)

As children move through this stage their understanding of themselves, their community and the wider world expands. They are less self-focussed than previously and enjoy working collaboratively.

They progress gradually beyond the fantasy and make-believe that typifies much of the mental world of the younger child. At the same time, play continues to be an important activity for promoting growth and learning, stimulating them to dramatise, build, solve problems, express themselves, create structures and exercise their imagination.

Social and Emotional Aspects

This stage sees a strengthening of the influence of the peer group as children clarify their identity with increasing consciousness of their membership in a particular age cohort.

Teachers may expect Stage 2 students to exhibit some of the following characteristics:

- being active, talkative and eager to work in groups;
- becoming more vulnerable to the opinions of others; valuing a 'best friend' as a source of help and loyalty;
- gaining self-esteem through success and mastery of tasks;
- still depending on adult approval and responding to praise and acceptance;
- displaying an increasing self-awareness and an ability to reflect on behaviours and achievement.



Intellectual Aspects

Most children's reasoning ability takes an important step forward early in this stage.

Teachers may expect Stage 2 students to exhibit the following characteristics:

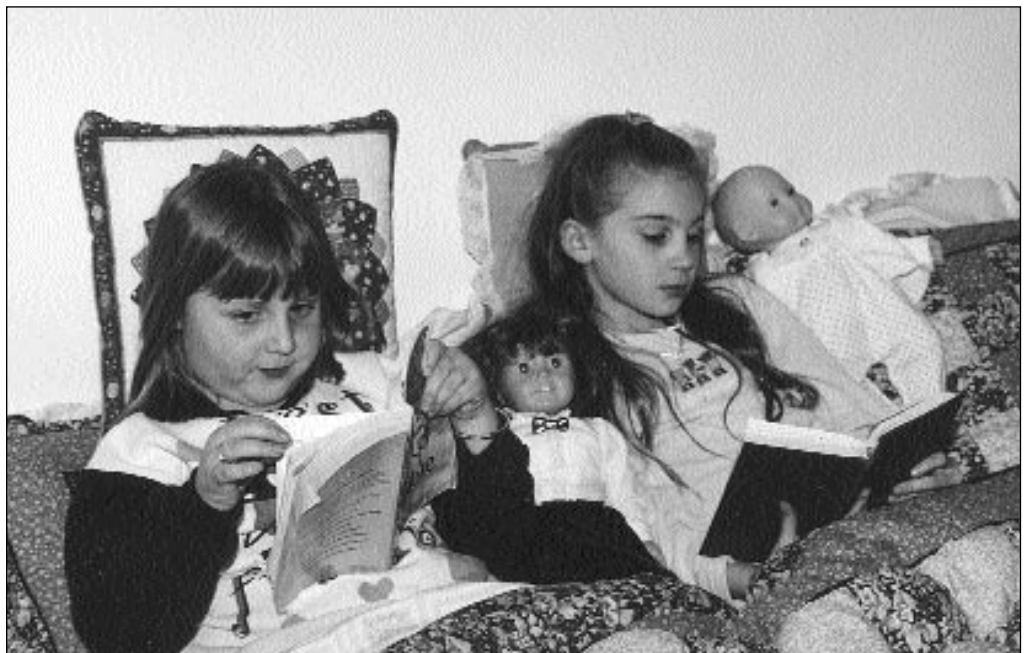
- becoming more systematic in thinking, more analytical;
- displaying a new awareness of individual differences, a greater capacity for anticipating consequences;
- still being very literal but developing in ability to understand different levels of meaning;
- having a better understanding of time and the sequence of events; Scripture stories can take on a new significance.

Faith/Moral Judgement Aspects

At this stage, children seek to clarify for themselves the distinctions between what is real (fact) and what is not (fantasy). They readily question and ask for proof. 'Is that true?' 'Did it really happen that way?' "How could that happen?"

