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Evaluation of the Middle Years Reform Program

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Evaluation of the Middle Years Reform Program

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Middle Years Reform Program (*MYRP*)

The Middle Years Reform Program (*MYRP*) was conducted in all Victorian government secondary and P-12 schools over the period 2001-2003.

The program was designed to provide these schools with financial support to employ additional classroom teaching capacity to develop and implement initiatives in the areas of literacy, attendance and the 'thinking curriculum' in Years 7-9.

The evaluators

The Collaborative Institute for Research, Consulting and Learning in Evaluation (CIRCLE) at RMIT University in collaboration with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) were commissioned by the Department of Education and Training, Victoria to undertake an evaluation of the program.

Data

Data for the evaluation were taken from:
    a.   Literature and document review;
    b.   Three preliminary consultations with representative groups of regional office personnel, school principals, middle years co-ordinators and other teachers familiar with middle years issues;
    c.   A questionnaire that was distributed by e-mail to all schools with students in years 7-9 that achieved a response rate of just over 80%;
    d.   Analysis of school-level aggregate data for the period 1998-2003 on Year 9 literacy, Years 7, 8 and 9 attendance, and retention to Year 11;
    e.   Six brief case studies of purposefully selected schools with Year 7-9 students.

The questionnaire data formed a key component of the evaluation of *MYRP*.

School Perceptions of the 'Key' Ideas Behind *MYRP*

Predominant among the 'key ideas' that schools saw as underpinning *MYRP* was the improvement of engagement of middle years students with learning.

Improved teaching and pedagogical practices more generally, improved literacy and generally improved outcomes for middle years' students were also seen by many schools as important ideas that underpinned the program.

Activities Specifically Funded by *MYRP*

'Staffing' and 'literacy' appeared to be the predominant focus for the allocation of *MYRP* resources by schools.

Schools typically allocated their *MYRP* funding to staffing, and, more specifically, to staffing of literacy programs or activities.

There was some evidence in the questionnaire data that schools had diversified the focus of the allocation of their *MYRP* resources in the area of staffing over the period of the program.

The Range of Middle Years Activities Conducted by Schools Before and During the Period of *MYRP* Funding

Schools previously involved in the *MYRAD* project were more likely to be involved in each area of activity in 1998 than schools not involved with *MYRAD*, but the latter group of schools 'caught up' so that there was no apparent difference in involvement by 2002 and 2003.

Fewer schools were involved with activities focussed on *Standards and Targets*, *Monitoring and Assessment* and *Curriculum Change* than with activities in other areas.

Early activity appeared to be most strongly focussed on the areas of *Home, School and Community Links*, and *Managing the Transition between Primary and Secondary Schools*.

There was some evidence that *MYRP* may have 'triggered' engagement by some schools with a number of key middle years activities in 2001 or 2002 in that there was a modest

increase over and above the underlying trend in reports of engagement between 2000 and 2002 in non-*MYRAD* schools. These areas included *Standards and Targets*, *Monitoring and Assessment*, *Classroom Teaching Strategies*, *School and Class Organisation* and *Leadership and Coordination*.

Activity in virtually all areas increased each year over the five-year period under review (1998-2003). More generally, the pattern of growth in reported engagement in middle years activities by both *MYRAD* and non-*MYRAD* schools suggested a process of 'reinforcement' and 'support' for an evolving trend in interest and concern in middle years reform activities rather than a sharp 'initiation' or 'triggering' of activity by *MYRP*.

Reported Outcomes of *MYRP*

Schools attributed a large number of outcomes to their involvement with *MYRP*. Four outcomes were identified by over 20% of *MYRP* schools. They were:

a. Improvement in literacy for students in general;
b. Improved engagement with school for students in general;
c. Increased awareness and/or improved pedagogical skills for teachers in the area of cognitive or thinking skills;
d. Improved engagement of students in general in areas of the curriculum other than literacy.

Three predominant themes summarised schools' perceptions of the diverse outcomes from *MYRP*. They were:

e. Increased achievement for students in general in the areas of literacy and thinking skills together with increased achievement for students at risk in the area of literacy.
f. Improvements in various aspects of engagement, attendance and retention.
g. Improvement in teaching and pedagogical practices.

A perceived reluctance by some teachers to change; increases in teacher workload from various additional tasks and roles; a feeling that expectations for *MYRP* had not been fully met; and insufficient funding were noted by schools as unexpected negative outcomes or experiences associated with *MYRP*.

'Measured' School-level Outcomes of *MYRP*

The possible impact of *MYRP* on literacy achievement (as measured for individual students against CSF standards), absence rates and apparent retention to Year 11 was examined

using school aggregate data for a group of schools that had not participated in the earlier *MYRAD* program.

Some evidence was found for the anticipated increase in literacy achievement across the first two years of the implementation of *MYRP*, although the effect size of the increase was small and the statistical results equivocal.

Results for absences in Years 7 and 9 were found to follow a trend opposite to that which would indicate a positive impact of *MYRP* in reducing student absence and there was a similar (but statistically non-significant) trend for Year 8.

There was no detectable impact of *MYRP* on apparent retention to Year 11.

An analysis of the relationship between school assertions of an increase in literacy achievement at Year 9 and observed change in school-aggregate literacy levels over the three years of *MYRP*, compared with the three preceding years, showed a trend in the data in the anticipated direction, but the trend was not statistically significant.

Conclusion

The *MYRP* program was characterised by a diverse range of responses by schools.

Disentangling the unique effects of *MYRP* was difficult because it was part of a broader concern with the middle years..

It is our judgement, based upon the data collected for this evaluation, that *MYRP* did have a positive effect in schools. *MYRP* has been associated with positive outcomes for middle years students and teachers. It has also been associated with an increasing in the level of awareness and of activity within schools in dealing with the particular problems of the middle years. Literacy levels and engagement seemed to have improved. Teachers have learned new skills and appear to be more effective.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Background to the Evaluation

The Collaborative Institute for Research, Consulting and Learning in Evaluation (CIRCLE) at RMIT University and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) were commissioned by the Department of Education and Training, Victoria (DE&T) to undertake an evaluation of the Middle Years Reform Program (*MYRP*). The evaluation commenced in February 2004 and the final report was delivered on September 10, 2004.

All Victorian secondary colleges and P-12 schools with students in Years 7-9 received funding under *MYRP* over the three-year period from 2001 to 2003. The program provided 'targeted' finances for schools to employ additional classroom teachers in support of initiatives in the areas of literacy, attendance and the 'thinking curriculum' in the Years 7-9.

Schools were allocated funds on the basis of their Year 7 – 9 enrolments plus a weighting derived from their Special Learning Needs index. There were minimum allocations of $10,000 per year for schools with fewer than 150 full-time equivalent students in Years 7 – 9 and $20,000 for schools with 150 or more such students. DE&T records show that, in 2001, approximately $11.73 million in total was made available to 307 schools under the program. In 2002, approximately $13.95 million was made available to 318 schools and, in 2003, $12.13 million was allocated to 390 schools. These allocations resulted in a median level of funding in 2001 of $36,038 per school. This rose to $36,776 in 2002 and declined to $26,904 in 2003. The number of schools funded under the program increased in 2003 as Special Development and other specialist schools were added to the list. This resulted in an apparent average decrease of about $10,000 per school in 2003, however the average for 304 schools that received funding for each of the three years of the program remained relatively stable (the median funding for these 304 schools was $36,425 in 2001, $37,963 in 2002 and $36,056 in 2003) .

The Middle Years Reform Program was the second in a series of initiatives designed to address the unique challenges posed by the middle years to schools and teachers across Victoria. It followed a more intensive action research project in 62 clusters of secondary and primary schools, the Middle Years Research and Development Project (*MYRAD*) that was conducted during the period 1998-2002. Subsequently, *MYRP* partially overlapped with, and was superseded by a number of new programs including: *Restart*, a program

focussed on improving the literacy skills of 'at risk' students in Year 7; *Access to Excellence*, a program focussed on literacy, numeracy, attendance and retention issues in Years 7-10 in specifically identified schools with high literacy and numeracy needs; and *Schools for Innovation and Excellence*, a program involving clusters of primary and secondary schools and focussed on innovative teaching and learning projects, school organisational reform and developing partnerships with the local community.

Objectives of the Evaluation

The evaluation was conducted, in part, to meet the requirements of the Victorian Government's Expenditure Review Committee that the program be reviewed in 2003.

The general stated objectives of the evaluation were to:

a. Examine the ways in which *MYRP* teachers were utilised in schools;
b. Examine the strategies used by teachers in *MYRP* with regard to student literacy, attendance and retention rates:
c. Examine progress towards specific targets in literacy achievement, attendance and retention;
d. Assess the impact of the additional *MYRP* teachers on student literacy, attendance and retention.

As the evaluation project unfolded, it became apparent that a critical question was whether or not reported and observed changes occurring in schools over the 2001 – 2003 period might be plausibly *attributed* to *MYRP*. From this perspective, the focus of the analysis of outcomes shifted from a concern with assessing whether or not specific targets had been met (objective c, above) to an analysis of the possible impact of *MYRP* on observed outcomes (objective d).

The Middle Years Reform Agenda

> One of the more long-standing unresolved problems for educators has been to establish the conditions that result in all students in early adolescence wanting to pursue productive learning within the school setting and experience success. Research findings focussed on the middle-years (Years 5-9) of schooling reveal a strong pattern of underachievement, and disengagement from school, particularly for boys.[1]

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[1] *Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) Project Executive Summary, February – December 2001.* Centre for Applied Educational Research, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, April, 2002.

The above quotation from the *MYRAD* Executive Summary for 2001 aptly sums up the agenda. Two decades of research into school effectiveness and improvement (see, for example, Scheerens and Bosker, 1997)[2] has provided a strong and comprehensive research base for mapping the general attributes of an effective school. Additionally, more specific research has identified the period of schooling that encompasses Years 5 to 9 as critical for achievement, engagement, attendance and retention of students. A variety of indicators suggest that there is little growth in literacy achievement during these years and a decline in students' enjoyment of schooling and attitudes to school.[3] The challenge has been to design and develop specific strategies for addressing these issues within the context of the widely varying characteristics and needs of different school communities.

One approach has been to build a broad model for school reform from the research base and to encourage schools to develop their own strategic directions and plans of action based on the principles and approaches recommended in the model. The model that underpins the range of middle year reform programs and activities in Victoria has grown out of the work of Peter Hill and colleagues at the Centre for Applied Educational Research (CAER) at the University of Melbourne. Hill and colleagues assembled recommendations for planning and action from the research base in a variety of forms, including: a list of "Habits of Mind" of high-performing schools, a list of "Strategic Intentions" for schools planning to address issues at the middle years, and a set of "General Design Elements" for schools.[4] The last mentioned, presented as the Hill-Crévola general design for a whole-school approach to improvement, appears to have been the most widely disseminated in Victoria. This approach, often called the "Hill-Crévola Model" comprises nine general aspects of schooling that, it is proposed, need to be addressed simultaneously to improve learning outcomes for students. A number of documents that provide brief summaries of aspects of the research base together with the Hill-Crévola model and/or the Habits of Mind and Strategic Intentions are available on the DE&T "Middle Years of Schooling" web sites.[5]

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[2] Scheerens, J., & Bosker, R. (1997). *The Foundations of Educational Effectiveness*. Oxford: Elsevier Science Ltd. (Pergamon)

[3] See, for example, *Redesigning the Middle Years*. Department of Education, Victoria. National Middle Years of Schooling Conference Report, March 1999.

[4] *Perspectives on Education. Teaching and School Effectiveness: Peter Hill*. Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria. 2001.

[5] http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys/index.htm and
http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys/conferences/index.htm
The documents include, particularly:

- *Middle Years of Schooling Overview of Victorian Research 1998-2004;*
- *The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5 – 9* (Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, 1999)*;*
- *Changing the Middle Years: Reflections & Intentions* (Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, 2001)*;*
- *Middle Years of Schooling Conference: Redesigning the Middle Years. Conference Report March 1999;*
- *Perspectives on Education. Teaching and School Effectiveness: Peter Hill;*

Although the authors classify them differently, there is considerable overlap in the content of the Habits of Mind, Strategic Intentions and the Hill-Crévola model. An informal content analysis of these various lists of recommendations suggested that they could be classified under six main themes: system-level reform; school structures, organisation and governance; school leadership; school personnel – development of capacities, understandings and beliefs; curriculum and assessment; and teaching and learning (see Appendix 1). The themes seek to generate a distinctive vision, organisation and pedagogical approach for the middle years. When applied to Years 7 to 9 in secondary schools they involve, broadly speaking:

h. A 'design approach' to reform and a focus on the whole school community;

i. Specialised teachers who use integrative strategies and are all skilled to promote literacy and numeracy;

j. A core curriculum taught by small teams in larger blocks of time than at present that supports sustained thinking and the study of topics in depth;

k. A specific focus on managing the transition from primary to secondary schooling and the development of 'convergent structures' that are neither solely primary or secondary as we now know them;

l. The building up of systems of assessment, monitoring, explicit standards and targets that provide high expectations for student achievement and identification and individualised assistance for students falling behind.

In addition to the documents that outlined various aspects of the approach developed by the CAER team, a PowerPoint presentation was prepared at the commencement of the program for use by Regional Office project teams in their discussions with schools. Information contained in the presentation included:

a. Examples of data on achievement, attitudes towards school and attendance that highlighted the 'dip' in the middle years;

b. State goals and targets for schools;

c. Lists of general principles for action and areas of focus for schools;

d. A time-table of activities to initiate the program;

e. An outline of the action plan that each school was required to develop to design and initiate the program.

The principles for *MYRP* outlined in this presentation were:

f. Flexible and coherent curriculum;Focus for teaching and learning;Clear statements of expectations;Innovation and excellence;Agreed targets in the core areas of literacy and numeracy;Achievement of targets;Developmental needs of young people;Identifying students 'at risk';Additional support for some students.

- Hill, P. W. & Russell, V. J. (1999). *Systemic, whole-school reform of the middle years of schooling.*
- Hill, P. W., Jane, G, Mackay, T., & Russell, V. J. (2000). Victorian Middle Years Research and Development Project (MYRAD).

They were followed in the presentation by a list of "Focus Areas" for schools consisting of:

    a. Strengthening relationships;
    b. Transition;
    c. Student attendance;
    d. Monitoring of achievement;
    e. Curriculum redesign;
    f. School reorganisation;
    g. Pathways;
    h. Professional development;
    i. Accountability.

It is not clear from the available documentation how these two lists in the PowerPoint presentation were derived. They differ in language and style from those prepared by the CAER, although the broad philosophy and implied strategic directions for schools are very similar.

These various recommendations for ways of thinking and strategic action focussed on the middle years of schooling form a comprehensive and wide-ranging set of what might be thought of as 'evidence-based principles' informing the character and direction of school reform. They can be seen as representing a first step in the development of a more comprehensive and action-focussed 'theory of change' for the middle years.

Such a theory of change for the middle years of schooling might involve deriving from these evidence-based principles a set of clearly defined intended outcomes of the reform process, the necessary and sufficient conditions (in relation to both strategy and context) needed to bring about each desired outcome, and the manner in which these individual strategy-context-outcome elements would be sequenced and integrated during implementation. A similar reasoning appears to be implied by the idea of a 'design approach' to whole school change advocated by Hill and colleagues. They suggest that "… the reform of the middle years calls for a response that goes beyond add-on programs".[6] Following developments in the USA it is argued that the focus needs to shift to "… whole school designs that represent deliberate attempts to change the entire ecology of schooling." In these designs " … each of the critical elements of schools and of school systems needs to be identified, those aspects that need to change in order for them to operate effectively and in alignment with all other elements need to be attended to, and each element needs to be redesigned accordingly." Hill and colleagues acknowledge, however, that there has not been an attempt to generate a whole-school design for the Australian context. The "General Design Elements" are proposed as an overarching structure that would inform this design attempt.

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[6] Hill, P. W. & Russell, V. J. *Systemic, whole-school reform of the middle years of schooling.* Centre for Applied Educational Research, University of Melbourne, 1999.

CHAPTER 2: THE EVALUATION APPROACH

Introduction

Mixed-method approaches involving integrated quantitative and qualitative methods were used for the evaluation. The initial evaluation plan proposed the development of a program logic model that would provide an integrating framework for the research by identifying key desired outputs and outcomes of *MYRP*, and the resources and strategies that might be utilised to achieve them. It was anticipated that the logic model would:

    a. Guide the development of specific evaluation criteria and questions;
    b. Support the detailed design of specific research methods (e.g. group and individual interview protocols, the questions to be asked on a planned school questionnaire);
    c. Suggest specific analyses to be carried out on available aggregated school performance data;
    d. Suggest an appropriate approach for investigating the possible impact of the program, based on the best evidence available from both quantitative and qualitative data sources;
    e. Identify the more immediate and short-term outcomes (e.g. student engagement in classroom learning) that might plausibly lead to longer-term outcomes such as literacy gains and retention to Years 11 and 12.

In the event, the multiple, overlapping goals and understandings of the program as presented in the available documentation and discovered by the evaluation team in three initial group consultations resulted in a level of complexity that could not be readily and simply captured by available approaches to building outcomes hierarchies and other logic models.[7] The most concise representation of *MYRP* that could be assembled from the available information was the conception of the program as a broad collection of evidence-based principles described in Chapter 1. It became clear that a major issue for the evaluation was the extent to which the specific activities funded under *MYRP* were linked with, or were indeed possibly continuous across, a range of other funded and un-funded activities focussed on the middle years. The challenge of isolating the impact of *MYRP* on school practices and outcomes from the potential impact of this more general activity became a major methodological challenge for the evaluation.

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[7] For example, Leeuw, F. L. (2003). Reconstructing program theories: Methods available and problems to be solved. *American Journal of Evaluation, 24*, pp. 5-20.

Evaluation Methodology

Data for the evaluation were gathered from five overlapping sources. Some detail is given of each in the sections following.

Document Review

A review of program documentation and supporting research literature was conducted. This material was largely available in the public domain from the DE&T 'Middle Years' and CAER websites.[8]

Preliminary Consultations

Three initial structured group consultations provided reflective, interpretive and evaluative contributions about the program. The groups comprised representatives of regional offices, school principals, and members of school leadership teams familiar with *MYRP*. A broad range of school representatives was sought. Individuals invited to participate were chosen on the basis of advice from the DE&T officer responsible for *MYRP* after consultation with colleagues in Regional Offices. Consultations were held in the following locations:

a. Bendigo. The meeting involved approximately 12 participants from the Central Highlands Wimmera, Loddon Campaspe Mallee and Goulbourn North Eastern Regions;

b. Melbourne. This meeting included approximately 20 representatives from the four Melbourne metropolitan DE&T regions and the Gippsland region;

c. Geelong. This was a specific meeting held with four personnel from the Barwon South Western Regional Office and two schools in the region.

DE&T Outcomes Data

Selected quantitative data that are archived by the student outcomes unit in DE&T relating to literacy achievement, attendance and transition to Yr 11 were provided to the evaluation team. These data consisted of:

a. School average literacy achievement from *MYRP*-only Schools (schools not involved in the earlier *MYRAD* project) for Year 9 over the period 1999 – 2003 (Year 9 was chosen as the focus for the analysis of achievement outcomes in *MYRP*-only schools as it was anticipated that there would be a 'lag' in the possible impact of the program on literacy outcomes and Year 9 students were those who would have had maximum exposure to the program).[9]

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[8] http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys/index.htm;
http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys/conferences/index.htm;
http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/EPM/CAER/

[9] The literacy outcomes data for Year 9 used in this evaluation are based on teacher judgements of individual students against the Literacy strand levels of the Victorian Curriculum and Standards Framework. The teacher

    b.   Recorded absences for each *MYRP*-only school at each of Years 7, 8 and 9 for the period 1999-2002;

    c.   Apparent retention rates from Year 10 to Year 11 for *MYRP*-only schools for the period 1999-2003.

The School Questionnaire

A questionnaire was sent to all Victorian secondary schools with students in Years 7 to 9 with the request that the school principal or nominee respond. The questionnaire was circulated as an e-mail attachment in MSWord format. It was distributed by DE&T on behalf of the evaluation team, but to ensure confidentiality of data it was e-mailed back to a secure address at the ACER. Two reminders, each with the questionnaire attached, followed the initial e-mail request. The questionnaire was distributed to schools on May 18th, 2004 with reminders on the 7th of June and the 21st of June.

The questionnaire contained items requesting information on the following:

    a.   School location and characteristics;

    b.   Activities associated with the middle years conducted at the school over the preceding five years;

    c.   *MYRP* funding levels, involvement with other middle years programs and activities;

    d.   Initial and evolving understandings of the 'key ideas' of *MYRP*;

    e.   Perceived outcomes of *MYRP* in the school, and nature of the evidence that relates the outcome to *MYRP*;

    f.   Additional planned changes and unintended outcomes.

A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2.

The School Case Studies

Six brief follow-up case studies were conducted in purposefully selected *MYRP* schools. The schools were identified from the responses to the school questionnaires to reflect differences in context (e.g. metropolitan/country) and extent of involvement with middle years programs and activities. The case studies involved:

    a.   Individual in-depth interviews with the school principal and members of the school leadership team;

    b.   A group interview with a sample of Year 7-9 staff;

    c.   Informal observation of middle years activities, where possible;

    d.   Analyses of reports, school review and other relevant documentation requested from the school principal.

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judgements are aggregated by schools and archived by DE&T where they provide the data for the 'Like School Groups' (LSG) benchmarks.

Data from the case studies was used to provide:

a. More detailed descriptions of specific strategies developed by schools with *MYRP* funding;

b. Triangulation and validation of preliminary inferences relating to the impact of the program on literacy and engagement outcomes;

c. Preliminary evidence for the mechanisms that might be activated by *MYRP* activities that result in these impacts.

Copies of the interview protocols used with the school administration and for the group interview with teachers are provided in Appendix 3.

Structure of the Report

The chapters of the report that follow are framed around the three main data gathering strategies used for the evaluation: school questionnaire; analysis of DE&T outcomes data; and the school case studies.

Chapter 3 provides a brief description of the schools that responded to the questionnaire while Chapter 4 addresses the question of how schools found out about *MYRP* and what their initial and emerging understandings of the nature of the program were. Chapter 5 describes how *MYRP* funding was allocated to schools and the activities that schools allocated this funding to, while Chapter 6 investigates the broad range of middle years activities undertaken and the changes that may have occurred in the extent of these activities over the five-year period from 1999 to 2003. Finally, in relation to data from the school questionnaire, Chapter 7 describes the important outcomes that schools identified as resulting from *MYRP*.

Chapter 8 describes the results of a series of analyses of the school-level outcome data provided by DE&T. Chapter 9 provides six brief case studies of *MYRP* in selected schools and draws some detailed conclusions about the implementation of the program in these particular school contexts. Finally, Chapter 10 provides an overview of the evaluation findings and draws some general conclusions about the implementation and impact of *MYRP* in Victorian schools.

CHAPTER 3: THE SCHOOL SURVEY DATA

This chapter describes some of the characteristics of the school survey and the schools that responded to it. It also aims to investigate the extent to which these schools were representative of the population of Victorian Government schools, thus providing a sense of the data quality.

