

'Sharing Our Story'

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



Stage Five
Documentation

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Imprimatur: Most Reverend Kevin Manning, Bishop of Parramatta.

Date: 30 September 1999

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ISBN : 0 9577576 4 6

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Stage Five

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 5 Student

Still closely aligned with their peer group, Stage 5 students use the emergent intellectual skills of adolescence to explore their identity as maturing individuals and their place in the surrounding culture.

Their growing capacity for abstract thought enables them to approach the study of R.E. as an intellectual discipline, similar to and connected with their other subjects, and to apply formal cognitive processes.

Social and Emotional Aspects



The emotional upheaval and temperamental behaviour, the confusion and occasional rebelliousness of the younger adolescent continue to find expression in this stage, although evidence of a growing maturity gradually emerges.

Teachers may expect Stage 5 students to exhibit some of the following characteristics:

- being influenced by the powerful combination of peers, the wider popular culture and the media (including advertising), along with particular sub-cultures built around music, the Internet, video games and various sporting and leisure activities;
- an attraction to novel, sensational and multi-sensory experiences (eg the movements, sounds and lighting of rock concerts);
- a preoccupation with self that tends to see as 'boring' anything that is not sensory or directly relevant to day-to-day life;
- a growing idealism and a quickness to challenge, with some emotion, any perceived shallowness or inconsistency in the adult world; a sensitivity to adult 'phoneyess'.

Intellectual Aspects

The developing capacity for abstract and systematic thinking greatly expands opportunities for learning.

Teachers may expect Stage 5 students to exhibit some of the following:

- expression of a deeper understanding of causes and consequences as they apply to social, political and scientific issues and movements;
- increasing comprehension of how events of one period in history have impacted on other periods, including our own;
- an understanding of how the different backgrounds and beliefs of people give rise to different interpretations of reality;
- ability to gather information from a widening range of sources, especially electronic;
- ability to test the validity of argument and to appreciate and use satire and irony, especially in humour.

Faith/Moral Judgement Aspects

Against the background of general intellectual growth, the different groups to which adolescents belong influence the ways they make sense of their experiences and find more comprehensive meaning in their lives.

Teachers of Stage 5 students may expect them to exhibit some of the following:

- a capacity for introspection and insight which makes the adolescent more aware of his or her own understandings and values, and fosters the formation of more informed opinions;
- a developing social conscience which leads to a new willingness to explore social issues, and may lead to outreach activity;
- a capacity to make one's own, in very particular ways, certain values that have come from different influences.



Implications for Teaching and Learning in Religious Education

1. R.E. is situated within an academic curriculum which seeks to develop every student's capacity to think logically and analytically, and to develop the capacity for abstract thinking. Religion itself should be treated within classroom programs in a manner that respects logic and consistency.
2. R.E. students need help in developing skills of enquiry and critical evaluation, of investigating how decisions are made, on what values they are predicated, and on how they can reflect different perspectives. They also need encouragement to suspend immediate judgement in favour of open and comprehensive exploration of issues.
3. The rich array of teaching methods used with this age group in various subjects is appropriate in R.E. Students can make investigations, debate issues, compile research findings, work collaboratively, express themselves through various media, and use a great variety of formats and conventions — written reports, graphs, maps, tables, diagrams, artwork, music, video and other electronic presentations .
4. The more sophisticated intellectual skills of this stage and the natural idealism of students can serve an exploration of significant social issues (eg justice, discrimination, rights and responsibilities, consumerism, materialism).
5. Appropriate Christian outreach programs provide opportunities for a growing idealism and clearer sense of personal values to be expressed in practical ways.
6. Students may often question the behaviour and priorities of adult figures, and express disillusionment when they perceive logical inconsistencies and a mismatch between rhetoric and practice.
7. Students may seriously question religious beliefs and practices; some may reject them as irrelevant to life as they are presently experiencing it.



8. During this stage, many concepts developed earlier can be profitably revisited and students can be helped to deepen their understanding in the light of their own developing capacities.
9. Considering the significance of the adolescent peer group, R.E. activities which call for collaboration, shared responsibilities and group presentations are particularly appropriate.
10. Because of their increased exposure to abstract ideas at this stage, students meet opportunities to relate new ideas to their own experiences and to establish connections between what they are learning in R.E. and the content and methods of other subjects.
11. Students should be helped to feel free to express anxieties, hesitations and doubts, to think aloud about religious issues and to test their understanding.
12. Given the natural appeal of music and movement to students at this stage, liturgical experiences should be well-prepared, engaging, meaningful and relevant.

The Classroom of a Stage 5 Teacher

In preparation for a social justice unit, we invited speakers from Amnesty International to talk with our students.

In subsequent discussions, students expressed an awareness of the link between Jesus working to set the oppressed free, and the Christian call to the students themselves to act likewise.

One said, 'I just didn't realise that these things were still happening'. Many had believed that Christian values and beliefs about human dignity were already shared by people generally. It came as a shock that the gospel of hope has a great relevance today.

The students wanted to do something and organised a letter writing campaign to support a move to set some oppressed people free.

Zac Culican
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Stage 5 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 4 (Years 7 and 8)

During these early years of secondary school, students move into the challenging period of adolescence. The physical and emotional changes of puberty create new opportunities for growth. New intellectual capacities become obvious with students being more capable of formal, logical thinking in which they interpret data, predict, generalise and draw conclusions. They begin to experiment with a range of roles as they seek to clarify personal identity. The conventions of the peer group provide a powerful framework for interpreting the world and making meaning.

Stage 6 (Years 11 and 12)

Many of these students demonstrate a more sophisticated sense of responsibility concerning social, environmental and ethical issues. The final years of school life are heavily influenced by preparation for examinations and for meeting the entry requirements of post-secondary courses; students are challenged to organise time and resources more efficiently and are aided by a stronger sense of their own strengths, weaknesses and goals.

Consider Your Own Students

1. Which of these *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?