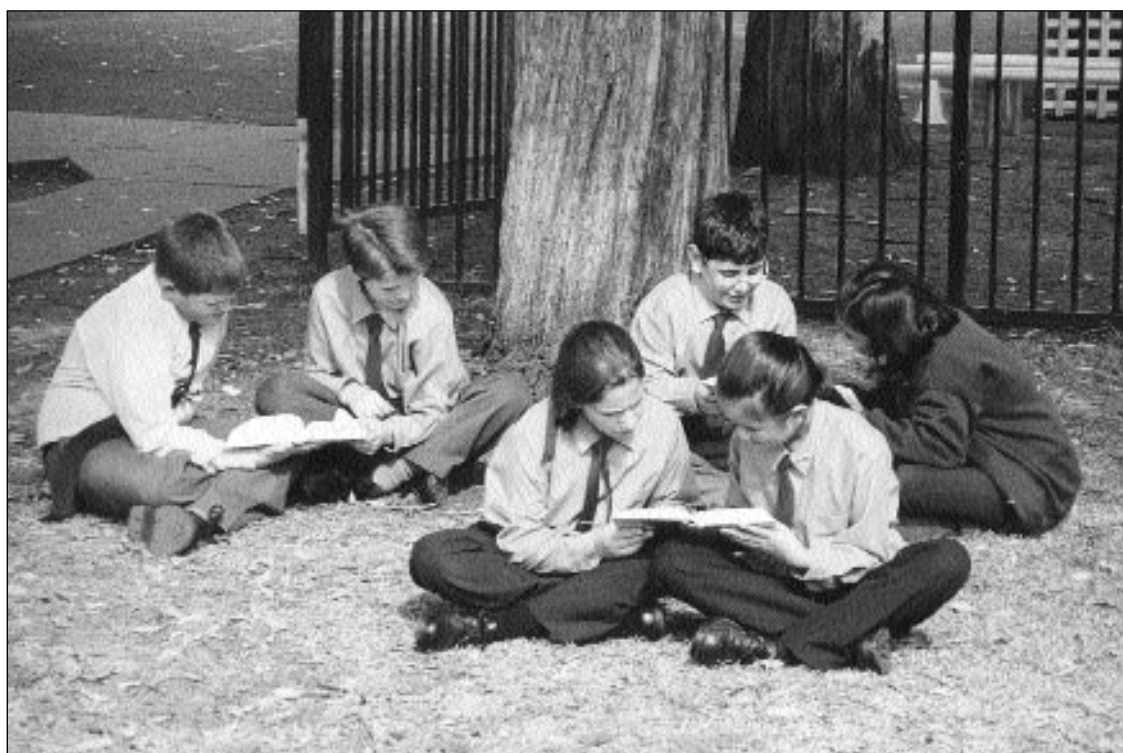
Teachers may expect Stage 2 students to exhibit some of the following characteristics:

- having a new understanding of rules and developing a moral framework that stresses fairness and equal treatment; being able to respond to the challenge: 'How would you feel if someone did that to you?'; judging moral responsibility on the intention rather than the outcome: 'He didn't mean to do it.'
- displaying an understanding of time, the sequence of events, and consequences which enables the student to better judge his or her own motivation and responsibility;
- taking on the stories and practices of the community; a 'tribal' Catholicism;
- beginning to understand that individual stories can be parts of a larger story which helps one make sense of life and the world.



Implications for Teaching and Learning in Religious Education

1. Highest priority should be given to the creation of a classroom climate where children work together in an atmosphere of safety and respect. Their strength of 'ownership' is increased when they have classroom responsibilities; for example, setting up displays.
2. Students need guidance in planning, making decisions and working in groups.
3. Students can be helped to deepen their understanding of the reasonableness of rules that govern human behaviour by being involved in the establishment of the rules of the classroom.
4. Appropriate liturgies can be extremely educative. Their educational value is enhanced when students are involved in preparation of the sacred space, music, prayers, readings and so on.
5. This is a stage when story-telling and story-reading can be done with great effect. Care should be taken, however, not to trivialise or sensationalize very significant stories or to present Jesus as a magician.
6. Routines and rituals of classroom prayer, story hearing and quiet time for reflection are all very appropriate.
7. The integration of Religious Education with other learning areas is particularly appropriate. This can focus on key concepts, processes, skills or values that cut across Key Learning Areas.



8. A readiness to place oneself in another's shoes can be fostered through discussions of everyday experiences, or of the lives of fictional characters. Children can role-play some events that reflect tension, disappointment, success, conflict or joy in attempts to appreciate perspectives different from their own.
9. Teaching strategies that are effective in other learning areas are also appropriate in R.E. These include those which develop skills in: researching, communicating according to purpose and audience, solving problems, making judgements and informed choices, responding creatively, working independently and working cooperatively.

The Classroom of a Stage 2 Teacher

My Year 4 children love dramatising gospel stories. They readily form groups and present the stories of Jesus, bringing their own understanding and interpretation to them. As follow-up they love to play 'hotseats', interviewing story characters and eliciting responses reminiscent of a Ray Martin or Jana Wendt program.

They are most responsive to different forms of prayer. Given a new hymn or song, my class jumps at the chance to create actions and present a liturgical movement. If liturgical gowns are available, performance takes on a new dimension of enthusiasm, adding life and colour to class Masses and assemblies while still being reverent and prayerful.

Greg Cumming
Chisholm Catholic Primary School, Bligh Park

Stage 2 in context

Because individual differences amongst students are so great and stage descriptions must, of necessity, overlap, the following summaries are provided. Teachers may find it relevant to consult the expanded description of students provided for these stages.

Stage 1 (Kindergarten to Year 2)

In this period of early childhood, children typically approach the world with a sense of natural curiosity and wonder. They have an enthusiasm for fantasy and play; in fact, play and interaction with others provide dominant forms of learning. Learning in general occurs through direct experience and any abstract ideas must be presented in the context of concrete experience.

Stage 3 (Years 5 and 6)

These children may be less spontaneous but are generally more self-motivated and capable of absorbing considerable information. More sophisticated reasoning gives them greater understanding of consequences and a greater capacity for using talk to justify assertions and opinions. Values and judgements are now more strongly influenced by peers, and self-esteem is significantly enhanced by mastery of tasks.

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?