Response Rate

As outlined in Chapter 2, an e-mailed questionnaire was sent to all Victorian secondary and primary/secondary schools that had students in grade levels 7 through 9. After removing a small number that did not have year 7 to 9 students and were inadvertently sent the questionnaire, the 'target population' included 307 schools. Two hundred and fifty one replies were received, resulting in an overall response rate of 81.8%. The present analyses are based on questionnaires received from 247 schools (80.5% of the 'target' population) on or before 7th July 2004. Four replies were received too late to facilitate processing.[10]

Distribution of Schools Across Regions

Of the analysed sample of schools, 144 (57.4%) were located in the four Melbourne Metropolitan administrative regions of DE&T while 107 (42.6%) were located in regions encompassing regional and rural Victoria. Comparison against the target population of schools with Year 7 to 9 students indicated that there were slightly lower response rates than average from the Barwon South Western and Loddon Campaspe Mallee regions and slightly higher response rates from the Goulbourn North Eastern and Southern Metropolitan regions. These departures from the average response rate are small, however, and are very unlikely to introduce any significant bias into the conclusions drawn for Victorian secondary schools with students in Years 7-9 as a whole.

Responses from each DE&T region are enumerated in Table 1. They are also shown in Figure 1.

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[10] It was subsequently discovered that one of the 247 schools responded to very few questions in the questionnaire and, in fact, should not have been included in the target population as it had only commenced in 2004. As data from this school were generally coded as 'missing', the presence of the school in the data set made no substantive difference to the majority of the results reported in this and subsequent chapters. When data relating to perceived outcomes from *MYRP* are presented in Chapter 7, however, estimates are made of the proportion of *MYRP* schools reporting a particular outcome. These estimates use 246 as the appropriate number of schools in the sample rather than 247.

Table 1: Questionnaire Respondents by Administrative Region

Region	N of Responses	'Target' Population	Percent Responses
Barwon South Western	21	31	67.7
Central Highlands Wimmera	18	23	78.3
Loddon Campaspe Mallee	24	32	75.0
Goulbourn North Eastern	26	29	89.7
Gippsland	18	21	85.7
Southern Metropolitan	42	47	89.4
Eastern Metropolitan	40	48	83.3
Northern Metropolitan	35	44	79.5
Western Metropolitan	27	32	84.4
Total	**251**	**307**	**81.8**
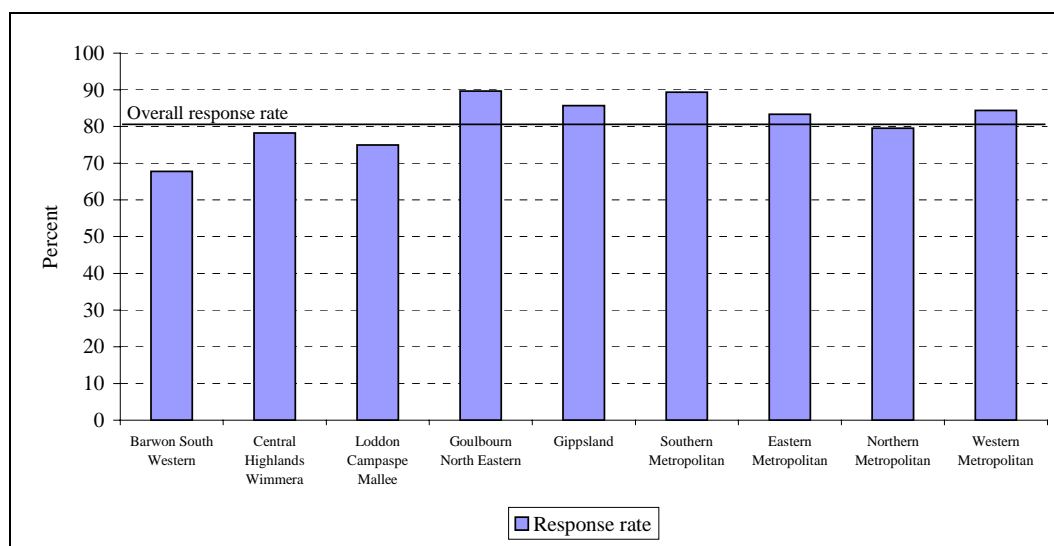
Figure 1: Response Rates from 'In-scope' Schools by Administrative Region

Other Characteristics of the Schools

To provide some additional contextual background to questions related to *MYRP* activities and outcomes, a series of questionnaire items requested more details of the nature of the responding schools:

a. Their current Like School Group;
b. Whether the school had one or more 'special status' designations;
c. Year levels covered and enrolment numbers.

These data are summarised in Table 2 to Table 6 below.

Table 2: Distribution of Responding Schools by Like School Group

Like School Group	N	%	Pop'n %
1	23	9.5	9.7
2	23	9.5	10.4
3O	6	2.5	3.2*
3S	4	1.7	
4	67	27.7	32.0
5	27	11.2	9.4
6	12	5.0	4.2
7	39	16.1	14.6
8	10	4.1	3.6
9	31	12.8	12.9
Total Responding to this Question	**242**		

(*) Includes both 3O and 3S.

The Like School Group (LSG) most commonly represented among the responding schools was Group 4 (Medium EMA, Low LOTE) while Group 7 (High EMA, Low LOTE) was the next most frequently represented. Least likely to be represented among the questionnaire respondents were schools from LSGs 3, 6 and 8 (Low EMA – High LOTE; Medium EMA – High LOTE; High EMA – Medium LOTE). The distribution of LSGs in the population of secondary and primary/secondary schools in 2003 in shown in the last column of Table 2.[11] While the two populations are not exactly equivalent (the present

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[11] Calculated from the data available on the DE&T 'Sofweb' website at
http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/standards/account/likesch.htm

sample of schools is restricted to those with Year 7-9 students) it appears that the sample is not biased in relation to the school LSG (and, by inference, the broad socio-economic and cultural profile of the school population).

Table 3 indicates that 38 of the responding schools (15.6%) had one or more 'special status' designations. Of these, 22 indicated that they had select entry accelerated learning (SEAL) programs, 7 were designated Music schools, 12 VET, 4 Language and 12 'Other'.

Table 3: Schools Indicating None, or One or More Special Status Designations

Special Status Designation	N	%
No Designated Special Status	205	84.4
One of More Special Designations	38	15.6
Total Responding	**243**	

Table 4 summarises aspects of the year levels covered by the surveyed schools. Almost 80% of responding schools covered Years 7 to 12 while 31 (close to 13%) were primary/secondary schools.

Table 4: Year Levels Covered by Responding Schools

Year levels	N	%
7 to 12	194	79.8
7 to 10	7	2.9
P to 12	31	12.8
Other	11	4.4
Total Responding to this Question	**243**	

Table 5 shows the enrolment numbers of the responding schools. Over 70% of schools enrolled under 1,000 students in total while approximately 95% enrolled less than 1,500. Similarly, close to 70% had less that 500 students in Years 7 to 9 and close to 95% had less than 750 in these years (Table 6). Over 50% of responding schools did not enrol fee-paying overseas students while a further 42% had between 1 and 49. A small number of schools (11) enrolled substantial numbers (50 and more) of fee-paying overseas students (Table 7).

Table 5: Total Enrolment of Responding Schools

EFTSU	N	%
0 to 499	88	36.2
500-999	86	35.4
1000-1499	58	23.9
1500-1999	10	4.1
2000 and over	1	0.4
Total Responding to this Question	**243**	

Table 6: Enrolment in Years 7 to 9

EFTSU	N	%
1 to 249	83	36.9
250-499	73	31.3
500-749	61	26.2
750-999	11	4.7
1000 and over	2	0.9
Total Responding to this Question	**233**	

Table 7: Numbers of Fee-Paying Overseas Students

EFTSU	N	%
Nil	106	52.7
1-49	84	41.8
50-99	9	4.5
100 and over	2	1.0
Total Responding to this Question	**201**	

Respondents' Role in the School

The position held by the respondent to the questionnaire is shown in Table 8. It can be seen that well over 50% of the questionnaires were completed by the school Principal and close to 20% by the Middle Years coordinator.

Table 8: Position of Respondent to Questionnaire

Position of Respondent	N	%
Principal	138	58.5
Middle Years Coordinator	45	19.1
Other	53	22.5
Total Responding to this Question	**236**	

Overview

The questionnaire data to be used in this evaluation of *MYRP* appear to be representative of all government schools in Victoria. This is because of the high response rate (greater than 80%), which has given good coverage of all administrative regions, and of each Like School Group. Further, it was demonstrated that there were only small differences between the distribution of the schools that responded to the survey and the 'population' of Victorian secondary and primary/secondary schools in relation to their regional location and Like School Group. Other data show that there is a wide spread of school sizes, types (7 to 12, 7 to 10, P to 12), and overseas student enrolments represented in the data.

Most respondents were either the principal or the Middle Years co-ordinator suggesting that the data came from a source in the school that was familiar with the program and able to retrieve information as required.

CHAPTER 4: HOW SCHOOLS FOUND OUT ABOUT *MYRP* AND THEIR UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE PROGRAM

This chapter addresses the questions:

a. How did schools come to find out about *MYRP* – Through formal communications from DE&T? More diffusely – through 'network' connections, for example? Did knowledge of *MYRP* emerge from previous engagement with a coherent middle years program in place in the school?

b. What were the early and emerging understandings of *MYRP*?

How Schools found out about *MYRP*

Information from the preliminary group discussions suggested that schools found out about *MYRP* in diverse ways. For some schools represented in the discussions the appearance of a line allocating funds to the "middle years of schooling" in the schools' 2001 global budgets was the trigger for finding out more about the program, for others, specific information from DE&T and/or publicity, support and professional development at the regional level were important.

The questionnaire asked schools: *How did your school find out about MYRP?* Schools were asked to describe as fully as they could the initial information they received about the program. The responses were classified into seven categories. The results of this classification are shown in Table 9.

It is apparent that the predominant way that schools found out about *MYRP* was by 'official' notification (memo, circulars, other documentation, e-mail etc.) from DE&T (45.5% of schools). A number of schools that first mentioned DE&T as the source of their information also mentioned sources represented by other categories in Table 9. Only a relatively small proportion initially found out about *MYRP* through the allocation of *MYRP* funding (5.2%). More important were regional networks (almost 14% of schools) and PD workshops and/or conferences (9.5%).

Table 9: Sources of Schools' Initial Information About *MYRP*

Source of Information	N of Schools	% of Schools
DE&T	105	45.5
PD and/or Conferences	22	9.5
Continuation of *MYRAD*	20	8.7
Regional Networks	32	13.9
Funding Received	12	5.2
Don't Know	18	7.8
Other	22	9.5
Total Schools Responding	**231**	

Early and Emerging Understandings of *MYRP*

An open-ended question asked schools: *When your school first implemented MYRP, what did the school believe were the key ideas behind the program?* A two-level hierarchical coding frame was designed to collect and summarise the responses to this question. Firstly, responses were coded by the specific group or activity focussed on in the response. The specific codes used were:

a. Teachers;
b. Students at Risk;
c. Students, generally;
d. Students, specified as boys;
e. Curriculum;
f. Other.

Within these generic categories, each response was also coded according to the specific area of change that was specified. The specific categories used were:

a. Improved engagement;
b. Improved numeracy
c. Improved literacy;
d. Improved student attendance;
e. Improved retention;
f. Improved outcomes, specified generally or across a range of specific areas;
g. Better teaching practices/pedagogies;
h. Easier transition from primary to secondary school;
i. Other.

Table 10 shows the distribution of generic categories, allowing for up to two responses for each school. Two hundred and thirty six schools mentioned one key idea for *MYRP* while 168 mentioned a second key idea. The frequency with which schools mentioned each of the 6 generic categories for these key ideas is shown in the second column of Table 10. It can be seen that most of the key ideas recognised by schools were focussed on *Students in General*. The third column shows the proportion (percent) that this represents of the total number of activities recorded. Column 4 shows the number of schools that recorded this particular key idea (the numbers in this column may be smaller than those in Column 2 as they are 'discounted' for those schools that mentioned a particular generic idea twice). Finally, the fifth column shows this 'net' number of activities as a percentage of the total number of *MYRP* schools that responded to the question.

Table 10: Schools' Perceptions of the Key Ideas Behind *MYRP* – Generic Code

Generic Area of Activity	No of Times Activity Recorded	Percent of Total Activities	N of Schools Recording Activity	Percent of Responding Schools (236)
Teachers	43	10.6	43	18.2
Students at Risk	4	1.0	4	1.7
Students in general	315	78.0	189	76.8
Students, specified as boys	7	1.7	7	3.0
Curriculum	13	3.2	13	5.5
Other	22	5.4	22	9.3
Total	404		278	

The predominant focus of the key ideas recognised by schools for *MYRP* was *Students in General* (78% of the ideas mentioned, while close to 77% of responding schools mentioned *Students in General* at least once in their response). Following in importance were key ideas associated with teachers (10.6% of ideas mentioned by 18.2% of schools). *Students at Risk*, *Boys* specifically and *Curriculum* were mentioned infrequently.

Table 11 shows the way in which the key ideas for *MYRP* were distributed across the categories of the specific codes that were nested within these generic codes.

Table 11: Specific Key Ideas Associated with *MYRP*

Specific Outcome	Teachers		Students – 'At Risk'		Students – General		Students – Boys		Curriculum		Other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Improved Engagement	-	-	-	-	127	40.3	3	42.9	-	-	-	-
Improved Numeracy	-	-	-	-	30	9.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Improved Literacy	-	-	3	75.0	62	19.7	-	-	-	-	-	-
Improved Attendance	-	-	-	-	26	8.3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Improved Retention	-	-	-	-	7	2.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Improved outcomes, specified globally	-	-	-	-	51	16.2	1	14.2	-	-	-	-
Better teaching practices etc.	39	90.7	-	-	-	-	3	-	10	83.3	-	-
Easier transition	-	-	-	-	9	2.9	-	-	-	-	1	50.0
Other	3	9.3	1	25.0	3	1.0	-	-	2	16.7	1	50.0
Total	43		4		315		7		12		2	

Looking at the columns of Table 11 for *Teachers* it can be seen, for example, that 39 or 90.7% of the responses that specified teachers as the focal group further specified that some aspect of *Better Teaching Practice* was involved. Similarly, when *Students in General* were the focal group, 127 (40.3%) of the responses concerned some aspect of *Improved Engagement*. It is possible to use the data from Table 10 and Table 11 to make estimates of the proportions of *MYRP* schools that believed a specific key idea was important for the program. Thus 18.2% of responding schools believed that a key *MYRP* idea involved teachers and 90.7% of these *Teacher* responses were focussed on the idea of better teaching practices and/or pedagogical approaches. From these figures we can estimate that approximately 16.5% of schools (0.182 × 0.907 - expressed as a percentage) believed that the improvement of teaching practices (presumably in the middle years) was a key idea behind *MYRP*. Thus from Table 10 and Table 11 we can estimate that the schools initially believed that the key ideas behind *MYRP* were:

a. Improved engagement with school for students in general (approx. 31% of schools);
b. Improved teaching practices and pedagogies (16.5% of schools);
c. Improved literacy for students in general (approx 15% of schools);
d. Improvements in outcomes for students specified generally (12.4% of schools);
e. Improved numeracy for students in general (7.3% of schools);
f. Improved attendance for students in general (6.4% of schools);
g. Improved curriculum and associated pedagogical practices (4.6% of schools).

These data are presented visually in Figure 2.
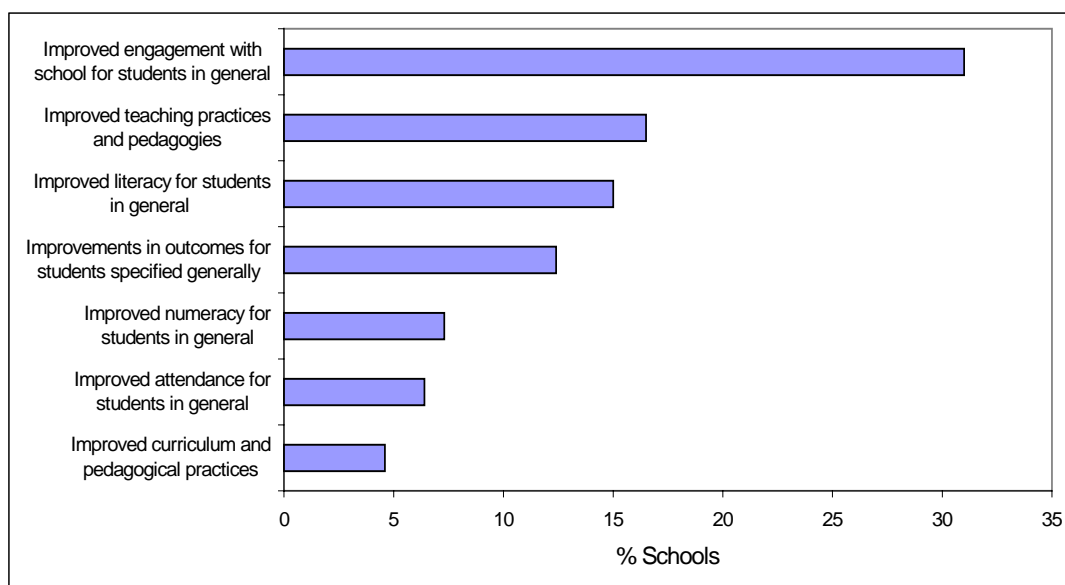
Figure 2: Key Ideas of *MYRP* as Initially Perceived by Schools

Two features of this rank order of 'key ideas' for *MYRP* stand out. Firstly, schools generally perceived *MYRP* in terms of student outcomes or improved teaching and/or pedagogical approaches (which, themselves, were frequently linked to desired student outcomes). Secondly, improved student engagement was the desired outcome most frequently mentioned by schools. Almost twice as many schools specified increased student engagement with school and learning as a key idea of *MYRP* compared with improved teaching practices/pedagogies or improved literacy.

There was little evidence that schools saw the improvement in thinking skills as a key area for the program. A search of the open-ended responses to the question about schools' initial views of the key ideas behind *MYRP* revealed that only 12 schools (5.1% of respondents to the question) mentioned *Thinking* in various ways in their descriptions (e.g. 'thinking curriculum', 'thinking tools', 'thinking skills', 'critical thinking'), always in conjunction with other desired learning outcomes.

Fifty-four schools (22.7% of respondents to the question) indicated that they had changed their views about the key ideas behind *MYRP*. There was a wide range of ideas expressed in response to the follow-up open-ended question that asked these schools what they now believed the key ideas behind *MYRP* were. Unfortunately, a brief section of the report cannot do justice to the diversity and richness of the responses. Following is a brief review of some of the main themes to emerge from an informal analysis.

Some schools 'added to the list' of student outcomes that were being focussed on, indicating a shift in emphasis in their program. Three typical responses of this kind were:

> To continue to develop the above but to also encourage and enhance the students' ability to utilise thinking skills and to provide opportunities and experiences for life long learning.

> As well as addressing the issues of alienation and low literacy, we have focussed on numeracy and attendance.

> Our focus now includes essential learning skills and teaching for understanding.

A number of other responses, however, indicated a development in the schools' thinking beyond single issues such as improving student engagement or literacy towards what might be thought of as more 'holistic' change in approaches to the middle years. Typical comments expressing this and related ideas included the following:

> We've moved from engagement in activity to developing interdependent learning through systems, processes and self-reflection.

> While the issues around the Middle Years are now much wider than Literacy in year 7 the College has used this funding source to continue to resource our work in literacy. We now understand that work in the Middle Years includes pedagogy, environment, assessment, links with home and

community and particularly the significance of the relationship between each teacher and each student.

That learning is a whole of life, whole of school process for staff and students. It's not what we do TO students rather how we ENABLE all learners including staff.

Extension of key ideas as 3 student surveys conducted over time of 5 years to build upon strong peer support, to continue to engage and motivate students within the classroom, but beyond interacting within the community, maintaining depth of co-curricular activities to broaden experiences and cater for differing learning styles. Also focus on pedagogy to engage students.

Whether it was an intended outcome or not, involvement in this program has led to a major reconsideration of the structure and delivery of our whole curriculum. It was through focussing on the issues of student engagement and attendance that we explored issues of adolescent needs, learning styles, and generic skills, leading to a re-evaluation of our programs.

The key idea was to focus on students in the Middle Years and decide the skills and values that we want students to develop and the strategies that we can put in place to enhance these skills. So at the start Literacy and Numeracy testing started the ball rolling and from there via various trials, we have developed our current year 7 learning team approach where we are attempting to create a team approach to all facets of learning. These ideas are in the planning to also develop the program at year 8 in 2005. The school is undertaking further pedagogical change.

Finally, a number of schools expressed a shift in thinking towards increased understanding of the critical role of teachers, innovative teaching strategies and renewed pedagogical practices in promoting engagement and improved learning in the middle years:

As above, although there is now a more sophisticated understanding of the teacher performance variables.

The focus is on improving teacher effectiveness and building better relationships with students.

Our focus now includes essential learning skills and teaching for understanding.

An understanding of the need for pedagogical change in teaching across the middle years 5-9.

Summary and Conclusion

Somewhat less than 50% of schools reported learning about *MYRP* from 'official' DE&T communications (although many in this group mentioned other channels of information as well) while other schools appeared to receive their initial notification and/or information through other means including, particularly, regional networks, professional development seminars or conferences, and as a continuation of their previous work with *MYRAD*.

Predominant among the 'key ideas' that schools perceived underpinned *MYRP* was
improvement in the engagement of middle years students with learning. Improved teaching
and pedagogical practices more generally, improved literacy per se and generally improved
outcomes for middle years' students were also seen by many schools as key ideas.

Somewhat fewer than a quarter of *MYRP* schools indicated that they had changed their
conception of the key ideas behind the program during implementation, suggesting that
over three-quarters of schools retained their initial viewpoints. A broadening conception of
the program to include additional areas for action, a more 'holistic' conception, and a shift
towards an understanding of the key role of teachers and 'pedagogical renewal' were the
main areas of change over the life of *MYRP* that were mentioned.

CHAPTER 5: *MYRP* FUNDING IN THE SCHOOLS – LEVELS AND UTILISATION

This chapter describes how funding was allocated to schools. (These data on funding were taken from the questionnaires and were not obtained from other sources.) It also describes how the schools used the funding.

Funding Levels

The funding received from the Middle Years Reform Program as reported by schools for the period from 2001 to 2003 is shown in Table 12 and Table 13.

A small number of schools believed that they received no funding at all from *MYRP*. These schools are unlikely to be correct in this belief as all schools with students in Years 7, 8 and/or 9 received *MYRP* funding.[12]   This funding was specified in the schools' global budgets under a budget line that read, "middle years of schooling". It is possible that some schools did not recognise that this was *MYRP* funding.

