

'Sharing Our Story'

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



Stage Six

Documentation

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Stage Six

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.

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 6 Student

Students at this stage are sometimes referred to as 'young adults', reflecting their growing maturity and sophistication. Their school life is now heavily influenced by preparation for examinations, and for meeting the entry requirements of post-secondary courses and for entry to the workforce itself. They often experience increasing pressure regarding their school performance, which may have to be balanced with part-time work commitments. Nevertheless, they are helped by a stronger sense of their own strengths, weaknesses and goals.

Social and Emotional Aspects

Many of the characteristics that distinguish the Stage 5 student persist into this stage but a strengthening maturity is in evidence. Teachers may expect Stage 6 students to exhibit some of the following characteristics:

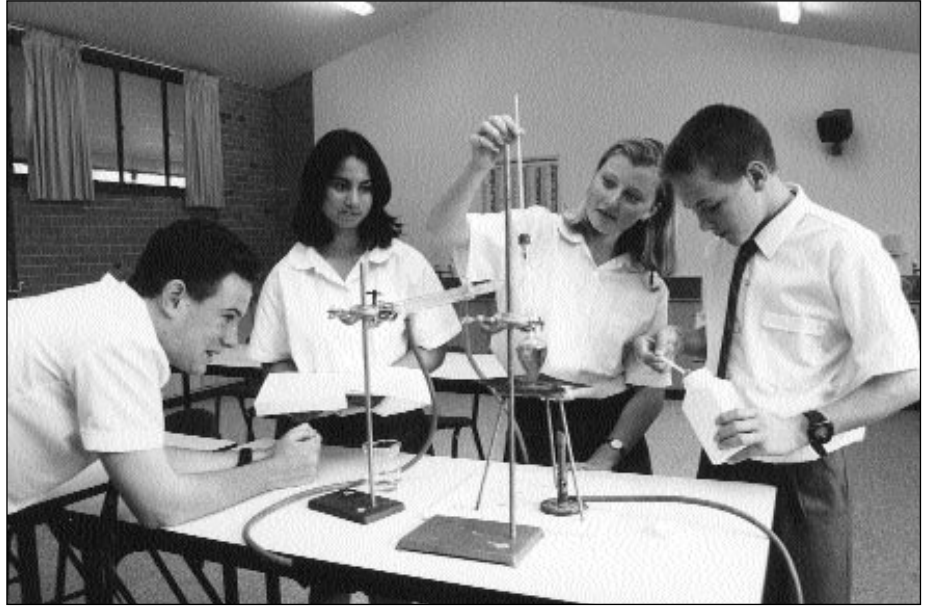
- a greater understanding of self, accompanied by an increased self-confidence and sense of independence;
- improving interpersonal skills with a greater openness to the perspective of others; relationships are often deeper and more enduring;
- still significantly influenced by peers and youth culture but this influence being now more stable than previously;
- willing to work cooperatively but valuing independence;
- often displaying considerable personal commitment along with a growing concern with social, environmental and ethical issues.



Intellectual Aspects

The capacity for abstract thought and systematic thinking is reflected in the following:

- working with more complex ideas and arguments; critical analysis; testing validity; linking ideas and practices;
- more competently dealing with different conceptual frameworks and ways of looking at the world;
- better understanding of social and historical contexts, and capacity to consider alternative explanations;
- reflecting critically on previous learning and reconsidering values;
- reading texts on a number of different levels.



Faith/Moral Judgement Aspects

The other aspects of maturity impinge considerably on this area in which individuals will vary greatly.

Teachers of Stage 6 students may expect them to exhibit some of the following:

- the still strong, yet moderating, influence of family;
- a willingness and capacity to explore certain ethical issues more fully;
- increasing independence in moral decision making and the development of a more sophisticated moral code;
- a strong sense of idealism and intolerance of perceived hypocrisy.

Implications for Teaching and Learning in Religious Education

1. Recognise that any education which develops rational and critical thinking, and the capacity to reflect on experience and search for meaning, is inextricably linked with education in faith.



2. Religious Education should be as intellectually challenging as any other subject. In R.E., students need to apply the tools of logic, to synthesise and evaluate ideas, to distinguish between authoritative and superficial data, and to separate rational from emotive responses.
3. Students may need help in understanding the connection between their study of R.E. and their study of other subjects.
4. Students need opportunities to exercise their skills in analysing the prevailing ideas and values of the surrounding culture, and to relate this to their own rigorous examination of the Christian faith and their own reflected-upon experiences of life.
5. Students need opportunities and encouragement to reflect on their own experiences and to identify their ways of making sense of everyday life : in their family, their social group, and the wider culture (including youth culture). Some may need help in challenging unhelpful 'life metaphors' — that is, ways of understanding themselves and their place in the world that diminish rather than enliven them.
6. Students can be helped to distinguish *central* elements of the Christian message from the more *peripheral*.
7. The natural idealism of students, along with a capacity for exercising leadership, can be fostered through involvement in various Christian outreach programs.

The Classroom of a Stage 6 Teacher

I have noticed a significant change in students as they move through Year 11. They become more critically reflective and this seems to lead to greater readiness to respond to social justice issues.

Their interest in ideas often results in their pushing me to give my personal beliefs about the various topics we explore.

I feel challenged to respond to the students' growing maturity by stressing relevance, allowing time for reflection and encouraging deeper thinking by using appropriate questioning.

Debbie Grigson O.P.
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Stage 6 in Context

Because individual differences amongst students are so great and stage descriptions must, of necessity, overlap, the following summary of Stage 5 is provided. Teachers may wish to consult the expanded description of students provided for this stage.

Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10)

Confrontation and questioning characterise many students at this stage as they 'test the limits' and come to terms with massive physical and psychological change in their lives. The peer group remains very significant, providing identity and security yet demanding extreme conformity. The values and expectations of the adult world face critical questioning, and negative attitudes to organised religion are often expressed.

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?