Table 12: Annual Funding from *MYRP* – 2001-2003

Amount of Funding	N of Schools (Percent) 2001	N of Schools (Percent) 2001	N of Schools (Percent) 2001
Zero	6 (2.4%)	5 (2.4%)	8 (3.7%)
Up to $24,999	59 (29.6%)	68 (32.4%)	69 (32.2%)
$25,000 - $49,999	76 (38.2%)	66 (31.4%)	68 (31.8%)
$50,000 - $74,999	44 (22.1%)	53 (25.2%)	54 (25.2%)
$75,000 - $99,999	12 (6.0%)	15 (7.1%)	12 (5.6%)
$100,000 and above	2 (0.8%)	3 (1.4%)	3 (1.4%)
Total Schools Responding	**199**	**210**	**214**

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[12] The exception is the school identified in a previous footnote that had only opened in 2004.

Over 60% of surveyed schools in each of the funding years indicated that they received less than $50,000 from *MYRP* per year (Table 12). Close to 70% received less than $150,000 for the full funding period (Table 13). Conversely, a small proportion of schools (varying between 6.8% and 8.5% depending on the year) reported that they had received over $75,000 per year. Similarly, 5.6% of schools surveyed reported that they had received $250,000 and above for the full three year funding period.

Table 13: Total Funding from *MYRP* – 2001-2003

Total Amount of Funding	N of Schools	% of Schools
Zero	3	1.5
Up to $49,999	35	17.8
$50,000 to $99,999	50	25.4
$100,000 to $149,999	51	25.9
$150,000 to $199,999	36	18.3
$200,000 to $249,999	11	5.6
$250,000 to $299,999	9	4.6
$300,000 and above	2	1.0
Total Schools Responding	**197**	
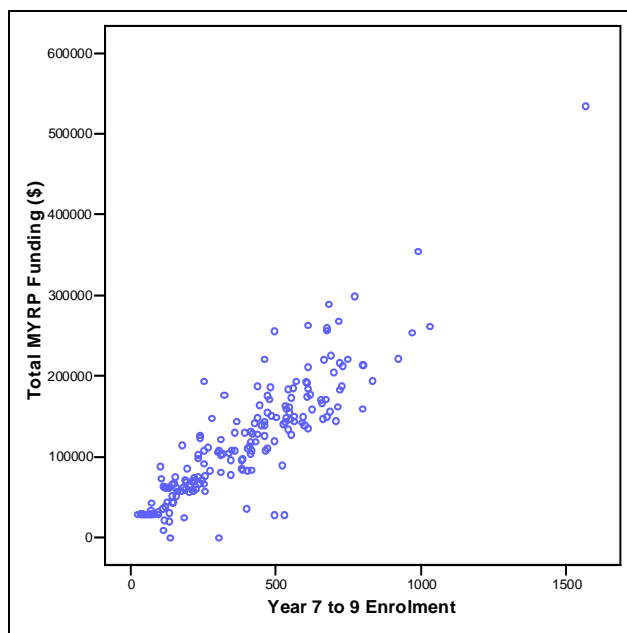
Figure 3: Scatter-plot Showing the Relationship Between 7-9 Enrolments and Total *MYRP* Funding

As outlined in Chapter 1, funding was tied to Year 7 to 9 enrolments in the school. This funding formula is mirrored in the scatter-plot for the relationship between Year 7 to 9 enrolments and total funding received as reported in the survey (Figure 3).

Specific Middle Years Activities to which Funding was Allocated

An open-ended question asked schools, for each of the years 2001, 2002 and 2003: … *on what specific activities did your school allocate the MPRP grant?*

A two-level hierarchical coding frame was designed to summarise the responses to this question. For each year, responses were first classified using a generic area of activity. The categories used were:

a. Provision of staff ('Staffing');
b. Professional development ('PD');
c. Allocation of resources ('Resources');
d. Programs
e. Students at risk;
f. Other.

Within each of these generic categories, each activity was also coded according to the specific area of learning, student activity or administrative function. The specific categories used were:

a. Literacy;
b. Numeracy;
c. Literacy and Numeracy;
d. Student attendance;
e. Co-ordination time (unspecified);
f. Other;
g. Unspecified (i.e. there was no elaboration beyond that allocated to the generic code).

For the year 2001, 192 schools mentioned 290 generic activities; 192 schools mentioned at least one activity and, of these, 98 mentioned a second. The frequency with which schools mentioned these activities is shown in Table 14.

Table 14: Major *MYRP*-funded Activities of Schools in 2001

Generic Area of Activity	No of Times Activity Recorded	Percent of Total Activities	N of Schools Recording Activity	Percent of Responding Schools
Staffing	158	54.4	151	78.6
PD	55	19.0	55	28.6
Resources	6	2.1	6	3.1
Programs	53	18.3	53	27.6
Students at Risk	6	2.1	6	3.1
Other	12	4.1	12	6.3
Total	290		283	

The second column of Table 14 shows the gross number of times a particular activity was mentioned and the third column shows the proportion (percent) that this represents of the total number of activities recorded. Column 4 shows the number of schools that recorded a particular activity (the numbers in this column may be slightly smaller than those in column 2 as they are 'discounted' for those schools that mentioned a particular generic activity twice). Finally, the fifth column shows this 'net' number of activities as a percentage of the total number of *MYRP* schools that responded to this question (192). Similar data are recorded for 2002 in Table 15 (189 schools responded) and for 2003 in Table 16 (184 schools responded). The extent and pattern of reported *MYRP*-funded generic activities across the years 2001 to 2003 are very similar, and the results presented in the three tables are briefly discussed together.

Table 15: Major *MYRP*-funded Activities of Schools in 2002

Generic Area of Activity	No of Times Activity Recorded	Percent of Total Activities	N of Schools Recording Activity	Percent of Responding Schools
Staffing	150	52.1	142	75.1
PD	53	18.4	53	28.0
Resources	8	2.8	8	4.2
Programs	54	18.8	50	26.5
Students at Risk	7	2.4	7	3.7
Other	16	5.6	15	7.9
Total	288		275	

Table 16: Major *MYRP*-funded Activities of Schools in 2003

Generic Area of Activity	No of Times Activity Recorded	Percent of Total Activities	N of Schools Recording Activity	Percent of Responding Schools
Staffing	154	53.5	143	77.3
PD	53	18.4	53	28.6
Resources	7	2.4	7	3.8
Programs	50	17.4	47	25.4
Students at Risk	9	3.1	9	4.9
Other	15	5.2	15	8.1
Total	288		274	

The most frequently reported generic activity recorded was *Staffing*, that is, the schools reported that funding from *MYRP* was allocated to the provision of additional staffing. Allocation of at least some of *MYRP* funding to staffing was recorded by 151 schools (78.6% of those responding to the question) in 2001, by 142 schools (75.1%) in 2002 and by 142 (75.1%) in 2003. *Professional Development* and specific *Programs* were the next most frequently reported categories of *MYRP*-funded activity. Between approximately 25% and 29% of responding schools reported allocating *MYRP* funding to one or other (or, very occasionally, both) of these generic activities. The remaining specifically coded categories were only addressed by small numbers of schools. Between approximately 3% and 5% of schools reported addressing *Students at Risk* or allocating *MYRP* funding to *Resources*. Thus, the predominant *MYRP*-funded allocation was clearly to additional staffing, with professional development and specific programs receiving significant, but lower levels of attention.

Table 17 shows the specific areas that schools focussed on when they allocated some or all of their *MYRP* funding to *Staffing*.[13] The predominant focus was on *Literacy* (59% of those *MYRP* funds allocated to staffing in 2001, 48% in 2002 and 52% in 2003). This area was followed in importance by *Literacy and Numeracy* combined, *Student Attendance* and *Other*. Areas of focus coded *Other* under staffing included a diversity of activities such as employment of learning support staff with responsibility for tracking student progress, teacher release, and enhancement of the role of the form teacher.

There is some evidence that schools diversified the focus of the allocation of their *MYRP* resources to staffing over the period of the program; the number of recorded areas of specific focus increased over this period, while the proportion of *MYRP*-funded staffing

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[13] Note that the unit for analysis here is the response to the generic question within which these specific categories are embedded – not the individual school. As a small number of schools indicated the same generic focus twice, the number of individual responses in this and similar tables may be slightly greater than the number of specific schools replying to the particular question.

resources allocated specifically to literacy decreased somewhat as allocations to one or other of a combination of literacy and numeracy teaching resources, student attendance and co-ordination time increased a little.

Table 17: Specific Focus when *MYRP* Funding Allocated to Staffing

Specific Area of Activity	2001		2002		2003	
	N Activity Focus	**%**	**N Activity Focus**	**%**	**N Activity Focus**	**%**
Literacy	32	59.3	31	48.4	35	52.2
Numeracy	0	-	1	1.6	1	1.5
Literacy & Numeracy	8	14.8	10	15.6	12	17.9
Student Attendance	6	11.1	10	15.6	9	13.4
Co-ordination Time	1	1.9	2	3.1	2	3.0
Other	7	13.0	10	15.6	8	11.9
Total Activities	54		64		67	

Taking a similar perspective, Table 18 and Table 19 show the specific focus of *MYRP*-funded activity when the generic allocation was to *Professional Development* and *Programs* respectively. Different patterns of specific focus compared with those when the generic allocation was to staffing are evident here.

Table 18: Specific Focus when *MYRP* Funding Allocated to Professional Development

Specific Area of Activity	2001		2002		2003	
	N Activity Focus	**%**	**N Activity Focus**	**%**	**N Activity Focus**	**%**
Literacy	4	19.0	5	26.3	3	17.6
Numeracy	1	4.8	1	5.3	1	5.9
Literacy & Numeracy	2	9.5	0	-	1	5.9
Student Attendance	0	-	0	-	0	-
Co-ordination Time	5	23.8	3	15.8	3	17.6
Other	9	42.9	10	52.6	9	52.9
Total Activities	21		19		17	

Table 19: Specific Focus when *MYRP* Funding Allocated to Programs

Specific Area of Activity	2001		2002		2003	
	N Activity Focus	**%**	**N Activity Focus**	**%**	**N Activity Focus**	**%**
Literacy	10	30.3	11	30.6	10	31.3
Numeracy	2	6.1	0	-	0	-
Literacy & Numeracy	1	3.0	2	5.6	4	12.5
Student Attendance	0	-	1	2.8	0	-
Co-ordination Time	0	-	1	2.8	0	-
Other	20	60.6	21	58.3	18	56.3
Total Activities	33		36		32	

The *Other* category was most frequently coded for both these generic allocations. Specific examples of *Other* activities include, for *Professional Development*: "PD for teaching and learning", "PD with primary teachers", "thinking Curriculum (whole of school PD)" and "Deakin University PD for all Junior Campus Staff". For *Programs*, responses coded as *Other* included "Leadership and intervention programs", allocation to middle-years elective programs, and a "Table Small Groups program".

The next most frequently specified specific focus was on *Literacy*. Roughly one quarter of *MYRP* funding allocated to *Professional Development* was focussed on *Literacy*, whereas roughly one-third of any *Programs* funding was similarly focussed. Some professional development allocations were applied to *Co-ordination* while a small amount of program activity was focussed jointly on *Literacy and Numeracy*.

Summary

While 'engagement' appeared to be the key idea schools, for the most part, recognised for the program (Chapter 4) most allocated their *MYRP* funding to staffing, and more specifically, to staffing of literacy programs or activities ('staffing', even 'staffing in literacy', and 'engagement' are not necessarily contradictory conceptions as one can be seen as a strategy to achieve the other). Other key areas to which *MYRP* funding was allocated included staffing for literacy *and* numeracy, staffing for student attendance activities, professional development for literacy, coordination time and programs for literacy. Thus 'staffing' and 'literacy' appeared to be the predominant focus for the allocation of *MYRP* resources by schools. The next chapter considers this *MYRP*-funded activity within the context of other middle years developmental work that schools might have been involved in.

CHAPTER 6: MORE GENERAL MIDDLE YEARS ACTIVITY

One of the most important methodological challenges posed by this evaluation was to distinguish, if possible, the impact that *MYRP* may have had, specifically, on school processes and outcomes from more general and possibly on-going activities in the school in relation to the middle years. Activities in this latter category may have been the result of the schools' involvement in a prior program focussed on the middle years of schooling (in particular, the Middle Years Reform and Development Program – *MYRAD*), 'diffusion' of ideas and motivations from *MYRAD* schools into non-*MYRAD* schools, or activities that had been developed from ideas generated within the particular school itself.

Our initial consultations with regional office and school personnel had suggested, similarly, that there may have been, in effect, two *MYRP* programs in schools: (a) a program specifically funded under *MYRP*; and (b) a broader program that implemented middle years reform values, 'target' areas for action, and strategies that had been encouraged by specific professional development activities in relation to the middle years and/or the more general climate of interest and concern in this area. This broader program may have been 'enabled', 'reinforced', or 'legitimated' by *MYRP*, but not specifically 'activated' by it.

To attempt to gain some insights into this possible evolution of a focus on the middle years of schooling and to isolate evidence for a more specific impact of *MYRP*, two questions were devised. One asked schools to indicate which of a list of 11 specified middle years programs the school had been involved in *over the previous five years*. The other asked schools to indicate, for 10 specific *areas of middle years reform activity*, whether there had been activity in each specified area, and for what specific years across the period 1999 to 2003 this activity had occurred.

Table 20 and Table 21 show the responses to the first mentioned question. The results suggest that many schools had been involved in multiple programs focussed on the middle years over the preceding five years. Just over 55% of responding schools indicated, for example, that they had been involved in between 3 and 5 particular programs in addition to *MYRP*, while approximately 30% had been involved in two or fewer additional programs and 14% reported involvement in 6 or more programs (Table 20). The number of schools involved in each specific middle years program varied markedly, however (Table 21).

Programs other than *MYRP* involving large numbers of schools included *Middle Years Literacy Training*, *Middle Years Numeracy Training*, *Schools for Innovation and Excellence*, and *Access to Excellence*. Programs involving relatively small numbers of schools included the *Middle*

Years Numeracy Research Project, the *Middle Years Literacy Research Project*, and the *Middle Years Pedagogy Research and Development Pilot* (*MYPRAD*). It should be noted that the knowledge of past and present involvement in this range of programs possessed by the respondent to the questionnaire may not have been completely accurate. For example, 70 schools (28.3% of those responding schools) reported involvement in *MYRAD*. DE&T records indicate that only 68 secondary or primary/secondary schools were, in fact, involved in *MYRAD*.[14]

Table 20: Number and Percentage of Schools Reporting Involvement in Middle Years Programs Other than *MYRP*

N of Programs Other than *MYRP*	N of Schools	% of Schools
0	15	6.1
1	21	8.4
2	38	15.4
3	51	20.6
4	57	23.1
5	30	12.1
6	23	9.3
7	8	3.2
8	2	0.8
9	2	0.8
10-12	Nil	
Total	247	

To gain an overview of the range of activities schools were involved in that related to the middle years of schooling and to attempt to isolate any specific impact of *MYRP* on these activities, schools were asked to respond to a complex question in which 10 specific *Middle Years Reform Activities* were listed. They were first asked to indicate (*No* or *Yes*) whether activities in this category had been undertaken in the school in the period 1999 to 2000 and, subsequently, to indicate in which particular years the activity had been undertaken. Schools were also given the opportunity to indicate in more detail the nature of the particular activity undertaken. Results from the first two parts of this question are described and discussed below. The data are presented separately for those schools that reported involvement in *MYRAD* and those that did not report involvement. Tests of the statistical significance of the differences between *MYRAD* and non-*MYRAD* schools are presented where appropriate.

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[14] Personal communication, DE&T. The 2002 Executive Summary of the *MYRAD* project indicates that there were 61 clusters of schools in MYRAD, constituted from 61 secondary colleges and 195 primary schools. Presumably there was a small amount of movement of secondary schools in and out of the program over its duration.

Table 21: Number and Percentage of Schools Reporting Involvement in Each Specific Middle Years Program Other than *MYRP*

Middle Years Program	N of Schools	% of Schools
Middle Years Research and Development (*MYRAD*)	70	28.3*
Middle Years Literacy Research Project	21	8.5
Middle Years Literacy Training	160	64.8
Successful Interventions in Literacy Research Project	51	20.6
Middle Years Numeracy Research Project	16	6.5
Middle Years Numeracy Training	143	57.9
Access to Excellence	100	40.5
Restart	81	32.8
Schools for Innovation and Excellence	151	61.1
Middle Years Pedagogy Research & Development (MYPRAD) Pilot	41	16.6
Student Action Teams Pilot	19	7.7
Other	34	13.8

*Note: Percentages total to more than 100.0 as schools could be involved in more than one additional program.

Involvement in activities around *Standards and Targets*, *Monitoring and Assessment* and *Curriculum Change* was reported less frequently than involvement in these other listed areas. Involvement in activities related to *Standards and Targets* was the only area of reported middle years reform activity where there was a significant difference between *MYRAD* and non-*MYRAD* schools. Schools that reported pervious involvement with the *MYRAD* program more frequently reported activity in this area.

Table 22 shows the overall level of reported involvement in the 10 listed middle years reform activities. Involvement in 7 of the 10 listed areas was, with one minor exception, reported by over 90% of the responding schools. These activities involved:

    a. Classroom teaching strategies;
    b. Teacher professional development;
    c. School and class organisation;
    d. Intervention and special assistance;
    e. Home, school and community links;

f. Leadership and coordination; and

g. Managing the transition between primary and secondary schooling.

Involvement in activities around *Standards and Targets*, *Monitoring and Assessment* and *Curriculum Change* was reported less frequently than involvement in these other listed areas. Involvement in activities related to *Standards and Targets* was the only area of reported middle years reform activity where there was a significant difference between *MYRAD* and non-*MYRAD* schools. Schools that reported pervious involvement with the *MYRAD* program more frequently reported activity in this area.

Table 22: Number and Percentage (in parentheses) of *MYRAD* and Other Schools Reporting Middle Years Reform Activity in a Particular Area

Field of Activity	*MYRAD*	Other
Standards and Targets	50 (73.5%)	99 (56.3%)*
Monitoring and Assessment	50 (73.5%)	137 (78.3%)
Classroom Teaching Strategies	68 (97.1%)	171 (97.2%)
Teacher Professional Development	67 (95.7%)	164 (92.7%)
School and Class Organisation	64 (91.4%)	154 (87.0%)
Intervention and Special Assistance	65 (92.9%)	166 (94.3%)
Home, School and Community Links	64 (92.8%)	170 (96.0%)
Leadership and Coordination	65 (94.2%)	166 (93.8%)
Curriculum Change	53 (76.8%)	126 (72.0%)
Managing Transition Between Primary & Secondary	67 (97.1%)	162 (92.0%)

* = pr<0.05 that the number of schools reporting involvement in each specified activity differs between *MYRAD* and Other schools.

Table 23 presents a different perspective on the responses to this question of overall involvement. It shows the number of listed activities (not including *Other*) that schools reported involvement in. It can be seen that school involvement in middle years reform activity was spread widely across many areas. Just over 90% of responding schools reported involvement in between 7 and 10 areas of reform activity. The 'spread' of activities did not differ significantly between *MYRAD* and non-*MYRAD* schools.

Table 23: Number and Percentage (in parentheses) of *MYRAD* and Other Schools Reporting Varying 'Coverage' of Listed Middle Years Reform Activities

N of Activities	*MYRAD*	Other	Total
0	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.4%)
1	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.4%)
3	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.1%)	2 (0.8%)
4	2 (2.9%)	1 (0.6%)	3 (1.2%)
5	1 (1.4%)	2 (1.1%)	3 (1.2%)
6	3 (4.3%)	7 (4.0%)	10 (4.0%)
7	7 (10.0%)	19 (10.7%)	26 (10.5%)
8	9 (12.9%)	31 (17.5%)	40 (16.2%)
9	19 (27.1%)	60 (33.9%)	79 (32.0%)
10	29 (41.4%)	53 (29.9%)	82 (33.2%)

Note: The pattern of apparent differences in the distribution of numbers of reported activities between *MYRAD* and Other schools is not statistically significant.

Table 24 and Figure 4 present the results when schools were asked to indicate the specific years (1999 through 2003) that each of the 10 nominated areas of middle year reform activity had been conducted in. The following observations can be made about the patterns of responses in these data:

1. There was an increase each year over the five year period in the number of schools undertaking activity in most areas, the exceptions are a small drop in the number of *MYRAD* schools reporting involvement in *Standards and Targets*, *Classroom Teaching Strategies* and *Managing the Transition between Primary and Secondary Schools* in 2003.

2. More *MYRAD* than non-*MYRAD* schools reported involvement in each area of reform activity in 1999, most but not all of these differences are statistically significant (Table 24). There are no apparent differences, however, in middle years reform-related activities between *MYRAD* and non-*MYRAD* schools in the later years of the period under review (this observation is confirmed by the pattern of statistical significance reported in Table 24, there are a number of significant differences, indicating more involvement by *MYRAD* schools, for 1999, 2000 and 2001 but no significant differences in reported involvement in 2002 and 2003).

3. As reported above, there are fewer schools involved with activities associated with *Standards and Targets*, *Monitoring and Assessment* and *Curriculum Change* than with activities in other areas.

4. Relatively more widespread early activity was reported in the areas of *Home, School and Community Links*, and *Managing the Transition between Primary and Secondary Schools* than in other areas (more than 40% of *MYRAD* and non-*MYRAD* schools were engaged in activities under these headings in 1999). These areas did not, however, engage the most schools in 2003.

5. Finally, there is some evidence that *MYRP* may have generated engagement with some specific areas of middle years activity in schools that were not previously engaged. There appears to be an increase over and above the underlying trend in reports of engagement between 2000 and 2002 in non-*MYRAD* schools in the areas of *Standards and Targets*, *Monitoring and Assessment*, *Classroom Teaching Strategies*, *School and Class Organisation* and *Leadership and Coordination*. The more general pattern in the results, however, suggests a process of 'reinforcement' and support for an evolving trend in interest and concern in middle years reform activities rather than a sharp 'initiation' or 'triggering' of activity by *MYRP*.

Table 24: Number and Percentage of *MYRAD* and Other Schools Reporting Middle Years Reform Activity in Nominated Areas for Each Year from 1998 to 2003 (N = 244)

Field of Activity	Year	*MYRAD*	Other	Total
Standards and Targets	1999	19 (27.9%)	27 (15.3%)	46 (18.9%)*
(N = 244)	2000	34 (50.0%)	36 (20.5%)	70 (28.7%)*
	2001	45 (66.2%)	70 (39.8%)	115 (47.1%)*
	2002	45 (66.2%)	80 (45.5%)	125 (51.2%*)
	2003	41 (60.3%)	81 (46.0%)	122 (50.0%)*
Monitoring and	1999	17 (25.0%)	22 (12.6%)	39 (16.0%)*
Assessment	2000	27 (39.7%)	45 (25.7%)	72 (29.6%)*
(N = 243)	2001	35 (51.5%)	77 (44.0%)	112 (46.1%)
	2002	38 (55.9%)	100 (57.1%)	138 (56.9%)
	2003	40 (58.8%)	102 (58.3%)	142 (58.4)
Classroom Teaching	1999	23 (32.9%)	38 (21.6%)	61 (24.8%)*
Strategies	2000	33 (47.1%)	59 (33.5%)	92 (37.4%)*
(N=246)	2001	48 (68.6%)	113 (64.2%)	161 (65.4%)
	2002	62 (88.6%)	144 (81.8%)	206 (83.7%)
	2003	59 (84.3%)	154 (87.5%)	213 (86.6%)
Teacher Professional	1999	24 (34.3%)	44 (24.9%)	68 (27.5%)
Development	2000	35 (50.0%)	64 (36.2%)	99 (40.1%)*
(N=247)	2001	43 (61.4 %)	102 (57.6%)	145 (58.7%)
	2002	59 (84.3%)	131 (74.0%)	190 (76.9%)
	2003	61 (87.1%)	149 (84.2%)	210 (85.0%)
School and Class	1999	25 (35.7%)	41 (23.2%)	66 (26.7%)*
Organisation	2000	39 (55.7%)	65 (36.7%)	104 (42.1%)*
(N=247)	2001	50 (71.4%)	104 (58.5%)	154 (62.3%)*
	2002	54 (77.1%)	127 (71.8%)	181 (73.3%)
	2003	57 (81.4%)	140 (79.1%)	197 (79.8%)
Intervention and Special	1999	26 (37.1%)	61 (34.7%)	87 (35.4%)
Assistance	2000	40 (57.1%)	87 (49.4%)	127 (51.6%)
(N=246)	2001	60 (85.7%)	125 (71.0%)	185 (75.2%)*
	2002	60 (85.7%)	154 (87.5%)	214 (87.0%)
	2003	60 (85.7%)	159 (90.3%)	219 (89.0%)
Home, School and	1999	35 (50.7%)	71 (40.1%)	106 (43.1%)
Community Links	2000	45 (65.2%)	90 (50.8%)	135 (54.9%)*
(N=246)	2001	56 (81.2%)	126 (71.2%)	182 (74.0%)
	2002	59 (85.5%)	149 (84.2%)	208 (84.6%)
	2003	59 (85.5%)	161 (91.0%)	220 (89.4%)
Leadership and Coordination	1999	26 (37.7%)	34 (19.2%)	60 (24.4%)*
(N=246)	2000	37 (53.6%)	65 (36.7%)	102 (41.5%)*
	2001	52 (75.4%)	111 (62.7%)	163 (66.3%)*
	2002	54 (78.3%)	139 (78.5%)	193 (78.5%)
	2003	61 (88.4%)	160 (90.4%)	221 (89.8%)
Curriculum Change	1999	11 (15.9%)	22 (12.6%)	33 (13.5%)
(N=244)	2000	23 (33.3%)	42 (24.0%)	65 (26.6%)
	2001	36 (52.2%)	63 (36.0%)	99 (40.6%)*
	2002	46 (66.7%)	97 (55.4%)	143 (58.6%)
	2003	49 (71.9%)	116 (66.3%)	165 (67.6%)
Managing Transition	1999	38 (55.1%)	86 (48.9%)	124 (50.6%)
Between Primary &	2000	48 (69.6%)	99 (56.3%)	147 (60.0%)*
Secondary	2001	59 (85.5%)	126 (71.6%)	185 (75.5%)*
(N=245)	2002	63 (91.3%)	146 (83.0%)	209 (85.3%)
	2003	62 (89.9%)	151 (85.8%)	213 (86.9%)

* = pr<0.05 (one-sided exact test) that the frequency of reported activities is higher in *MYRAD* than Other schools.

Standards and Targets
MYRAD Schools

Standards and Targets
Other Schools

Monitoring and Assessment
MYRAD Schools

Monitoring and Assessment
Other Schools

Classroom Teaching Strategies
MYRAD Schools

Classroom Teaching Strategies
Other Schools

Teacher Professional Development

MYRAD Schools

Teacher Professional Development

Other Schools

School and Class Organisation

MYRAD Schools

School and Class Organisation

Other Schools

Intervention and Special Assistance

MYRAD Schools

Intervention and Special Assistance

Other Schools

Home, School and Community Links
MYRAD Schools

Home, School and Community Links
Other Schools

Leadership and Coordination
MYRAD Schools

Leadership and Coordination
Other Schools

Curriculum Change
MYRAD Schools

Curriculum Change
Other Schools

Figure 4: Graphs of the Percentages of all *MYRAD* and Non-*MYRAD* Schools by Participation in a Nominated Middle Years Reform Area and the Year(s) the Activity was Conducted

Summary and Conclusions

There are currently a considerable number of DE&T programs offering support to schools for initiatives in the middle years of schooling. These initiatives commenced with the Middle Years Research and Development project (*MYRAD*) that involved 68 secondary schools in the period 1998/99 to 2001. The *MYRAD* project was followed by *MYRP* in 2001 to 2003 and, subsequently by a range of other programs that typically commenced in 2003 or 2004. The *MYRP* thus 'bridges' between the more intensive *MYRAD* project on the one hand, and a number of other similarly intensive and/or tightly focussed middle years initiatives on the other. In 2004, schools reported having been involved in up to nine middle years programs other than *MYRP* (including *MYRAD*). Most typically, schools were involved in four programs in addition to *MYRP* but the range was considerable; a small number of schools (6% approximately) were not involved in any program other than *MYRP*, whereas a similarly small number (12, or 4.8%) reported involvement in seven, eight or nine additional programs.

An attempt was made to 'map' the middle years activity that may have been directly or indirectly related to this array of programs by requesting schools to indicate and describe the extent of their middle years initiatives across the years 1999 to 2003. By 2003 over 90% of *MYRP* schools (with one minor exception) reported having been involved in each of seven pre-specified areas of middle years activities at some time over this five-year period. These activities included: classroom teaching strategies; teacher professional development; school and class organisation, intervention and special assistance; home, school and

community links, leadership and coordination; and managing transition between primary and secondary schooling. Fewer schools reported involvement in monitoring and assessment activities (approx. 77%), curriculum change (approx. 73%) and initiatives involving standards and targets (approx 62%). In 2003, each of the seven areas initially listed above attracted activity from over approximately 80% of schools or more. Again, curriculum change (67.6% of schools in 2003), monitoring and assessment (58.4%) and standards and targets (50.0%) were less frequently addressed.

Schools that had been previously involved with *MYRAD* more frequently reported involvement in each of these 10 areas of activity in 1999 compared with schools that had not been involved with *MYRAD*, although a significant level of involvement (between approx. 13% and 49% of schools) in each was reported by 'non-*MYRAD*' schools. The highest level of this early engagement with an issue in non-*MYRAD* schools was reported to be in the area of managing the transition between primary and secondary schooling.

By 2003, however, the non-*MYRAD* schools had reached very similar levels of activity. There was also some evidence in 5 of the areas of activity that *MYRP* may have generated activity in schools that may not have otherwise become engaged with that activity (in that there was an increase in the number of schools that reported involvement in non-*MYRAD* schools that appeared to be above the underlying trend).

CHAPTER 7: THE PERCEIVED OUTCOMES

OF *MYRP*

A series of 'open-ended' items on the school questionnaire asked respondents to describe the major outcomes resulting from *MYRP* in their schools in relation to:

- Learning outcomes in the area of literacy;
- Learning outcomes in other areas of the curriculum;
- Student development of cognitive skills;
- Attendance and retention;
- Student engagement.

The responses were coded to two levels. The first, more general or generic level indicated a broad outcome, typically identifying the group of individuals or the activity for which the outcome was described. Attached to the generic code was a second, more specific code. This provided a more detailed account of the generic outcome, typically in relation to the nature of the achievement represented in the description.

For example, the following generic categories were developed for the question asking about outcomes of *MYRP* related to *Student Learning in the Area of Literacy*:

a. Teachers;
b. Students in general;
c. Students at risk[15];
d. Students specifically identified as boys;
e. Program development and/or implementation;
f. Other.

A frequency count across these categories can thus tell us how many schools reported outcomes related to these broad groups and activities. This then leads to such questions as: "What were the outcomes achieved by teachers?" To answer this question, the more specific level of coding was used. Thus for the question relating to student learning in literacy, the following specific categories were developed:

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[15] 'Students at risk' was defined very broadly for the purposes of coding here and in analyses of other outcomes. Frequently schools simply used variations of the phrase itself when discussing literacy outcomes. In other responses the 'students at risk' category was used when the school indicated that a 'targeted' group of lower achievers in literacy was being discussed. Phrases used included 'identified students', 'students with low literacy skills', 'students with low levels (of literacy)' and 'students in the lowest groups'. Additionally the context of the response indicating selective or 'targeted' intervention was sometimes used to code the outcome as being for 'students at risk'.

    a. Improved knowledge (including, for teachers, their knowledge of pedagogical practices and of student achievement gained from monitoring and assessment);

    b. Innovation in literacy pedagogies, improved teaching strategies;

    c. Improved literacy;

    d. Greater engagement, participation and/or confidence;

    e. Improved targeting of specific students;

    f. Improved attendance;

    g. A specific statement that the literacy outcome was not known; and

    h. Retention.

After trialing the coding frames that were developed in this way it was found necessary to code up to two outcome statements for each question into both the generic and specific coding categories. Allowing for two outcomes for each question enabled the majority of the prominent outcomes statements made by schools to be classified and counted. This approach using generic and specific coding frames and allowing for each to be applied twice maximized accuracy in the coding while giving considerable flexibility to the analysis and helping to preserve much of the richness in these data.[16]

Student Learning in the Area of Literacy

The categories used to code responses to the outcomes question that was focussed specifically on *Literacy* were given as the example in the section above. Table 25 shows the distribution of responses that were coded in the first, generic dimension of the coding frame. The second and third columns in Table 25 show the number and proportion of statements that were coded into each particular category. As up to two statements in each response were coded, however, this approach can lead to 'double counting' of schools (i.e. schools will be counted twice if they reported two outcomes coded to the same generic category). The fourth column corrects the frequencies in the second column for this double counting and thus indicates the number of schools reporting either one or two outcomes for a particular group or activity. The final column shows the proportion of the 246 *MYRP* schools that reported this outcome at least once (i.e. the counts in the previous column are presented as a proportion of 246 schools). This final column thus provides an estimate of the proportion of Victorian secondary and primary/secondary schools with

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[16] The coding frame was developed and applied by ACER Project Services in consultation with the evaluation team. It should be noted that there were not sufficient resources available to conduct a formal check on the reliability of the coding using more than one coder. Informal checks suggested that the coding was reliable. Many statements were complex, however, and might be given more than one interpretation. Hence the results should be interpreted with the caveat in mind that there was not a formal assessment of inter-rater reliability in relation to application of the coding frames.

years 7 to 9 students who believed that they had achieved this particular major outcome for *MYRP*.[17]

Table 25: Perceived Outcomes – Student Learning in Literacy

Generic Outcome Field	No of Times Outcome Recorded	Percent of Total Outcomes	N of Schools Recording Outcome At Least Once	Percent of *MYRP* Schools Recording Outcome
Teachers	78	24.3	72	29.3
Students – 'At Risk'	63	19.6	61	24.8
Students – General	113	35.2	99	40.2
Students – Boys	5	1.6	5	2.0
Programs	55	17.1	53	21.5
Other	7	2.2	7	2.8
Total	321		297	

From Table 25 it can be seen that schools reported outcomes associated with literacy most frequently for *Students in General* (35.2% of the outcomes statements made in response to the request to identify outcomes associated with student learning in the area of literacy, and, correspondingly, 40.2% of schools). Outcomes for *Teachers*, *Students at Risk*, and outcomes in relation to the development and/or implementation of *Programs* were also reported quite frequently. These outcomes represented 24.3%, 19.6% and 17.1% of the outcomes statements respectively, and were reported by 29.3%, 24.8% and 21.5% of schools. There were few reports of outcomes for male students specifically or in *Other* categories.

Table 26 shows a breakdown of responses to this question as coded into the second, specific dimension of the coding frame and nested within responses coded according to the generic dimension. Thus it can be seen in the first row and column of data in the table, for example, that of those outcome statements that were concerned with *Teachers*, 34 or 44.2% of the statements concerned *Increased Knowledge*, including knowledge derived from assessment. Similarly, in the third column of data, it can be seen that, of those outcome statements concerned with *Students in General*, 83 or 74.8% were specifically concerned with improved *Literacy*.

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[17] As there were five questions that enquired about "major" outcomes for *MYRP* and as up to two outcomes were coded for each question, these proportions will, overall, total to considerably more than 100%. They do, however, provide a clear indication of the relative ordering of schools' perceptions of the impact of *MYRP* across the target areas of student learning in literacy and other areas of the curriculum, cognitive skills, attendance and retention, and engagement.

Table 26: Specific Outcomes Associated with Student Literacy

Specific Outcome	Teachers		Students – 'At Risk'		Students – General		Students – Boys		Programs		Other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Improved Knowledge (incl. of assessment)	34	44.2	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-
Innovative literacy pedagogies etc.	35	45.5	0	-	0	-	1	25.0	1	6.7	0	-
Improved Literacy	0	-	43	72.9	83	74.8	2	50.0	12	80.0	0	-
Greater Engagement etc.	0	-	3	5.1	19	17.1	1	25.0	0	-	0	-
Improved Targeting of Specific Students	2	2.6	9	15.3	0	-	0	-	2	13.3	0	-
Improved Attendance	3	3.9	0	-	7	6.3	0	-	0	-	0	-
Literacy Outcome not Known	0	-	4	6.8	2	1.8	0	-	0	-	1	100.0
Retention	0	-	3	5.1	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-
Other	3	3.9	0	-	1	0.9	0	-	0	-		
Total	77		59		111		4		15		1	

In those statements that identified *Students in General*, the most frequently reported specific outcome was improved literacy per se (74.8% of responses – see Table 26). Issues classified as *Greater Engagement, Participation and/or Confidence* were also frequently mentioned (17% of relevant responses). Thus increased literacy for students in general was identified by approximately 30% of schools as among the major outcomes of *MYRP* (75% of the 40% that identified *Student in General* as a salient outcome group). Similarly, increased engagement, participation and/or confidence in relation to literacy were identified as major outcomes by approximately 7% of schools.

Typical comments that were coded as indicating an increase in literacy per se for students in general included:

> CSF data indicates (a) rise in (the) number of Year 8 and 10 students at or above expected CSF levels.

> This year's Triennial Review points out that there has been a noticeable improvement in students' literacy levels.

And, more circumspectly:

> Percentage of Year 8 students at Level 5 (Established) or better has decreased in 2001 when compared to 2000. Reading down from 74% to 69%, Speaking and Listening down from 74% to 69%, Writing down from 74% to 56%. Perhaps our aim of a 5% increase each year was too optimistic in the short term. CSF mean data seems to suggest a slight improvement over the two years. Bridging the Gap data suggests an average improvement of 10 months in students Reading and Spelling Ages for those students involved in the program.

Comments in relation to engagement, participation and confidence included:

> Increased student engagement through enhanced learning activities in the middle years English classes.

> Students feeling more confident about their learning/literacy.

In the statements that identified *Teachers* as a salient group in relation to literacy outcomes, approximately 46% reflected the belief that *Better Teaching Strategies* were the result, while 44% of responses indicated that *Improved Knowledge* (including knowledge of assessment) resulted. Thus approximately 13% of schools identified better teaching strategies in relation to literacy learning as a major outcome of *MYRP* while another 13% identified improved knowledge in relation to literacy learning as a major outcome.

The following two quotations are typical of those made about teaching strategies and teacher knowledge respectively:

> We have developed a Whole School Approach to the teaching of Literacy.
> Grouping students by ability has been a very successful strategy at the

> school. Providing teacher aide support and having smaller classes for at risk students has been an advantage.
>
> Teachers across KLAs shared and developed knowledge of a variety of classroom strategies and use of resources and teaching activities to maximise student understanding; increased awareness of the need to support and develop literacy skills of all students across the curriculum; focus on development of learning programs for students at risk;

Finally, in those statements that identified *Students at Risk* in relation to literacy outcomes, approximately 73% specified *Improved Literacy* per se as the outcome while 15% of statements identified improved targeting of specific students as the outcome. Thus around 18% of schools identified improved literacy for students at risk as a major outcome of *MYRP* and close to 4% identified *Improved Targeting of Specific Students* in relation to literacy as a major outcome.

Responses indicating specific targeting and subsequent improvement in literacy among *Students at Risk* included the following:

> Improvement in approximately 20 targeted students per term from the Bridges program.
>
> The improvement of outcomes for students at risk in the middle years. A literacy expert was recruited as part of our staffing at a cost to breadth in programs.
>
> The Corrective Reading Program has shown substantial improvement in the reading skills of students with literacy problems. Having an extra teacher in classrooms has resulted in substantial revision of classroom materials to make them more appropriate for students with literacy problems.
>
> The development of a literacy program which caters for students at both ends of the spectrum of learning. The Literacy Program identifies students performing below expected levels on entry in Year 7 and provides one-to-one and small group support to develop literacy skills. This program has been extremely successful in improving the literacy outcomes of every student involved.

The proportions of *MYRP* schools that reported specific 'major' outcomes of *MYRP* in relation to *Literacy* are shown in Figure 5. It can be seen that improved literacy per se for both students in general (particularly) and students at risk were seen as the most important *MYRP* outcome in this area. Improved teaching strategies in literacy and improved teacher knowledge in the area were also seen to be important outcomes by significant numbers of schools.
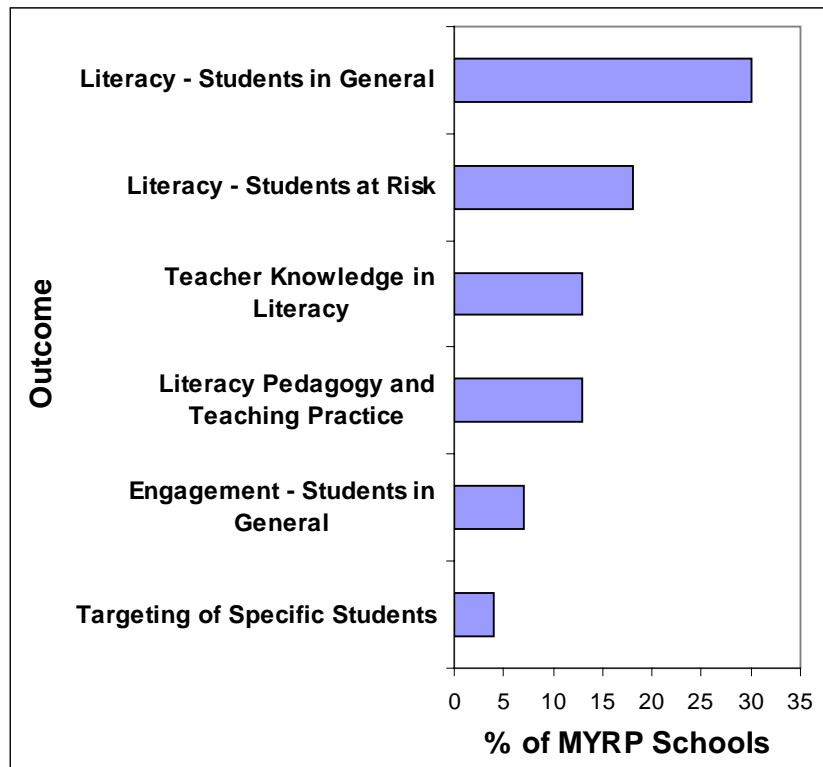
Figure 5: Major Outcomes of *MYRP* Reported by Schools in the Area of Literacy

Student Learning in Other Areas of the Curriculum

The generic coding frame for the analysis of the outcome statements for the questionnaire item that asked about *Student Learning in Other Areas* was identical to that for *Student Learning in Literacy* except that outcomes specifically for boys was not required as a category. The coding frame for the specific dimension consisted of the following substantive categories:

a. Improved numeracy;
b. Better teaching strategies and pedagogies;
c. Improvement in other KLAs;
d. Greater engagement, participation and/or confidence in learning;
e. Greater awareness, interconnectedness, integration of the curriculum;
f. Improved attendance;
g. Improved teacher – student relations;
h. Improved retention;
i. Other.

Table 27 shows the data from the analysis of the generic dimension. It can be seen that the predominant groups represented in the outcome statements for other curriculum areas

were *Teachers* and *Students in General*. These two response categories represented 37.4% and 45.0% of coded statements respectively, and 41.9% and 47.2% of *MYRP* schools.

Table 27: Perceived Outcomes – Student Learning in Curriculum Areas Other than Literacy

Generic Outcome Field	No of Times Outcome Recorded	Percent of Total Outcomes	N of Schools Recording Outcome	Percent of *MYRP* Schools Recording Outcome
Teachers	119	37.4	103	41.9
Students – 'At Risk'	19	6.0	18	7.3
Students – General	143	45.0	116	47.2
Programs	28	8.8	28	11.4
Other	9	2.8	9	3.7
Total	318		274	

Table 28 shows the results for the coding of the specific dimension, within the generic categories.

Among the outcomes for *Teachers*, the predominant responses referred to: (a) *Improved Teaching Strategies* (50.4%); and (b) *Increased Awareness of Integration Issues* and/or *Improved Connectedness Between School Subjects* and *Curriculum Integration* (46.2%). It can thus be estimated that approximately 15% of *MYRP* schools indicated that better teaching strategies in curriculum areas other than literacy was a major outcome of the program. Similarly, 13.5% of schools indicated that greater curriculum integration (or awareness of curriculum integration issues) in areas other than literacy was a major program outcome.

Table 28: Specific Outcomes Associated with Curriculum Areas Other than Literacy

Specific Outcome	Teachers		Students – 'At Risk'		Students – General		Programs		Other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Improved Numeracy	-	-	6	31.6	10	7.0	1	3.6	-	-
Better Teaching Strategies etc.	60	50.4	-	-	-	-	1	3.6	1	100.0
Improvement in Other KLAs	-	-	8	42.1	21	14.7	-	-	-	-
Greater Engagement etc.	1	0.8	2	10.5	67	46.9	1	3.6	-	-
Curriculum Integration etc.	55	46.2	-	-	6	4.2	-	-	-	-
Improved attendance	-	-	-	-	18	12.6	-	-	-	-
Outcome not known or specified	-	-	-	-	1	0.7	25	89.3	-	-
Improved teacher/student relations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Retention	-	-	2	10.5	9	6.3	-	-	-	-
Other	3	2.5	1	5.3	11	7.7	-	-	-	-
Total	119		19		143		28		1	

Typical comments about outcomes for teachers in relation to 'other' curriculum areas included:

> Pedagogy change in literacy has also spilled into other areas and students are assessed more accurately using a wide range of assessment models and have experienced activities using a range of multiple intelligences to ensure some engagement with the school curriculum.

> Modelling of best practices; increase in KLA discussions about improvements to student learning; sharing of ideas between KLA's and membership of networks increased.

Among the outcomes for *Students in General*, the most frequent response referred to issues associated with *Greater Engagement, Participation and Confidence in Learning* (46.9%). *Improvement in KLAs Other Than Literacy* and *Improved Attendance* were specified in 14.7% and 12.6% of the responses respectively. These results suggest that approximately 21% of schools (i.e. 47% of 45%) believed that greater student engagement in curriculum areas other than literacy was a major outcome of *MYRP*. Smaller numbers of schools reported that, for *Students in General*, improved learning in other KLAs (approximately 7%) and improved attendance (approximately 6%) resulted from the implementation of *MYRP*.

Comments referring to increased engagement in curriculum areas other than literacy included:

> Improved connectedness and a willingness to learn.

> The improvement of student perceptions of the quality of the learning environment; improvement of student engagement with their learning as measured by the rate of work completion; and a trend of improvement in academic performance across all year levels.

> Student engagement, links across curriculum areas, interdisciplinary projects making the learning more authentic.

Approximately 10% of schools described the development and/or implementation of a program in curriculum areas other than literacy as an important outcome of *MYRP*. Typically, however, the outcomes of the program were not described. A wide variety of programs was mentioned including the Community Youth Program, an 8-10 Pathways program, a Numeracy Action Plan and boys' education and social competence programs.

Increased engagement was not reported as a predominant outcome in curriculum areas other than literacy for *Students at Risk*. For this group, the major outcomes were perceived to be *Improvement in KLAs Other Than Literacy* and *Improved Numeracy*. It should be noted, however, that only approximately 3% and 2% of schools respectively reported these outcomes for 'at risk' students. Two typical comments were:

> Because of their improved reading skills, Corrective Reading students were able to improve their results in other areas as well.

> Those students most at risk have benefited from additional support and have performed better than they otherwise would have.

The relative proportions of schools reporting the most important of these outcomes for curriculum areas other that literacy are shown in Figure 6.
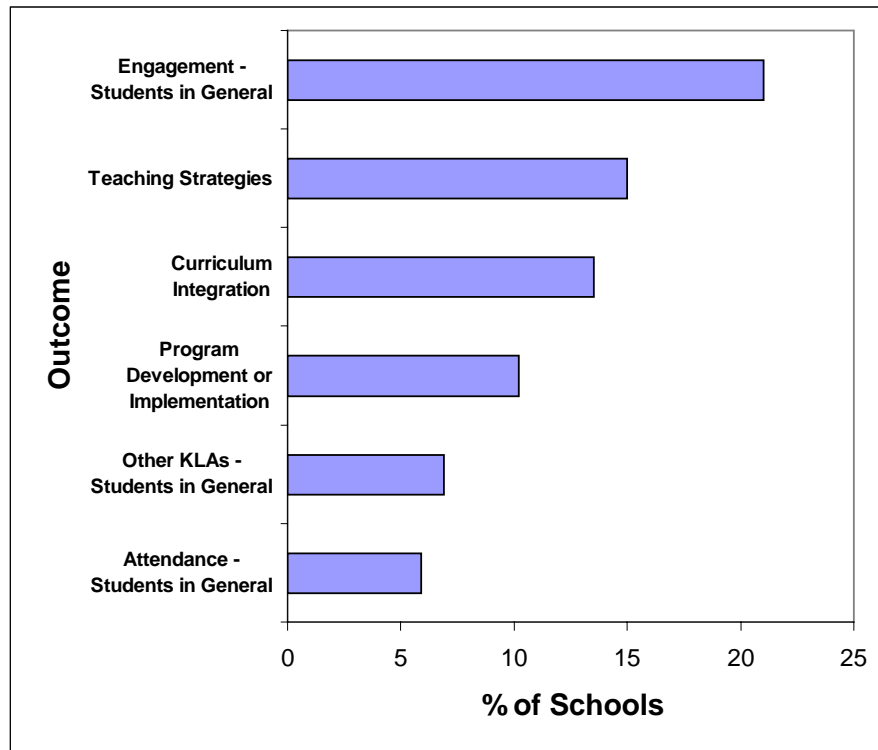
Figure 6: Major Outcomes of *MYRP* Reported by Schools in Curriculum Areas Other than Literacy

Student Development of Cognitive Skills

The generic coding frame for the analysis of the outcome statements for the questionnaire item that asked about *Student Development of Cognitive Skills* identified categories for:

a. Teachers;
b. Students at risk;
c. Students in general;
d. Curriculum;
e. Other.

The coding frame for the specific dimension consisted of the following substantive categories:

    a.   Improved numeracy skills;
    b.   Greater awareness of the role of thinking, changed pedagogy;
    c.   Improved literacy skills;
    d.   Increased emphasis on thinking skills;
    e.   Improved thinking skills;
    f.   Program outcome unknown;
    g.   Improved retention;
    h.   Other.

Table 29 shows the data from the analysis of the generic dimension while Table 30 shows the data for the specific dimension nested within categories of the generic dimension. In relation to the development of cognitive skills, outcomes for *Teachers* and *Students in General* were most frequently nominated. These categories accounted for approximately 44% and 33% of the coded statements and represented one or two generic responses from 35% and 26% of schools respectively.

Table 29: Perceived Outcomes – Development of Cognitive Skills

Generic Outcome Field	No of Times Outcome Recorded	Percent of Total Outcomes	N of Schools Recording Outcome	Percent of *MYRP* Schools Recording Outcome
Teachers	94	44.1	86	35.0
Students – 'At Risk'	13	6.1	11	4.5
Students – General	71	33.3	64	26.0
Curriculum	24	8.8	23	9.3
Other	11	11.3	11	4.5
Total	213		195	

For *Teachers*, the predominant outcomes were *Greater Awareness of the Role of Thinking* in the curriculum and/or *Improved Pedagogy* in relation to thinking skills on the one hand (68.1% of relevant responses) and, on the other, an *Increased Emphasis on Thinking Skills* in their teaching (26.6% of relevant statements). From this it can be estimated that approximately 24% of schools believed that a major outcome of *MYRP* related to teachers developing a greater awareness or improved pedagogy in the area of thinking skills while approximately 9% of schools believed that an increased emphasis on thinking skills in teaching was a major outcome.

Comments that were coded as representing greater teacher awareness of the role of thinking in the curriculum and/or improved pedagogy in relation to thinking skills included:

> There are not yet quantitative measures or evidence of major gains but there is a growing awareness of the issues around middle years and a shift in pedagogy. We are attempting to measure how students learn and to develop them metacognitively because we take the view that cognitive development is improved when students are aware of their own learning and when we teach for different learning styles.

> A major outcome has been the development of teaching approaches which utilize such things as Bloom's Taxonomy in order to explicitly address different aspects of cognitive development as well as catering for multiple intelligences.

> Increased emphasis in the teaching and learning process, with particular strength in thinking oriented approaches and development of higher order skills in students.

For *Students in General*, the major focus of schools' reporting of outcomes was on the development of *Improved Thinking Skills* per se (67.6% of relevant statements). This was recorded as a major outcome of *MYRP* by approximately 17.5% of schools. Additionally, an *Increased Emphasis on Thinking Skills* in the curriculum was recorded by 4.7% of schools.

Comments related to the development of thinking skills for students in general included (the second quotation was also coded for *Teachers – Greater Awareness of the Role of Thinking / Improved Pedagogy*):

> Cannot answer this with any authority - anecdotal evidence would suggest that where there has been consistent application of strategies learnt from PD activities this has a resulted in development of cognitive skills.

> Students more able to reflect on their own learning and able to manage tasks at a higher cognitive level. In particular staff are able to evaluate their own teaching programs and identify the levels of thinking students are being asked to use. Staff are now more aware of the different levels of thinking in the tasks set. Staff now avoid too much of the lower level retelling and repetition and more readily (shift) more students to higher levels of thinking. Assessment procedures have become more flexible as a result of teacher PD on different learning styles. ICT has been integrated into the curriculum and is used regularly by students. Understanding of Literacy Across the Curriculum is now a well understood pedagogy - all teachers consider themselves as teachers of literacy. Literacy is now understood as a complex system, which includes the manipulation of visual images and data.

The relative proportions of schools reporting these outcomes related to cognitive skills are shown in Figure 7.
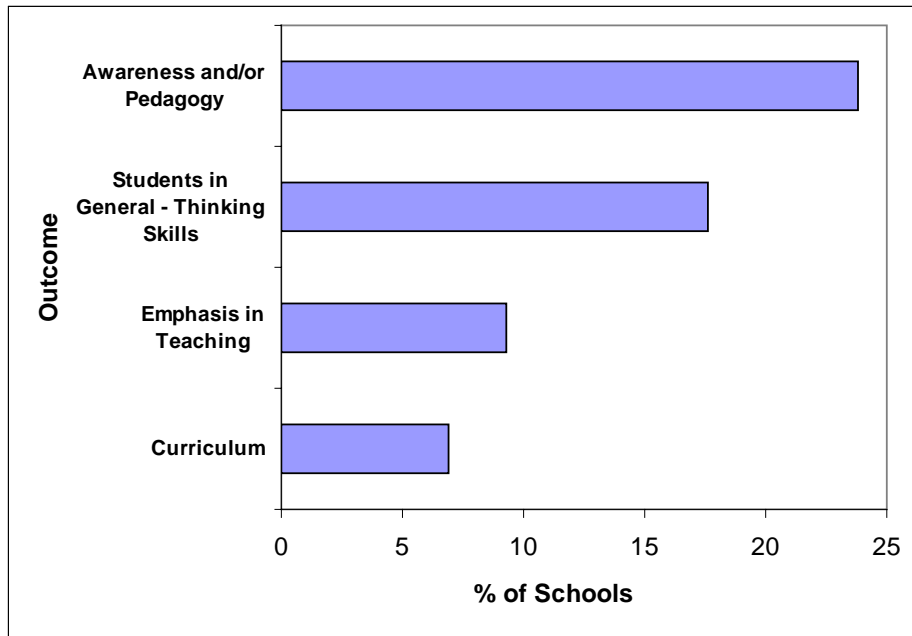
Figure 7: Major Outcomes of *MYRP* Reported by Schools in the Area of Cognitive Skills

Table 30: Student Development of Cognitive Skills

Specific Outcome	Teachers		Students – 'At Risk'		Students – General		Curriculum		Other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Improved Numeracy Skills	-	-			3	4.2	-	-	-	-
Greater Awareness of the Role of Thinking; Improved Pedagogy	64	68.1	1	7.7	4	5.6	5	20.8	-	-
Improved Literacy Skills	-	-	1	7.7	6	8.5	-	-	-	-
Increased Emphasis on Thinking Skills	25	26.6	4	30.7	1	1.4	12	50.0	1	33.3
Improved Thinking Skills	1	1.1	1	7.7	48	67.6	-	-	-	-
Outcome not known or specified	-	-	2	15.4	1	1.4	3	12.5	2	66.7
Retention	-	-	1	7.7	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other	4	4.3	2		8	11.3	4	16.7	-	-
Total	94		13		71		24		3	

Student Attendance and Retention

The generic coding frame for the analysis of the outcome statements for the questionnaire item that asked about *Student Attendance and Retention* identified categories for:

a. Specified year levels;
b. Students at risk;
c. Students in general;
d. Policy or program developed or implemented;
e. Other.

The coding frame for the specific dimension consisted of the following substantive categories:

a. Attendance improved;
b. Retention improved;
c. Attendance not improved or decreased;
d. Retention not improved or decreased;
e. Better student tracking, data collection;
f. Outcome not known or specified;
g. Improved retention;
h. Other.

Table 31 shows the data from the analysis of the generic dimension while Table 32 shows the data for the specific dimension. Outcomes that were nominated most frequently by schools included those for *Students in General* and for *Students at Specified Year Levels*. A number of schools also indicated that attendance and/or retention was not an issue of concern for them. From Table 31 it can be seen that 54.6% of outcomes statements focused on attendance and retention were made in relation to *Students in General*. Approximately 43% of *MYRP* schools made these statements. Table 32 shows that there were two main outcomes mentioned: *Improved Attendance* (42.7% of *Students in General* statements) and *Improved Retention* (35% of statements). We can thus estimate that over 18% of schools believed that they had seen an improvement in attendance as a result of *MYRP* while 15% of schools believed they had seen an improvement in retention.

Table 31: Perceived Outcomes – Student Attendance and Retention

Generic Outcome Field	No of Times Outcome Recorded	Percent of Total Outcomes	N of Schools Recording Outcome	Percent of *MYRP* Schools Recording Outcome
Specific Year Levels	50	17.2	40	16.3
Students – 'At Risk'	14	4.8	11	4.5
Students – General	159	54.6	106	43.0
Policy/Program	17	5.8	17	6.9
Other	11	3.8	11	4.5
Not an Issue	40	13.7	40	16.3
Total	291		225	

Comments made by schools relating to improved attendance and/or improved retention included:

> Student absence rates halved in all year levels over the course of *MYRP* program due to the employment of an attendance officer and the implementation of a strict attendance policy. Little impact on retention due to factors beyond the school's control.

> Documented in Annual Report - positive outcomes in both (attendance and retention).

> There has been a significant improvement in attendance, especially, and retention and therefore presumably connectedness to school via improved teaching connected to *MYRP*.

In contrast, approximately 6% of schools specifically indicated that they had not seen an increase in attendance, or, indeed, had experienced a decrease. Similarly, about 3.5% of schools indicated that retention had not improved or had decreased in association with *MYRP*. Typically, schools in this group made comments such as "attendance remains an issue" while a number indicated that attendance had improved but there were still issues with retention (or vice versa). Some schools gave extensive comments in response to this question. Following are three typical examples:

> Attendance remained well below state averages but actually worsened over the 3 years in average terms due to individuals with extreme absences. Retention has improved but there are still issues in this area. MIPS was a major factor here.

> Although *MYRP* and other MYs initiatives have achieved encouraging outcomes, it is clear that there is still much to do. Student attendance has not improved, and this is not satisfactory. 2003 Student surveys indicate

> levels of concern regarding the connectedness and motivation of year 9 boys in particular, and this appears to be reflected in high absence rates for Year 9. We are optimistic that more immediate follow-up with parents (being trialled this year) is having a significant impact on student absences. Student Real Retention has generally compared favourably with state and LSG data. Reform of learning and teaching in the middle years will hopefully result in improved engagement and attendance.

> In 2000 prior to the start of *MYRP* our apparent retention at Year 7-10 was 92.4%. In 2003 this had risen to 96.5%. Our attendance figures do not indicate a corresponding improvement over the years 2000-2003. However we have introduced an Attendance Officer during that time and now believe our figures are much more accurate. We also are part of the 'Gippsland campaign - It's Not OK To Be Away' as one strategy to change the culture in Gippsland of absenteeism in schools. This strategy, combined with improved learning and teaching strategies to improve engagement should see an improvement in attendance figures in the future.

Approximately 17% of comments related to *Students at Specific Year Levels*. These were made at least once by 16.3% of *MYRP* schools. Again the predominant outcomes mentioned were *Improved Attendance* and *Improved Retention* (60% and 30% respectively, see Table 32). We can thus estimate that close to 10% of schools believed that improved attendance in relation to students at specific year levels was a major *MYRP* outcome, while 5% considered improved retention a major outcome. The year levels specified in these responses varied. Some schools reported improvements in attendance and/or retention at Year 9 or Years 8 and 9, while others identified Year 7 or Years 7 and 8 as the focus of improvement. Typical comments included:

> Have significantly improved the days absent for Year 9 students and Real Retention rates have improved for 7-10.

> Student attendance at Years 7 & 8 improved over the three (year) period 2001-2003 as evidenced in our Triennial Review, improvements have also been achieved at Year 9 but not to same degree. Retention is still not a problem in Year 7 to 9 but from Year 10 to 11.

The relative proportions of schools that reported outcomes related to attendance and retention are shown in Figure 8.

Table 32: Student Attendance and Retention

Specific Outcome	Specific Year Levels		Students – 'At Risk'		Students – General		Policy/Program		Other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Attendance Improved	30	60.0	8	72.7	67	42.7	3	17.6	-	-
Retention Improved	15	30.0	3	27.3	55	35.0	-	-	-	-
Attendance not improved; decreased	3	5.9	-	-	22	14.0	-	-	-	-
Retention not improved; decreased	2	4.0	-	-	13	8.3	-	-	-	-
Better student tracking; data collection	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	47.0	1	100.0
Outcome not known or specified	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	35.3	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	-
Total	50		11		157		17		1	
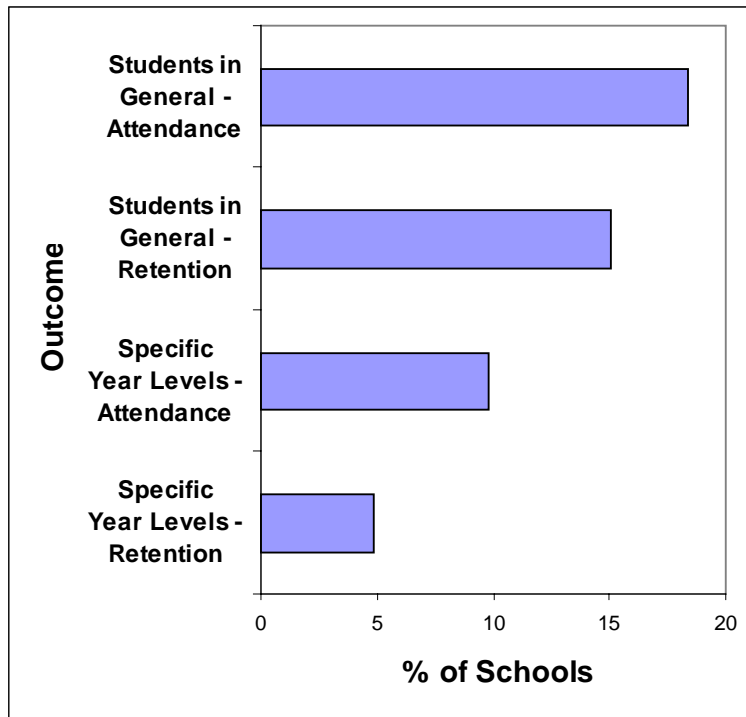
Figure 8: Major Outcomes of *MYRP* Reported by Schools in the Area of Student Attendance and Retention

Student Engagement

The generic coding frame for the analysis of the outcome statements for the questionnaire item that asked about *Student Engagement* identified categories for:

a. Teachers;
b. Students at risk;
c. Students in general;
d. Students at specific Year levels
e. Program developed or implemented;
f. Professional Development;
g. Projects/activities;
h. Other.

The coding frame for the specific dimension consisted of the following substantive categories:

a. Attendance improved;
b. Retention improved;

    c. Engagement improved;

    d. Better teaching strategies and/or pedagogies;

    e. Improved student/teacher relations;

    f. Improved results;

    g. Outcomes not known;

    h. Other.

The results from the application of the generic coding frame to the *Student Engagement* question are shown in Table 33. Schools referred in their responses mainly to *Students in General*. This group was the focus of a little over 50% of the outcome statements by approximately 44.7% of *MYRP* schools. Approximately 15% of statements were associated with *Teachers* and 10% were associated with *Students at Specified Year Levels* (15.0 and 8.9% of schools respectively. A combination of the categories for *Programs* and *Projects/Activities* represents approximately 10% of statements associated with engagement (and 10% of *MYRP* schools) while *Professional Development* was specified by fewer than 4% of schools.

Table 33: Perceived Outcomes – Student Engagement

Generic Outcome Field	No of Times Outcome Recorded	Percent of Total Outcomes	N of Schools Recording Outcome	Percent of *MYRP* Schools Recording Outcome
Teachers	37	14.6	37	15.0
Students at Risk	9	3.5	9	3.7
Students in general	129	50.8	110	44.7
Students – specific year levels	25	10.2	22	8.9
Programs	15	5.9	15	6.1
Professional Development	9	3.5	9	3.7
Projects/Activities	10	3.9	10	4.1
Other	20	7.9	20	8.1
Total	254		232	

Applying the specific coding categories within these generic codes shows that over 90% of outcome statements associated with *Teachers* referred to *Improved Teaching Strategies, Pedagogies* (Table 34). As teachers were mentioned by 15% of schools in relation to student engagement we can estimate that close to 14% of schools saw improved teaching strategies and pedagogical approaches in relation to student engagement as a major outcome of *MYRP*. Similarly, we estimate that *Improved Engagement per se* for students in general was seen

as a major outcome by 28% of schools, while improved engagement by *Students at Specific Year Levels* was seen as a major outcome by a little over 5% of schools. Improved engagement as a result of *Specified Programs, Projects or Activities* was also mentioned on a number of occasions (approximately 5% of schools). These results are summarised in Figure 9.

Specific responses that were coded as improved teaching strategies in the area of student engagement included the following:

> Increased student engagement - range of student surveys used. Increased range of classroom teaching strategies and assessment strategies used by teachers. Noisier classrooms. More use of ICT in the classroom. Increased parent satisfaction with teaching programs at the school.

> *MYRP* got the ball rolling around reforming middle years. Teachers are using thinking skills tools in classroom and in assessment . This has led to significant changes in students completing exams. Double sessions were introduced in 2003 and a survey of staff showed over 50% felt the longer time frame had seen them rethink their classroom structures and meant higher engagement levels of students with less time wasted.

> By providing a stimulating curriculum, a hands on approach to learning and implementing integrated studies across KLAs there is evidence of greater student engagement, productivity and success.

Similarly, comments coded as representing an indication that *MYRP* had contributed to increased engagement per se for students in general included:

> Improve(d) literacy skills influence engagement especially in the smaller withdrawal groups.

> Certainly, students more engaged with the curriculum, teachers and the school, measures of student survey results, attendance and the decline in the number of student discipline issues all being positive indicators of this.

> Increased willingness of students to be involved in "discretionary" activities, e.g. school debating teams, student leadership programs and activities - maybe increased "ownership" of school?

> Engagement was central to our *MYRP* developments. Students were more engaged in all stages of learning, from design to assessment.

Table 34: Student Engagement

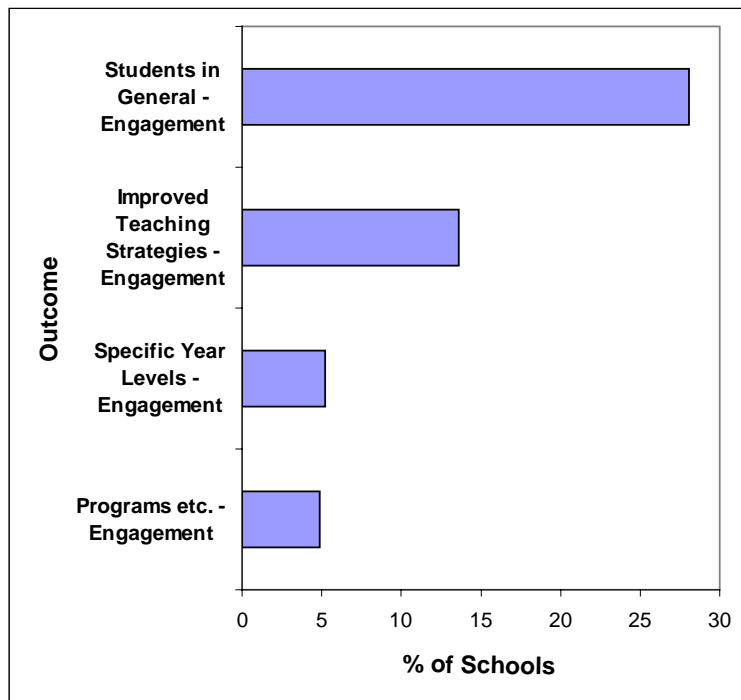| Specific Outcome	Teachers		Students – 'At Risk'		Students – General		Students – Specific Year Levels		Programs/Projects and Activities		Professional Development	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Attendance Improved	-	-	1	11.1	17	13.2	2	8.3	-	-	-	-
Retention Improved	-	-	-	-	8	6.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Engagement Improved	-	-	2	22.2	81	62.8	14	58.3	12	48.0	1	11.1
Teaching Strategies, Pedagogies	34	91.9	2	22.2	-	-	-	-	1	4.0	4	44.4
Improved teacher – student relations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4.0	1	11.1
Outcomes not known	1	2.7	4	44.4	-	-	3	12.5	11	44.0	3	33.3
Improved academic results		-	-	-	4	3.1	2	8.3	-	-	-	-
Improved behaviour, more 'settled' classes	2	5.4	-	-	7	5.4	1	4.2	-	-	-	-
Other					12	9.3	2	8.3	-	-	-	-
Total	37		9		129		24		25		9	

Figure 9: Major Outcomes of *MYRP* Reported by Schools in the Area of Student Engagement

'Other' and Unexpected Outcomes

Finally in this chapter on the perceived outcomes of *MYRP* it is important to consider those changes and outcomes for students, teachers, the broader school community, and the school as an organisation that lie outside the specific objectives of *MYRP*. These changes and outcomes might have been planned for and anticipated by schools as part of their efforts to find 'local solutions to local problems' specific to the school in its particular context, or they might have been quite unplanned and unexpected. To tap into this broader field of possible impacts of *MYRP*, schools were asked to indicate (*Yes/No*) whether there were other planned changes that resulted directly from *MYRP* in their school, whether there were any unexpected positive outcomes resulting from *MYRP* and whether there were any negative unexpected outcomes. Ninety-eight respondents (44.5% of those responding to the question) indicated that there were other planned changes resulting from *MYRP* in their schools while 104 (47.5%) indicated that there were positive unexpected outcomes and 40 (18.4%) indicated that there were negative unexpected outcomes.

Similar coding and data analysis strategies were used for the open-ended follow-ups to these questions as for those that requested descriptions of outcomes in specific areas that were analysed in the sections above.

Other Planned Changes Associated with *MYRP*

The generic coding frame for the question requesting information about *Other Planned Changes* included the following categories:

a. Teachers;
b. Specific year levels;
c. Students in general;
d. Professional development;
e. Programs;
f. Curriculum;
g. Other.

The specific coding frame consisted of:

a. Organisational restructuring and time-table changes;
b. Better teaching strategies and pedagogies;
c. Specific outcomes unknown;
d. Thinking curriculum;
e. Improved staff and student morale and/or wellbeing;
f. Other.

The results from the application of the generic coding frame are presented in Table 35. It can be seen that the other planned changes reported by schools were focussed on changes associated with *Teachers* (15.9% of *MYRP* schools), *Programs* (11.0% of schools) and *Curriculum* (14.2%).[18] Data for the specific coding frame are reported for just these three generic categories in Table 36 while the four most frequently specified categories of change are shown in Figure 10. The four main areas where schools reported other planned changes resulting from *MYRP* were: *Organisational Restructuring and/or Timetable Changes* in relation to curriculum (13.0% of *MYRP* schools), *Changes and Improvements in Teaching Strategies and Pedagogical Approaches* (9.1% of *MYRP* schools), *Program Development and or Implementation* with no further specification of outcomes (8.3% of schools) and *Organisational Restructuring in Relation to Teachers* (3.6% of schools). It should be noted that a number of schools indicated in their responses to this question that they were reiterating points made earlier in their questionnaire responses.

Table 35: Other Planned Changes Resulting Directly from *MYRP*

Generic Field	No of Times Change	Percent of Total	N of Schools Recording	Percent of *MYRP*

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[18] It should be noted that the comments made by schools in this section of the questionnaire were wide ranging and often included a number of overlapping themes. They represented a particular challenge for the application of a relatively simple and time-effective coding scheme. The results should be taken as indicative of the broad nature of the changes being reported only.

	Recorded	Outcomes	Outcome	Schools Recording Outcome
Teachers	40	31.0	39	15.9
Specific year levels	10	7.8	9	3.7
Students in general	3	2.3	3	1.2
Professional Development	6	4.7	6	2.4
Programs	28	21.7	27	11.0
Curriculum	35	27.1	34	14.2
Other	7	5.4	4	1.6
Total	129			

Table 36: Other Planned Changes – Specific Code

Specific Outcome	Teachers		Programs		Curriculum	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Organisational Restructuring etc.	9	22.5	-		32	91.4
Teaching Strategies & Pedagogies	23	57.5	-		-	-
Specific outcomes unknown	-	-	21	75.0	-	-
Thinking Curriculum	-	-	1	3.6	2	5.7
Improved Morale &/or Wellbeing	3	7.5	3	10.7	-	-
Other	5	12.5	3	10.7	1	2.9
Total	40		28		35	

Specific comments made by schools and coded under *Curriculum – Organisational Restructuring* tended to focus either on restructuring the school itself or, more frequently, the school day and/or timetable (the 4 period day was sometimes highlighted) on the one hand, or various 'structural' curriculum innovations on the other. Some indicative comments are provided below:

> Development of a Junior School zone. Classes dedicated to Year 7 and 8 students. Student ownership of their learning spaces. These developments arose out of the increased awareness of the needs of Middle Years students as shown by *MYRP* data.

> Timetabling changes which will affect the whole school - we are considering a 4 period day and alternative programs for the Year 9 classes. The team approach to (be) extended into Year 8.

> *MYRP* allowed for the development of teams and a funded focus on middle years. This set the groundwork for a systemic change to double sessions in 2003. The teams also allowed a focus on teacher/learning relationships which has seen reintroduction of pastoral care programs at years *7-9* and enhanced roles for form teachers. The year nine program is a vocational Education focus with community projects.

> …the major curriculum restructure has come out of this project. A Curriculum Reform Group was established to steer these changes. It has led also to the formation of Professional Learning Teams to develop the programs for 2005.

> Restructuring of the curriculum and the introduction of ability groups in years 7 & 8

> Structural change, which led to the Core teacher program, and pedagogical change (integrated projects).
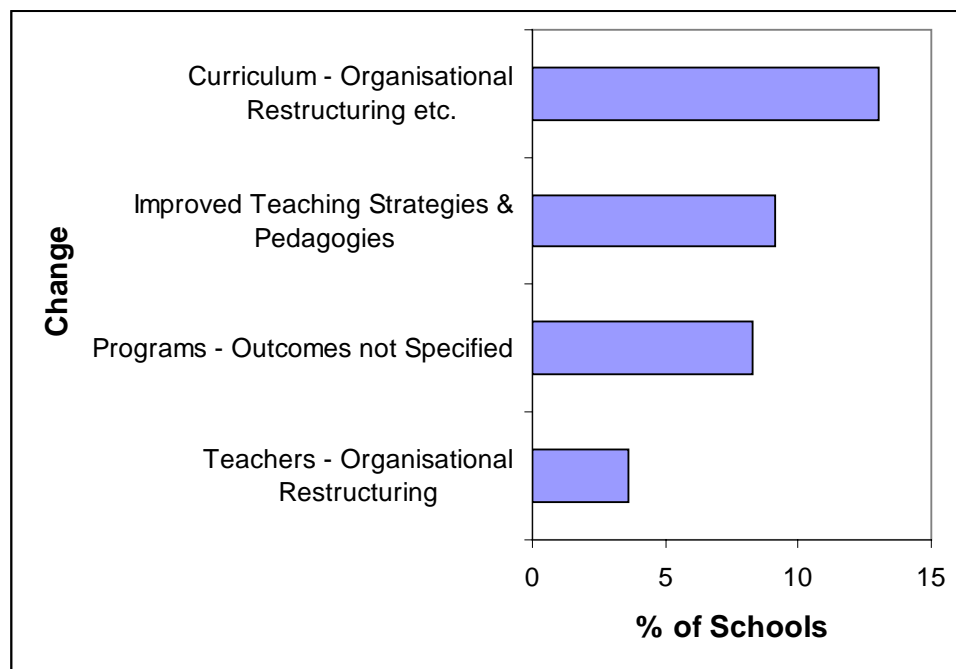

Figure 10: Other Planned Changes Resulting from *MYRP*

A wide range of diverse comments was coded as indicating changes in *Teaching Strategies and Pedagogical Approaches*. More frequently mentioned were issues such as the impact of strategic professional development on teaching in the middle years, changes in the focus and nature of teacher review, changes in teacher culture, the development of professional

learning teams, and pedagogical changes reflected in ability grouping and reform of assessment and reporting.

Similarly, many different *Programs* were mentioned by schools in response to this question. Typically, schools mentioned development and/or implementation of the programs without commenting on outcomes from them. The programs mentioned included: You Can Do It, involvement in the Alpine Leaders course, the Real Game, Enterprise Education, specific reading programs, leadership programs and an Emotional Intelligence program.

The category of *Organisational Restructure in Relation to Teachers* also captured a wide range of changes. These included: establishing the position of Middle Years Coordinator as integral to the school leadership team; the introduction of team teaching approaches; the inclusion of teachers from areas other than literacy and numeracy in the planning of integrated projects; and timetable change to enable fewer teachers and greater blocks of time with middle years students.

Unexpected Positive Outcomes from *MYRP*

The generic coding frame for *Unexpected Positive Outcomes* contained the following categories:
   a. Teachers;
   b. Students at Risk;
   c. Students in General;
   d. Other.

And the more specific categories used were:
   a. Improved engagement;
   b. Improves staff/staff communications and relations;
   c. Greater awareness and/or increased interest;
   d. Improved student outcomes;
   e. Better teaching strategies and/or pedagogies;
   f. Improved relations with other schools;
   g. None or not known;
   h. Other.

The clear majority of the generic codes fell into the category that encompassed comments that referred to *Teachers* (72.3% of coded comments – an estimated 27.2% of *MYRP* schools). The next most frequent used was the 'catch-all' *Other* category (17.6% of comments - an estimated 8.5% of schools). The distribution of responses according to the specific codes associated with the generic category for teachers is shown in Table 37.

Table 37: Unexpected Positive Outcomes from *MYRP* – Outcomes for Teachers

Specific Outcome	Teachers	
	N	%
Improved Engagement	12	14.0
Improved staff/staff communications and/or relations	24	27.9
Greater awareness and/or increased interest	25	29.1
Improved student outcomes	-	-
Better teaching strategies and/or pedagogies	19	22.1
Improved relations with other schools	-	-
None specified or not known	-	-
Other	6	7.0
Total	86	

From these data we can estimate that approximately 21% of *MYRP* schools specified or referred to *Greater Teacher Awareness and/or Interest* as an important unanticipated outcome of *MYRP*. Typical responses included:

> Staff became much more aware of literacy needs of specific students and felt much more empowered to deal with these.

> Staff were given productive time release to engage in meaningful discussions about teaching and learning across a broad spectrum. Attendance at both local and national middle years conferences. Also school staff were invited to present at middle years conferences and P-12 conferences sharing (this school's) middle years practice with other schools.

> The extent to which the awareness of the learning needs of middle years students was raised amongst staff.

> We now have a recognition that middle years is an area that needs to be addressed by all staff. Things like thinking curriculum strategies and student engagement have become part of the culture due to the raised awareness by *MYRP* actions. Literacy across the curriculum has flowed out of the literacy focus and there is a general acceptance by staff of the need to address this and how it connects to the whole school.

> Staff relationships with students and improved knowledge of their achievement levels have resulted to a greater extent than expected. Staff are more willing to question their classroom practice, improve and change their approach to student learning.

> The increase in interest in co-curricular programs was much greater than expected.

> Improved teacher awareness of contemporary educational thought has contributed to lively and effective discussion. This has created a sense of professional renewal for many staff.

Similarly, approximately 20% of schools saw *Improved Communications and Relations Among Staff* as being important, 16% saw *Better Teaching Strategies and/or Pedagogical Approaches* as important while approximately 10% referred to *Increased Engagement*.

Typical comments related to improved communications and relations are given below:

> Improved staff communication- particularly at the year 7 & 8 Team level.

> Significant increase in teacher morale and effectiveness, unprecedented level of staff collaboration and collegiality.

> Greater discussions between teachers regarding strategies to engage students. A willingness to improve. The beginnings of cross curricular activities being developed and implemented with enthusiastic responses.

Responses coded in the other categories for teachers were somewhat less clear-cut. When discussing teaching and pedagogical issues, schools quite often referred to staff willingness to work in new ways and to adapt to change. For example:

> Teachers are very happy working in cross KLA teams with a specific group of students who they will follow through years 7 to 9.

> Commitment of staff to continually adapt to change- try new things- take change on board- regularly evaluate what we were doing.

> Willingness of staff, despite their previous experience, to adopt change.

When discussing improved engagement, some schools referred to both the engagement of teachers and students (sometimes linking the two) or to increased engagement by teachers themselves. For example:

> The funding allowed vital time for teachers to plan and implement programmes to capture the attention of young people and connect them in a positive way to the school. An unexpected positive was how staff responded to the opportunity to create new opportunities to learn. This in turn led to a growing awareness of how important "engagement" is in the teaching and learning process.

> The work has led to an improvement in teacher engagement and higher levels of excitement amongst teachers.

> For some teachers, it renewed their enthusiasm for teaching middle years groups; students and teachers develop stronger, more positive relationships; more opportunity for responding to specific students' needs through withdrawal, smaller elective groups, response to individual needs; increased teacher collaboration; less discipline issues when the same teacher takes a class across the years.

Finally, a number of responses, coded generically under 'other', referred to improved relations with local primary schools:

> Improved liaison between primary and secondary teachers. Improved transition procedures.

> significant improvement in links with local primary schools

> Stronger links between the feeder schools and the secondary College. We are now exploring teacher swaps, the use of school specific resources and student movement between the primary and secondary schools.

Unexpected Negative Outcomes from *MYRP*

When provided with the opportunity, a small number of schools mentioned an unexpected negative outcome from *MYRP* they had experienced. The outcomes were coded to a single-level classification. (While not restricted to providing a single response only, the majority schools responding to this question mentioned one unintended outcome only. Hence the most salient single outcome was coded for the analysis.) The categories used, together with the frequency and percentage of the responses given and an estimate of the proportion of the total group of *MYRP* schools mentioning each specific unintended outcome, are shown in Table 38.

Table 38: Unexpected Negative Outcomes from *MYRP*

Generic Field	No of Times Change Recorded	Percent of Total Outcomes	Percent of *MYRP* Schools Recording Outcome
Reluctance to change	9	20.5	3.7
Insufficient funding	3	6.8	1.2
Increase in workload	7	15.9	2.8
Time constraints more generally	1	2.3	0.4
Expectations of change not met	5	11.4	2.0
Timetabling and/or staffing difficulties	3	6.8	1.2
Other	16	36.4	6.5
Total	44		

Nine schools (an estimated 3.7% of *MYRP* schools) reported a reluctance to change among their staff (two additional schools also mentioned reluctance to change when discussing another issue.). For a number of schools this was a resistance to change generally, however three schools clearly specified the focus of this perceived reluctance: (a) (among some senior staff) to the testing of students and the use of test data "to determine program provision"; (b) to teaching "outside their designated teaching area"; and (c) "an ongoing philosophical conflict between the traditional KLA dominated view of curriculum and the generalist student learning centred approach of the middle years".

Seven schools commented that staff had experienced increases in workload, change in work patterns or felt under time pressures and constraints that had caused concern, resentment or reluctance to change. Specific issues mentioned included: (a) the additional time required for professional development and/or team meetings; (b) additional coordination and preparation time in literacy and mathematics; (c) increased workload associated with the need to develop new resources and teaching strategies; (d) concern about the longer continuous periods of teaching associated with the need to reduce the numbers of different teachers in the middle years programs; and (e) the pressure felt to document changes to teaching practices while, at the same time, developing new strategies and skills.

Five schools expressed, in various ways, a view that the expectations for *MYRP* had not been fully met. For one school, *MYRAD* had given a vision of what was possible in the area of primary/secondary cooperation and the available funding for *MYRP* gave " a sense that we weren't doing as much or enough". For another, the success of a specific program at Year 9 led to an unfulfilled expectation among teachers that they weren't able to achieve the same results at Year 10. Additionally three schools mentioned issues associated with insufficient funding (in two schools for literacy programs/support) and timetabling difficulties.

Summary and Conclusion

Figure 11 provides a summary of the extent to which schools identified specific outcomes of *MYRP*. A wide range of outcomes was identified by 5% of schools or more. Four outcomes were identified by over 20% of *MYRP* schools. They were:

a. Improvement in literacy for students in general;
b. Improved engagement with school for students in general;
c. Increased awareness and/or improved pedagogical skills for teachers in the area of cognitive or thinking skills;
d. Improved engagement of students in general in areas of the curriculum other than literacy.

A further nine outcomes of *MYRP* were identified by between 12% and 20% of schools. These were:

a. Improved attendance at school by students in general;
b. Improved literacy specifically for students at risk;
c. Improved thinking skills for students in general;
d. Improved retention (typically from Years 9 to 10, or 10 to 11) for students in general;
e. Improved teaching strategies in curriculum areas other than literacy;

     f.   Improved teaching strategies in relation to student engagement;

     g.   Improved curriculum integration (specified in areas of the curriculum other than literacy);

     h.   Improved teaching strategies in literacy;

     i.   Improved teacher knowledge in relation to literacy.

Finally, between about 5% and 10% percent of schools identified a further 8 outcomes:

     a.   Program development and/or implementation in literacy;

     b.   Improved attendance at specific year levels within the middle years;

     c.   An increased emphasis on teaching thinking skills;

     d.   Increased engagement by students in general in relation to literacy;

     e.   Increased engagement in Key Learning Areas other than literacy by students in general;

     f.   Curriculum development in relation to attendance and retention;

     g.   Improved attendance by students in general;

     h.   Increased engagement with school by students at specified year levels.

Three predominant themes appear to run through the schools' perceptions of outcomes from *MYRP*. Firstly, schools identified increased achievement for students in general in the areas of literacy and thinking skills as a key outcome. Increased achievement for students at risk in the area of literacy was also highlighted. Each of these achievement outcomes was identified as important by upwards of 18% of *MYRP* schools. Secondly, schools identified improvements in various aspects of engagement, attendance and retention as important. These included improved engagement for students in general both overall and in areas of the curriculum other than literacy, improved attendance and improved retention for students in general. These outcomes were identified by upwards of 15% of schools as important. Thirdly, schools identified various aspects of improvement in teaching and pedagogical practices as important outcomes of *MYRP*. These outcomes included, particularly, improved teaching strategies in curriculum areas other than literacy, improved teaching strategies related to student engagement, improved curriculum integration in areas other than literacy and improved teaching strategies and teacher knowledge of student achievement in literacy. Each of these areas of improvement was mentioned by 12% of schools or more.
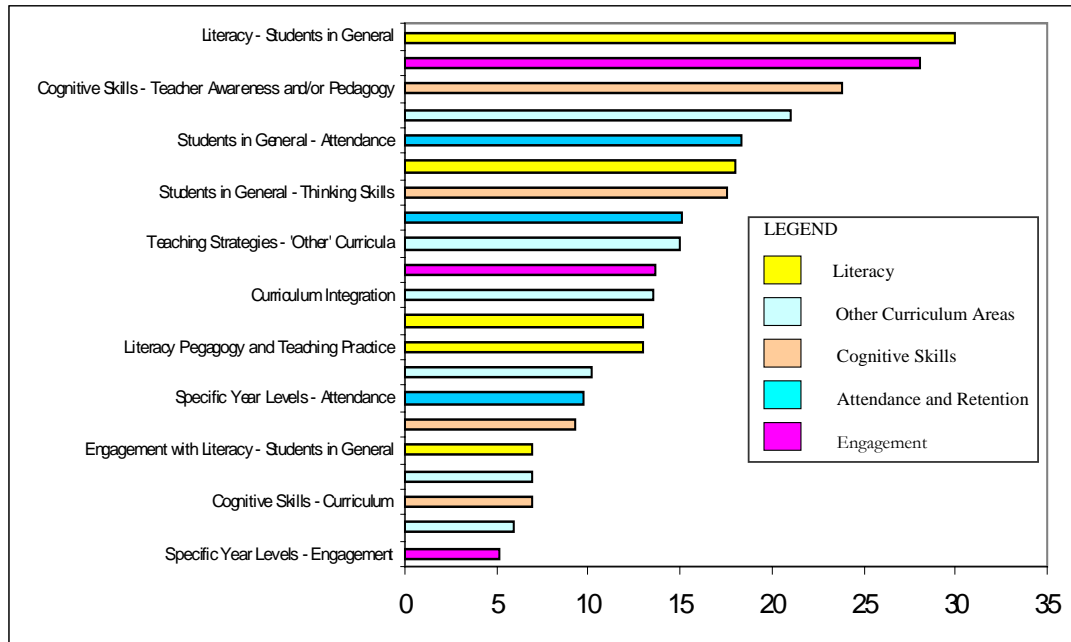
Figure 11: Bar Chart Showing Proportions of Schools Emphasising Particular Outcomes of *MYRP*

Finally, it is important to note that organisational and curriculum restructuring on the one hand and teachers on the other were the predominant focus of responses that asked about 'other planned changes' and 'unexpected positive outcomes' relating to *MYRP*. There is an indication here that a number of schools were 'thinking beyond' a specific focus on literacy and student engagement to broader 'system' issues associated with the middle years and a concern with the interest, enthusiasm, commitment and expertise of teachers as possibly critical mediating factors if an innovative school program is to succeed.

CHAPTER 8: OUTCOMES OF *MYRP* - ANALYSES OF DE&T SCHOOL-LEVEL OUTCOMES DATA

Introduction

Analyses of the activities of schools in relation to the middle years of schooling in Chapters 5 and 6 suggested that most were strongly engaged with a number of different reform-related projects and activities by 2003. There were also frequent reports from the surveyed schools that standardised testing, assessment against CSF 'benchmarks' and anecdotal evidence showed that the reform activity was resulting in a range of desired outcomes, particularly in relation to literacy, engagement/attendance/retention and improved teaching practices and pedagogy.

In order to explore more directly the possible impact of this intensive activity in those schools that received their initial 'middle-years' funding from *MYRP*, data on literacy achievement, school attendance and transition to Year 11 across a six-year period from 1998 to 2003 were requested from DE&T. The following 'school-level' data were made available:

    a.   Year 9 literacy achievement;
    b.   Student absences for Years 7, 8 and 9;
    c.   Apparent retention to Year 11. [19]

In order to maximise the possibility that a complete six-year set of data was available on each school, but also to guard against the loss of too many schools from the data set, a combination of 'list-wise' deletion of schools and imputation of missing data elements was used. Schools were selected from among those in this data set if there was achievement data present for 1998. Small amounts of missing data for other years were then estimated from the data that were available separately for each variable of interest. The estimation

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[19] By 'school-level' we mean that the data that were available were not individual student level results and recorded absences etc. but these data summarised across all classes at the requested year levels. The data were thus: (a) the average Year 9 literacy achievement; total recorded absences for Years 7, 8 and 9 respectively, and the 'apparent retention rate' for the school, calculated from the Year 10 student enrolment in July 2002 and the Year 11 enrolment in February 2003. It is important to acknowledge that student data aggregated to the school level pose severe limitations on the statistical validity of the analyses and the nature of inferences that can be drawn due to well-known problems of aggregation bias and the restriction of range. In particular, for example, an increase in the school average Year 9 literacy CSF ratings should not be interpreted as indicating that all (or indeed most) individual students showed gains in literacy.

was carried out by the 'EM' (expected maximisation) approach available in the statistical program SPSS 12.0. There were 206 schools represented in the resulting data file. These schools had received funding from *MYRP* but had not been involved in the earlier *MYRAD* program.

Year 9 Literacy

Patterns of Change in Literacy – 1998 to 2003

Table 39 shows minimum and maximum values, the median (the 'mid-point of the distribution where 50% of the schools are above, 50% below), the 25th and 75th percentiles of the distribution and the mean (numerical average) of Year 9 literacy achievement levels in the 206 schools. The median and the mean are highlighted. Both show a small rise from 1998 to 2002 and then a very small drop to 2003. Taking the difference between the highest value of the mean (5.46 in 2002) and the lowest (5.40 in 1998) in relation to the 'pooled' standard deviation of literacy scores[20] for 1998 and 2002 (0.28) yields an 'effect size' of 0.24. This is close to the value of what is conventionally regarded as a 'small' effect size (0.20) only. The effect size for the difference between 2000 and 2002, representing the possible impact of *MYRP* on literacy achievement is 0.17.

Table 39: Distributions of School Year 9 Literacy Scores from 1998 – 2003

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Min	4.25	4.07	4.21	4.23	4.68	4.51
25th % ile	5.25	5.25	5.27	5.30	5.31	5.28
Median	5.40	5.42	5.41	5.45	5.46	5.42
75th % ile	5.53	5.54	5.53	5.56	5.55	5.54
Max	5.89	5.99	5.98	6.10	6.00	5.87
Mean	5.34	5.35	5.37	5.40	5.41	5.38
s.d.	0.28	0.28	0.25	0.24	0.22	0.24
N	206	206	206	206	206	206

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[20] The 'root mean square' of the standard deviations, calculated by squaring the standard deviations averaging and taking the square root of the average.

A Note on Testing Statistical Significance in These Time-series Data

A 'mixed-model' analysis of variance was conducted to assess the statistical significance of the apparent changes in school average Year 9 literacy achievement. In this analysis, 'time' (across the years 1998, 1999 etc.) was regarded as a 'within schools' (repeated measures) factor and the 1998 Like School Group (LSG) as a 'between schools' factor. The LSG was included in the analysis primarily as a control variable, to address any possible confounding of the impact of *MYRP* on literacy with the broad socio-economic and cultural context of the school.

Mixed-model analyses of variance require a number of decisions to be made about the appropriate significance tests to be used and the specific contrasts to be employed (in the present case, contrasts across the individual years in the six-year time period and across the individual LSGs). Appropriate analysis procedures for the within-schools (across time) effects utilise an initial test of whether or not the data conform to certain assumptions that are commonly termed 'sphericity'. It the test for sphericity is found to be statistically significant, a particular strategy (the multivariate approach) for testing the statistical significance of the overall 'time' effect is recommended. This is a conservative approach to repeated-measures analysis, and, while the available test for sphericity is quite sensitive, it was adopted for all analyses in this report. The test for sphericity was found to be statistically significant in all analyses of literacy achievement, absences and apparent retention. Hence the multivariate test of the general effect of 'time' was always used.

Further, typical approaches to mixed-model analyses enable single 'contrasts' to be established *a priori* between, for example, selected pairs of years across the time period being analysed. There are a limited number of these *a priori* contrasts available is standard statistical packages. The contrasts chosen for these analyses are called in SPSS 12.0 'difference' contrasts (also known as 'reverse-Helmert' contrasts). These are quite useful for studies of the 'growth' in a variable under study when there are a relatively small number of time points. They involve, in the present case, contrasting and testing the average school literacy level in 1999 to that in 1998, then the average literacy level for 2000 against the pooled averages of 1998 and 1999, then the average level for 2001 against the pooled averages for 1998, 1999, 2000, and so on. With six time-points, five such contrasts are possible.

The specific hypotheses that underpinned our use of this particular set of contrasts were:
   a. The contrast between the mean literacy score for 2001 would be significantly higher than the pooled mean literacy scores for 1998, 1999 and 2000;
   b. The mean literacy score for 2002 would be significantly higher than the pooled mean literacy scores for 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001; and
   c. The mean literacy score for 2003 would be higher than the pooled scores for all of the preceding years.

It was hypothesised that the contrast of literacy scores from 1998 against 1999, and the contrast of scores from 2000 against the pooled scores of 1998 and 1999 would not be significant. This pattern of mean school literacy scores would support a hypothesis that an improvement in mean Year 9 literacy assessments was associated with the implementation of *MYRP* and (provided other competing explanations could be plausibly ruled out) was generated by the school activities associated with implementation. Similar hypotheses were established for absences and apparent retention, except that the hypotheses for absence were that absence rates in 2001 would be significantly lower than pooled absence rates in 1998, 1999 and 2000, and so on.

In a similar manner, *a priori* contrasts between the LSGs were established by contrasting each LSG other than Group 9 against Group 9 (the 'high EMA' – 'high LOTE' group), which might be anticipated to include those schools in the lower ranges of literacy achievement and apparent retention, and the higher ranges of absence.

Finally, a conservative approach is for the results of these two sets of tests of single contrasts to be considered only if the appropriate global test for the between-schools (time) factor or the within-schools (LSG) factor is statistically significant. Given the specific nature of the hypotheses for the 'time' effect, however, a consistent pattern of statistical significance for contrasts that suggest an impact of *MYRP* and a pattern of non-significance in those where an impact cannot be expected may provide some plausible evidence for a genuine effect.

Statistical Results for Year 9 Literacy

There was a significant difference, pooled over the six years for which data were available, between the LSGs (F = 5.66; 8 and 197. d.f.; pr. <0.001). Like School Groups 1, 2, 3 and 4 had significantly higher Year 9 literacy scores, on average across the six years, when compared with Group 9.

The test for sphericity of the time-series data was statistically significant. This indicated that the conservative 'multivariate' test for the general effect of 'time' on Year 9 literacy should be used. This test was not significant (F = 1.86, 5 and 193 d.f. p = 0.104). Two of the anticipated specific 'time' contrasts were, however, statistically significant. They were for the contrast between the school average Year 9 literacy achievement for 2001 against the pooled school average achievement for the previous 3 years, and the school average Year 9 literacy achievement in 2001 against the pooled school average achievement for the previous 4 years (F = 4.791, 1 and 197 d.f., pr. = 0.030; F = 5.567, 1 and 197 d.f. pr. = 0.019 respectively). Thus, while the appropriate global test for the apparent trend in literacy scores across the years 1998 to 2003 indicates that the trend could arguably have occurred by chance, two of the three hypothesized specific contrasts between average literacy scores for specific years were significant, and the two that were hypothesized to be

not significant (between 1999 and 1998, and for 2000 against the pooled results for 1998 and 1999) were indeed not significant. There is thus some plausible statistical evidence to support the hypothesized growth in Year 9 literacy achievement across the first two years of implementation of *MYRP*. Statistical support for this hypothesis is not clear-cut, however, and the effect size for the increase is very small.

Absences - Year 7, 8 and 9

Year 7

Table 40 shows the distribution of school average recorded absences for Year 7 across the six years under investigation.

Table 40: Distributions of School Year 7 Absences from 1998 – 2003

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Min	2.60	1.60	1.40	3.90	1.20	0.80
25th % ile	12.20	11.45	11.99	12.05	12.78	13.36
Median	14.40	13.52	14.03	14.61	14.90	15.89
75th % ile	16.66	15.47	16.05	12.05	17.73	18.31
Max	31.30	46.8	29.60	51.50	38.90	38.90[*]
Mean	14.44	13.66	14.03	14.86	15.35	16.03
s.d.	4.08	4.32	4.12	4.81	4.67	4.61
N	206	206	206	206	206	206

[*]Note: The value for the maximum school average absence rate for 2003 was 31.0 before imputation of missing data points.

Both the mean and median values for Year 7 absence rates show a decrease from 1998 to 1999 followed by an increase for each subsequent year to a maximum mean absence rate in 2003 of 15.94 days per year. Taking the difference between this high value for 2003 and the lowest mean absence rate (1999) yields an effect size of 0.53, which is regarded as 'medium' by conventional standards. The effect size over the period from 2000 to 2003 is a little smaller (0.48).

The mixed-model analysis of variance showed a statistically significant difference in Year 9 absence rates across the LSGs (F = 3.901, 8 and 197, d.f., pr. <0.001). Like Schools Group 9 had significantly higher absence rates that LSGs 2, 3 and 4 (LSG 3 had clearly lower absence rates than all other LSGs).

The multivariate test for the change over time in absence rates was clearly significant (F = 8.83, 5 and 193 d.f., pr. < 0.001) while the test for the interaction between change over time and the LSGs was not significant. The individual contrasts across time showed a statistically significant decrease in absence rates from 1998 to 1999 (F = 13.28, 1 and 197 d.f., pr. < 0.001) and significant increases in absence rates for 2001 compared with the average of 1998, 1999 and 2000 (F = 5.32, 1 and 197 d.f., pr. = 0.02), 2002 compared with the average of 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 (F = 12.610, 1 and 197 d.f., pr. < 0.001) and 2003 compared with 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002 (F = 10.10, 1 and 197 d.f., pr. = 0.002). Thus, with the exception of the observed difference between 1998 and 1999, the pattern of statistically significant differences over the years was in accord with expectations. Contrary to expectations, however, these latter three statistically significant differences were associated with an increase in absences over the period under investigation rather than a decrease. Figure 12 shows the pattern of change in Year 7 absence rates over the period being investigated. The change in recorded absences over time is statistically significant and the effect sizes suggest that it is of some substantive importance.

Estimated Year 7 School Mean Absence Rates for the Period 1998 to 2003
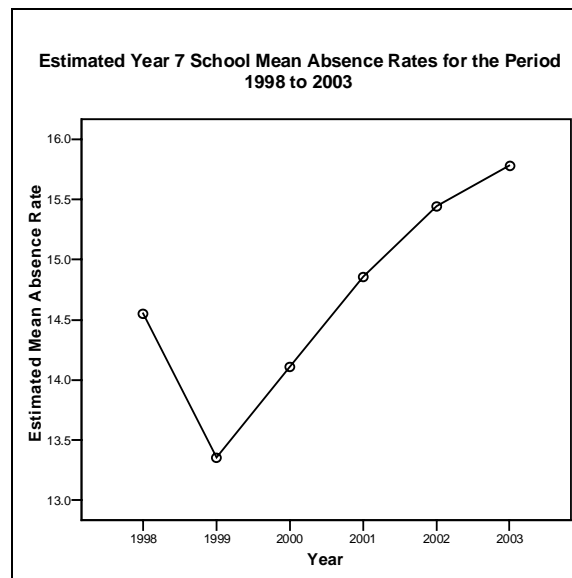
Figure 12: Year 7 Absence Rates – 1998 to 2003

Year 8

Table 41 shows the distribution of school average recorded absences for Year 8 across the period 1998 to 2003. Year 8 absence rates show a similar pattern to those for Year 7 except that there is not a decrease between 1998 and 1999. Rather, both the mean and the median suggest that recorded absences were increasing for the whole period under investigation. The effect size of the apparent increase in absence rates between 1998 and 2003 is 0.43, within the 'small' range by conventional standards.

As with the data for 1998, the overall test for differences in absence rates across the LSGs was statistically significant (F = 5.64, 8 and 197 d.f., pr. <0.001). Absence rates for LSG 9 were significantly higher than those for Groups 2, 3, and 4 while absences for LSG 8 were significantly higher than for LSG 9.

The test for sphericity associated with the within-schools effect was statistically significant suggesting that the multivariate approach to differences across time should be used. This test was not statistically significant at the conventional 0.05 level (F = 2.114, 5 and 193 d.f., pr. = 0.065). The individual *a priori* contrasts showed only one of the anticipated differences across the years; the average school absence rate for 2002 was found to be significantly different to the pooled average rate for 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 (F = 7.60, 1 and 197 d.f., pr. = 0.006). Absence rates for 2002 were higher than those in the preceding years. The data, therefore, do not support a clear-cut conclusion that there was a significant change in recorded absence rates at Year 8 during the years 1998 to 2003.

Table 41: Distributions of School Year 8 Absences from 1998 – 2003

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Min	3.60	2.50	1.70	4.90	7.90	4.80
25th % ile	13.66	13.81	14.77	15.29	15.62	15.86
Median	16.43	16.58	17.36	17.72	18.00	18.47
75th % ile	19.40	19.41	19.77	20.75	21.41	21.59
Max	42.70	66.00	51.40	39.70	38.20	49.70[*]
Mean	16.73	16.85	17.38	18.10	18.91	18.93
s.d.	5.04	6.09	5.37	4.96	5.31	5.26
N	206	206	206	206	206	206

[*]Note: The value for the maximum school average absence rate for 2003 was 38.40 before imputation of missing data points.

Year 9

Table 42 shows the distribution of school average recorded absences for Year 9 across the 1998 to 2003 period.

Table 42 suggests that Year 9 reported absence rates remained relatively steady across 1998 and 1999 but increased from there to 2002. This increase is followed by an apparent drop in 2003. Comparing the data in Table 40, Table 41 and Table 42 it is also apparent that recorded absences in Year 9 were higher than those in Year 7 (particularly) and Year 8. The effect size of the apparent increase in absence rates from 1998 to 2002 is 0.53 ('medium' by

convention) while that for the maximum increase while *MYRP* was being implemented (2000 to 2002) was 0.24, that is to say, by convention, 'small'.

The overall test for differences in absence rates across the LSGs was again statistically significant (F = 5.16, 8 and 197 d.f., pr. <0.001). Absence rates for LSG 9 were significantly higher than those for Groups 2, 3, 4 and 7.

Table 42: Distributions of School Year 9 Absences from 1998 – 2003

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Min	3.30	2.10	1.70	6.60	7.00	0.60
25th % ile	15.05	15.35	16.66	16.66	17.08	17.30
Median	17.84	17.89	19.70	20.29	20.74	20.18
75th % ile	21.19	20.96	22.42	24.10	24.71	23.11
Max	37.30	41.60	52.40	54.10	48.70	62.80[*]
Mean	18.20	18.35	19.76	20.56	21.27	20.68
s.d.	5.31	5.71	6.29	6.55	6.32	7.04
N	206	206	206	206	206	206

[*]Note: The minimum and maximum values for reported Year 9 absence rates were not changed by the imputation process.

The test for sphericity associated with the within-schools effect was statistically significant, indicating that the multivariate approach to differences across time should be used. This test was clearly significant at the conventional 0.05 level (F = 7.992, 5 and 193 d.f., pr. <0.001). The individual *a priori* contrasts showed two of the three anticipated differences across the years were statistically significant; the average school absence rate for 2001 was found to be significantly different to the pooled average rate for 1998, 1999 and 2000 (F = 15.72, 1 and 197 d.f., pr. <0.001) while the absence rate for 2002 was significantly different from the pooled rates for 1998, 1999, 200 and 2001 (F = 18.30, 1 and 197 d.f., pr. <0.001). Absence rates for 2002 were higher than those in the preceding years. Additionally, however, there was a significant difference between the recorded absence rate for 2000 compared with the pooled rates for 1998 and 1999 (F = 14.65, 1 and 197 d.f., pr. <0.001). Figure 13 shows the pattern of these observed differences in absence rates. It is apparent that there were increases in recorded absence rates in 2000, 2001 and 2002 followed by a decrease in 2003. The decrease in 2003 is not evident in the significance tests as they were focussed on isolating differences in 'growth' across the time period being examined, but the difference is clearly apparent in the plot of means (these are 'adjusted' for any associations between the LSGs and change in recorded absence and may not mirror exactly the difference observed in Table 42). Taken together with the fairly substantial effect size,

these results suggest that there was a significant and substantively important increase in absence rates in Year 9 between 1998 and 2002, followed by a possibly substantive drop in absences in 2003.
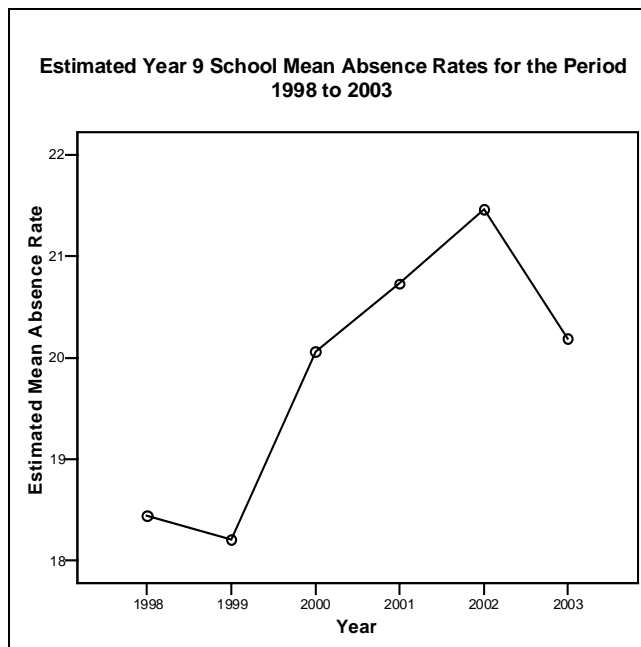

Figure 13: Year 9 Absence Rates – 1998 to 2003

Transition to Year 11 – Apparent Retention Rate

Table 43 shows the distribution of apparent retention from Year 10 to Year 11 across the 1998 to 2003 period (calculated as the Year 11 enrolment recorded in February of the year under consideration as a percentage of the Year 10 enrolments in July of the previous year).

The overall test for differences in apparent retention rates across the LSGs was statistically significant (F = 4.59, 8 and 188 d.f., pr. <0.001). In relation to the specified contrasts, apparent rates for LSG 9 were significantly higher than those for Groups 7 and 8. A plot of apparent retention rates showed clearly that the 'standout' difference was between LSG 8 and the other LSGs, with apparent retention rates for LSG 8 being notably lower than for the others.

The data for the median and mean apparent retention rates presented in Table 43 suggest that there was a U-shaped relationship over time; retention rates first decreased then increased during the period 1998 to 2003 with a suggestion that the period of increase coincided with the period of the implementation of *MYRP*. The effect size of the

difference between 2000 and 2003 is very small however (0.05) and the overall statistical test of the trend across time is not significant. (A test of the specific U-shaped relationship for apparent retention across time was similarly not significant.) It should be concluded that there was no significant or substantively important change in apparent retention rates to Year 11 over the years under review.

Table 43: Distributions of School Year 9 Absences from 1998 – 2003

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Min	8.30	2.70	5.60	5.20	4.70	17.90[*]
25th % ile	87.26	86.13	85.42	86.22	86.19	85.49
Median	93.32	92.75	91.62	91.55	91.59	92.59
75th % ile	99.74	99.81	98.13	91.34	98.80	99.95
Max	231.50	203.20	205.00	210.20	217.30	197.50
Mean	95.20	94.22	93.21	93.57	93.61	94.03
s.d.	17.75	17.39	16.92	16.33	16.78	17.12
N	197	197	197	197	197	197

[*]Note: The value for the minimum school average apparent retention rate for 2003 was 55.9 before imputation of missing data points.

Summary and Conclusion

The possible impact of *MYRP* on recorded literacy achievement against CSF standards, absence rates and retention from Year 10 to Year 11 was examined using school aggregate data for a group of schools that had not participated in the earlier *MYRAD* program.

There was some evidence for the anticipated increase in literacy achievement across the first two years of the implementation of *MYRP*, although the effect size of the increase was small, and the statistical results were equivocal. Results for absences in Years 7 and 9 were found to follow a trend opposite to that which would indicate a positive impact of *MYRP* in reducing student absence. While there was a similar trend in Year 8 to that for the other two years the results were not statistically significant. Finally, there was no detectable impact of *MYRP* on apparent retention to Year 11.

It is difficult to draw clear conclusions from these results. The analysis of school-level aggregate data in relation to individual-level correlates, teacher and school-level effects and trends over time is well known to be problematic. Additionally, the assessment by teachers of literacy achievement against CSF standards introduces a level of subjective judgement at

both the individual assessor and school levels (including the influence of possible expectancy effects) that many find of concern. The apparent increase in literacy in the first two years of *MYRP* is perhaps indicative that small improvements may be occurring in a number of schools, and certainly many schools believe that this has been a major achievement of *MYRP* (Chapter 7).

Subjectivity in judgement and recording is not so clearly a problem with data relating to student absence. Indeed, it may be argued that *MYRP* has encouraged an increased focus of concern and vigilance in recording student absences, which may plausibly result in an apparent increase in absence rates, rather than the anticipated decline. There is a little evidence in the open-ended questionnaire responses from schools to support this interpretation. The apparent decrease in absence rates between 2002 and 2003 at Year 9 (where overall absence rates are higher) may be an indication that the attention of many schools to the issue of engagement and student attendance encouraged by *MYRP* may be starting to have the desired impact.

CHAPTER 9: THE SCHOOL CASE STUDIES

Descriptive Case Study 1: Vivaldi Secondary College

School profile

Vivaldi Secondary College was established in 1926 as a rural Higher Elementary School. It was officially proclaimed as a High School in 1950. The area served by the school is now a suburb of Melbourne, with easy freeway access to the city, but it retains strong elements of the attractive, riverside bush setting that made it the home of colonies of artists for more than one hundred years. It is now in like school group 1.

The school has 1287 students, 412 of whom are in Years 7 to 9. Most students are from families of middle to high socio-economic status and English-speaking background. Over ninety percent of students proceed to Year 12. Students do not wear school uniform.

The culture of Vivaldi SC reflects its long history and traditions. The school is recognised for its pioneering curriculum innovation over many years. Staff and students take great pride in the great variety of curricular and extra-curricular programs, especially the music, art and drama programs, which have gained international recognition.

The school is divided into three sub-schools: Junior (Years 7 and 8); Middle (Years 9 and 10); Senior (Years 11 and 12).

Methodology

The chosen methodological approach centred on semi-structured interviews with the principal, the assistant principal (curriculum and professional development), the transition co-ordinator, the head of junior school, the professional development and SOSE co-ordinator, the English co-ordinator and teachers involved in the delivery of middle years programs. Interviews took place in the principal's office and were taped (with the interviewees' consent). Notes were also taken during the interviews. Relevant documents provided by the school informed the discussion and analysis. The analysis took the form of description and discussion of the information gathered, under identified categories that were developed for the purpose.

Findings

Reasons for participating in _MYRP_

The principal and staff were aware that, for many years, problems relating especially to attendance and disengagement, had existed in the Year 8 cohort of students. There was a general perception that this situation could be worsening.

The school operates a 'Middle School' curriculum, a vertically-structured elective program that offers over eighty 'units' to students in Years 9 and 10. Interviewees reported that this program is very popular and seen as successful by students, parents and teachers. Evaluations of the program indicated relatively high levels of student engagement and reduced levels of student misbehaviour in Years 9 and 10. But Year 8 continued to cause difficulties and there was resistance, for various reasons, to the idea of incorporating this year level into Middle School.

> [Students] are mostly OK in Year 7 because everything is still new to them. Troubles start somewhere towards the end of Year 7 and become worse in Year 8. But we have always tended to say: 'Just hang on in Year 8 because they'll soon be in Middle School'. They kind of sort themselves out in the [Middle School elective] program. (Assistant Principal)

The principal first became aware of the Middle Years initiatives through discussion with fellow principals whose schools were _MYRAD_ schools. He and other key staff subsequently learnt more through communication with the regional office, attending conferences and professional development sessions and professional reading. When the opportunity arose to apply for _MYRP_ funding, teachers agreed that the focus of activity should be on Years 7 and 8.

Interviewees' understandings of the main features of _MYRP_

Interviewees reported that they were impressed by the strong research base that underpinned the Middle Years reform strategies. In particular, they reported that the findings of the Victorian Quality Schools Project relating to literacy resonated with their own experiences of the growing gap between achieving and non-achieving students in the middle years, and their perceptions of student underachievement and disengagement, particularly among some students in Year 8.

> The research raised people's awareness of why some students were behaving as they were. (Principal)

Teachers in the school were already committed to the 'beliefs and understandings' of middle years reform, but recognised that there was room for improvement, specifically in the areas of monitoring and assessment, classroom teaching pedagogies, the development of professional learning teams and intervention and special assistance. Developing the understanding of all staff in these areas, especially pedagogy, became a central goal of the middle years strategy at Vivaldi SC. It was addressed mainly through extensive staff professional development 2001-2004.

The main strategies of the *MYRP* plan at Vivaldi Secondary College

The principal stressed his belief in 'encouraging staff to try out new things, to know what's happening in other schools.' The *MYRP* funding, he said, had helped to 'keep teaching loads and class sizes reasonable' – two things that he saw as preconditions for innovation and improvement.

The strategies adopted at Vivaldi SC centred mainly on improving curriculum and pedagogy through concentrated and targeted professional development. Professional development was described as 'intensive' and 'demanding' by several interviewees. It focussed on understanding the learning needs of students and developing student centred programs to meet those needs. (Examples: *Multiple Intelligences*; *Productive Pedagogies*; *Student Learning Styles*; *Middle years of schooling 'You can do it'*; mentoring training for home group teachers; MYPRAD training; boys literacy.)

> We've had lots and lots of theory. Now we are sitting down and working out how to implement it. (Assistant Principal)

Teachers were working co-operatively in Key Learning Area (KLA) based groups. The KLA/faculty was viewed as the main unit of professional community in the school. Interviewees expressed reservations about the value of cross-faculty professional learning and integrated curriculum teams in secondary schools. The principal favoured an 'organic' approach to building such teams:

> (Cross curriculum) learning teams can become artificial. Teachers need a common purpose for meeting. Teachers do make connections – e.g. SOSE programs may integrate some LOTE and Music. But we have to be mindful of increasing teachers' working loads for little or no gain. We find that the young teachers establish boundaries. They are not going to burn out and they may not be here for the long haul. We have to factor all that in, so we don't push learning teams. This isn't to say that professional learning teams don't happen. Networks form and reform with the tasks. This is a secondary school culture – different from primary schools. (Principal)

Auditing existing units of work in light of teachers' new awareness of middle years issues was a major professional collaborative project in the school. The assistant principal reported that PD in 'Productive Pedagogies' was resulting in a change of focus from a teacher-centred 'input' modes of teaching and learning to a student centred 'enquiry' or 'product' mode, but that there was still some resistance to these notions from some staff, including younger 'newer' teachers. However, she saw the high levels of professional discussion, and even the tensions that arose from varying opinions among staff, as valuable for professional community and learning.

> Teachers are learning to let go. We've almost got the groundswell. Almost
> enough to change the groundswell. (Assistant Principal)

The assistant principal also reported a movement away from an individual 'privatised' mode of teaching towards a culture where teachers were happy to have other teachers in their classrooms. She saw this as a 'flow on' from the professional development and related activities.

Other strategies

These included:

- Establishing a Middle Years Working Party to oversee initiatives and their implementation, especially teacher professional development.

- Limiting the number of teachers at junior levels, especially Years 7 and 8.

- Timetabling more 'double periods' to facilitate extended blocks of time for teaching and learning and reduce the movement of students between rooms.

- Home group teachers in Years 7 who 8 took the class for at least two subjects.

- A 'shadowing program' involving Year 7 teachers and Year 6 (primary school) teachers.

- Improved communication with primary feeder schools, including a LOTE tutoring program.

- Improved collection and storing of data about students moving from primary to secondary school. (Did not include CSF student achievement data or AIM data.)

- A corrective literacy program (withdrawal and some in-class assistance). There are five withdrawal groups with up to twelve students in each group. There are also numeracy correction groups, with four or five students in each group.

- Targetting key staff, (e.g. faculty co-ordinators) for extra PD and expecting them to establish ways of leading other teachers and sharing their expertise.

The head of junior school identified the main 'assumption' that underpinned these strategies

> An assumption underpinned the project:: that an increase in the percentage of students actively engaged in their learning, with the appropriate staff for a greater period of time, will lead to improved engagement and learning; and improvements in the associated benchmarks. (Head of Junior School)

Expenditure of *MYRP* funds

MYRP funds were spent on salaries for the co-ordination and teaching of the literacy and numeracy corrective programs and on middle years co-ordination. The funding also helped to keep classes at manageable sizes. The principal pointed out that this was a necessary precondition for productive change.

Leadership and support

Teacher interviewees identified a strong school focus on teaching and learning, 'coming from the top'. This started with the principal and assistant principals and extended through the senior leadership positions such as heads of departments and heads of the sub-schools. Vivaldi Secondary College already had a strong tradition of curriculum leadership, but *MYRP* was seen as providing direction and concrete suggestions and strategies on which leaders could build. Leadership was not seen as the sole prerogative of the principal class and teachers who held 'official' leadership positions, but was encouraged in all teachers. Teachers said that they felt well supported in attempting to bring about desired changes. This was largely because of the time that had been devoted to arriving at agreed goals on the basis of agreed principles for implementing Middle Years strategies. The extensive professional development undertaken by all staff was also seen as an invaluable means of support and an indication that senior administrators were 'serious' about effecting meaningful change.

ICT

Several interviewees saw the use of ICT as a significant element in the implementation of the *MYRP* program. They said that the school was relatively well off in terms of computers, with computer 'pods' easily accessible to students between classrooms. This allowed for more student-centred curriculum delivery, an important goal of the school's Middle Years pedagogy. Computers enabled students to access information for themselves and to develop higher-order thinking skills of analysis and evaluation. The head of the junior school saw student use of computers as an important mechanism for changing from a 'chalk and talk' teaching and learning technology to one in which students had much more control over their own learning.

Effective use of ICT was also seen to be vital in helping teachers to organise and share curriculum. Units of work that were revised in light of professional development and *MYRP* principles were made available for all staff through the school's Intra Net.

Outcomes

The interviewees identified the chief outcome of the Middle Years Reform Program for their school as being the changes in pedagogy and ways of thinking about schooling that had flowed from the extensive professional development undertaken by all staff. This was described by one interviewee as: 'a sea change in the ways we think of schools.'

There was general agreement that most teachers had made significant changes to their pedagogy as a result of the *MYRP* initiatives and that change had 'flowed through' to other year levels in the school. Teachers were working much more collaboratively and using 'meta language' about their teaching practice when working on professional tasks such as revising units of work.

Interviewees believed that students in Years 7 and 8 were now more engaged. This perception was supported by school data that showed improved attendance and retention. The principal noted that improvement in student attendance may have been even higher than shown in the data. This was because of more reliable methods of collecting attendance data and also because of difficulties in recording students as 'present' when they were out of the school participating one of the many innovative community based programs. Improved student 'connectedness' to school was shown in the results of a 'connectedness' survey. Interviewees saw these improvements as a direct result of pedagogical change and clearer perceptions among teachers of the needs of students in the middle years.

Corrective reading program results and numeracy program results showed improved outcomes for participating students. Other evidence of improved student achievement was given as the reduced number of Year 7 and 8 students rated 'N' on their school reports. The interviewees said that the school was cautious about using CSF-related student achievement data and or AIM data as an indicator of improvement as they lacked confidence in the reliability and validity of such data.

The principal and teachers had reservations about the extent to which improvements in student engagement, literacy, attendance and retention could be directly linked to *MYRP*. They pointed out that many other factors were at work, including involvement in other programs such as *Schools for Innovation and Excellence.*

Summary of findings

Vivaldi Secondary College decided to participate in the *MYRP* because it recognised that the research-based program and associated funding would meet identified student needs in their junior sub-school.

Interviewees showed a very good understanding of the main features of *MYRP*. They showed confidence in the research that underpinned it and said that the research reflected their own experiences of student underachievement in the middle years.

The main strategies adopted in the school, focussed on teacher professional development and related KLA-based activities to change pedagogy and develop new curriculum that reflected student-centred, enquiry-based principles of teaching and learning.

Strategies also included: the establishment of a middle years working party; limiting the number of teachers in classes in the sub-school; timetabling more double periods; improved communication with feeder primary schools, including a 'shadowing' program and improved ways if collecting and sharing student information; corrective literacy and numeracy programs; and targeting teachers for professional development that would help them to lead others.

MYRP funds were spent mainly on salaries for the co-ordination and teaching of literacy and numeracy corrective programs and on co-ordination of middle years initiative.

Strong leadership, focussed on teaching and learning, extended from the principal class through a formal, similarly focussed formal leadership structure. Informal leadership was also encouraged and supported. Teachers felt well supported in implementing programs.

The school was relatively well off in terms of ICT. The effective use of ICT was seen as a significant element in the implementation of middle years initiatives.

Interviewees identified pedagogical change and higher levels of professional community as the main outcomes of the *MYRP* program in their school. They also reported staff perceptions of improvement in student engagement, and saw these improvements as related to improved pedagogy. These perceptions were supported by some survey data and by improved attendance and retention.

Reading and numeracy testing showed improvement for students who participated in the corrective programs. Improved achievement for other students was shown in fewer 'Ns' in Year 7 and 8 student reports. Interviewees reported low confidence in the reliability and validity of CSF and AIM student achievement data.

The interviewees were unsure about the extent to which direct links between improved outcomes and *MYRP* could be identified. They pointed out that many other factors were at work, including the school's involvement in other programs such as *Schools for Innovation and Excellence.*

Descriptive Case Study 2: Shakespeare Secondary College

School context

Shakespeare Secondary College is a small rural secondary college (7-12) which offers a broad curriculum to about three hundred and eighty students. It has 218 student in Years 7 to 9. The relatively small size of the school promotes a friendly atmosphere and there are supportive partnerships with parents, students, teachers, other schools in the area and the community. Most students are of English-speaking background, and the number of boys is almost double that of girls. The school has gained recognition for its special music programs, its distance education program and tree planting programs. Shakespeare Secondary College is the only secondary college in the local Shire.

Methodology

The chosen methodological approach centred on semi-structured interviews with the principal, the assistant principal, the Leading Teacher who led Middle Years initiatives, the teachers who were team leaders of at Years 7 and 8 and teachers involved in the delivery of middle years programs. Interviews took place in an interview room and were taped (with the interviewees' consent). Notes were also taken during the interviews. Relevant documents, provided by the school informed the interviews and analysis. The analysis took the form of description and discussion of the data gathered, under identified categories that were developed for the purpose.

Findings

Reasons for participating in *MYRP*

Teachers at Shakespeare SC had gained a good knowledge of Middle Years initiatives through the school's participation in the Middle Years Research and Development project (*MYRAD*) that was conducted during the period 1998-2002. The Principal and staff were enthusiastic about the project and welcomed the opportunity to continue the work they had started in the school. Teachers were particularly keen to address issues of student disengagement and student safety. As the only secondary school in the shire, they were particularly interested in exploring ways to improve communication with local primary schools.

Interviewees' understandings of the main features of *MYRP*

Interviewees reported that they were impressed by the strong research base that underpinned the Middle Years reform strategies. The research had confirmed their own impressions of student disengagement and underachievement in Years 7-9, particularly among boys. Partly as a result of the school's participation in *MYRAD*, teachers were already committed to the 'beliefs and understandings' of middle years reform, but recognised that there was room for improvement, specifically in the areas of boys' literacy, monitoring and assessment, the development of professional learning teams, classroom teaching pedagogies, the development of professional learning teams, and intervention and special assistance.

The main strategies of the *MYRP* plan at Shakespeare Secondary College

The strategies adopted at Shakespeare SC centred mainly on developing student centred programs to engage students and raise student achievement. Teachers were encouraged to emphasise a risk-taking, problem-solving approach:

> There's now a belief that 'this is worth having a go at' permeating through
> the school. (Principal)

The principal said that teachers had decided to 'start small and do it well. Get a landing party on the beach'. Consequently, effort was initially concentrated at Year 7 (2001). A special area in the school was devoted to Year 7 students. Volunteer teachers formed cross-faculty professional teams and worked together to develop theme-based integrated cross-curriculum projects. Of a total staff of thirty-three, eighteen teachers were now involved in these teams at Years 7 and 8. Last year the teams met weekly. This year, because of involvement in other programs, they meet fortnightly. Time release is provided for these meetings.

> Momentum has been sustained. Teachers appreciate not working in isolation.
> They enjoy developing the integrated units – the one on Ancient Egypt was
> really good last year. (Year 7 Team Leader)

The teams conducted a curriculum audit and remodelled courses on the basis of the CSF, which they found useful for planning and assessment. They had also changed reporting processes and formats to more accurately reflect CSF outcomes. They found that using the CSF outcomes-based approaches was consistent with Middle Years and helpful in implementing Middle Years classroom strategies.

Teachers were encouraged to use 'table group' teaching strategies. Classroom furniture was arranged so that students sat in groups of four to six students around each table. The expectations were that the furniture would not be moved and that teachers would use co-operative learning teaching strategies, rather than traditional 'chalk and talk' with all students facing to the front. The teacher who led middle years initiatives said that this had 'worked' in most cases, but that some teachers, although they had not actually moved the furniture from the 'table-group' configuration, were continuing to 'teach' from the front of the room – (which created difficulties for students who were facing the opposite way!).

Teachers in the teams were interested in using a more data-based approach for monitoring students' progress and planning curriculum, but the team leaders said that this was 'hugely time consuming' and was 'not really happening.'

> The time for proper data analysis is just not there, although we can certainly see the value of it. It's so time consuming – collecting, analysing. And teachers seem to prefer anecdotal to hard data. (Team Leader).

Other strategies

These included:

- Staff professional development in boys' education and numeracy skill development.

- Introduction of social and emotional health and well-being programs.

- Changing classroom configurations to 'table groups' and skilling staff in the teaching of small groups.

- Establishing networks between primary and secondary teachers.

- Reporting to parents about combined activities in the local 'cluster' of schools.

- Limiting the number of teachers at junior levels, especially Years 7 and 8.

- Timetabling larger blocks of time to facilitate effective teaching and learning and reduce the movement of students between rooms.

- Improved collection and storing of data about students moving from primary to secondary school.

- Corrective literacy and numeracy programs program (withdrawal and some in-class assistance).

- Improving home, school and community links and partnerships

Expenditure of *MYRP* funds

MYRP funds were spent on limiting numbers of Year 7 at lower levels; on a time allowance for the Middle Years co-ordinator (Leading Teacher); on providing some time release for teams of teachers to meet and on facilitating the corrective literacy and numeracy programs.

Leadership and support

The team leaders said they and their team members felt well supported in attempting to bring about desired changes.

> Teachers said they enjoyed the teams because of the support factor –
> support from each other and from the school leadership. (Team Leader)

Teachers appreciated the time release allocated for team meetings. They also appreciated the whole school professional development sessions that helped them to implement strategies on the basis of agreed goals. The allocation of a specific area for Year 7 was also mentioned as a significant example of the school leadership's commitment to and support for the Middle Years initiatives.

Outcomes

The interviewees identified the chief outcome of the Middle Years Reform Program for their school as being the changes in pedagogy and ways of thinking about schooling that had flowed from professional development and the experiences of teachers working in professional learning teams.

There was general agreement that there had been significant gains made among the teachers who participated in teams and that these gains had 'flowed through' to other teachers.

Interviewees reported a perception, shared, they said by most staff, of increased student engagement. This perception was supported by the results of a 'student engagement survey'. It was also supported by an increased enrolment of Year 7 students and by the fact that the average absentee rate in Year 7 had dropped by 2.4 days per student since 2001.

Teachers reported fewer incidents of student misbehaviour in Year 7 and 8 and a reduction in reported cases of bullying. The general classroom 'climate' was described as 'now more friendly and relaxed' due to improved relationships.

CSF student achievement data showed improvement in literacy and numeracy for most students. Some students who participated in the literacy and numeracy correction programs raised their achievement by two CSF levels in a twelve-month period.

Corrective reading program results and numeracy program results showed improved outcomes for participating students over a twelve-month period (based on ACER ORCHID test results).

The principal and teachers interviewed had reservations about attributing improvements in student achievement solely to *MYRP* as they felt that other factors, including participation in other programs, e.g. *Restart* and *Schools for Innovation and Excellence*, had significant influence. However they confidently claimed that the team-teaching approach and reduction in the numbers of teachers for Year 7 and 8 students had resulted in better relationships among teachers and students. They believed that the evidence of improved student engagement, reduction in reported incidents of student misbehaviour and bullying were related to these initiatives.

Summary of findings

The school's reasons for participating in *MYRP* were based on positive experiences as a *MYRAD* school. They welcomed the opportunity of continuing their work with the support of *MYRP* funding. They expressed confidence in the Middle Years research which, they believed, reflected their own experiences of teaching students in Years 7-9.

The principal class and teacher interviewees all had a very good understanding of the principles that underpin the Middle Years reform initiatives. They were strongly committed to the 'beliefs and understandings ' and were particularly interested in the development of professional learning teams and improving educational outcomes for boys.

The main strategies centred on developing programs, based on Middle Years reform principles, to raise levels of student engagement and achievement. Cross-faculty teams were working successfully with Year 7 and 8 students. They met regularly to discuss student welfare and curriculum and to develop cross-faculty integrated projects. Other strategies included: a focus on boys literacy and numeracy; corrective programs in literacy and numeracy; reducation of the numbers of teachers and increase in the length of class periods at Years 7 and 8; improving communication and networking with primary schools; improving home and community links.

MYRP funds were spent on keeping numbers of students in Year 7 low, on-time allowances for team leaders and the Middle Years Co-ordinator, on providing time release for team members and on facilitating the corrective literacy and numeracy programs.

The principal and assistant principal provided strong leadership, focused on teaching and learning and underpinned by sound understandings of Middle Years Reform principles. Similarly strong leadership was provided by the middle years co-ordinator and the team leaders. Teachers appreciated the support of time to meet, appropriately targeted professional development and the special area provided for Year 7 students.

Interviewees reported the chief outcomes of *MYRP* as being the changes in pedagogy and ways of thinking about schooling that had flowed from PD and, especially from the development of cross-faculty professional teams of teachers at Years 7 and 8. From these had flowed improved student engagement, improved relationships among teachers and students, improvements in retention and attendance and reduction in incidents of bullying and student misbehaviour. CSF student achievement data and the results of testing in the corrective programs showed significant improvement, especially among lower-achieving students and boys.

The interviewees had reservations about the extent to which these successful outcomes could be attributed to *MYRP*, but were confident that the *MYRP* strategies had led to better relationships among students and teachers.

Descriptive Case Study 3: Tallis Secondary College

School profile

Tallis Secondary College was established in 1926, in inner suburban Melbourne. It is a coeducational school with 1270 students and over 130 teachers and support staff. Formerly a working class area, the suburb in which the school is situated has recently become 'gentrified' and, consequently, the socio-economic profile of the student population is changing, but continues to be vital and diverse with students of over forty ethnic backgrounds and varying social and economic circumstances. The school's like school groups are 3O and 3S.

In 1996, the school was nominated as one of only six advanced Science and Technology Centres in the state of Victoria. It received a grant of one million dollars to resource innovative learning technologies. This resulted in the school becoming a leader in providing online access in the classroom and developing, sharing and storing curriculum via Intra Net. The grant also allowed the school to introduce new subjects, including robotics and electronics, desktop publishing and computer-aided design.

As a technology 'Navigator School' Tallis SC was required to run regular seminars for other Victorian, Australian and international teachers on the teaching approaches used in conjunction with advanced learning technologies. It receives regular visits by local and international educators and takes pride in its reputation as an international leader in this field. Students and teachers have very good access to computers, there are more than five hundred PCs in the school and there are varying means of access, from computer pods to dedicated IT classrooms. Teachers and students also have personal laptop computers.

Methodology

The chosen methodological approach centred on semi-structured interviews with the principal, the assistant principal, the Middle Years co-ordinator and teachers involved in the delivery of middle years programs. Interviews took place in an interview room and were taped (with the interviewees' consent). Notes were also taken during the interviews. Relevant documents, provided by the school informed the interviews and analysis. The analysis took the form of description and discussion of the data gathered under identified categories that were developed for the purpose.

Reasons for participating in *MYRP*

The principal and staff at Tallis SC who were working on Middle Years programs had been involved in Middle Years pedagogical initiatives from the mid nineties. They applied for the

school to be part of the *MYRAD* project, but their application was not successful. Nonetheless, they followed the progress of the *MYRAD* project with great interest. In their local network of schools, they investigated and discussed *MYRAD* and the associated literature, invited Peter Hill and others to speak with teachers, and related the *MYRAD* findings to their own experiences. In 1996, when the school became a Navigator technology school, interest in Middle Years increased, because teachers saw the great potential of ICT to develop programs and pedagogy that would complement and assist in the implementation of the approaches advocated in the Middle Years literature (e.g. the Hill-Crevola model). The school and the local network continues to be highly involved in these developments.

Interviewees' understandings of the main features of *MYRP*

All interviewees showed strong familiarity with and knowledge of the main features of *MYRP*. They said that they were impressed by the strong research base that underpinned the Middle Years reform strategies. The research had confirmed their own impressions of student disengagement and underachievement in Years 7-9, particularly among boys.

Because of the schools designation as a Technology Navigator school, teachers at Tallis SC had participated in a great deal of professional development, not only in the technical aspects of ICT, but also in its pedagogical applications and significance. The *MYRP* initiative gave further impetus to the changes in understandings that had developed:

> Staff were really interested. Some did post graduate courses. [Being a Navigator school] turned the staff into a reflective learning community – changed the nature of the school. The keystone was a constructivist view of students' learning. Teachers helped other teachers. There was a philosophical shift. (Assistant Principal)

The main strategies of the *MYRP* plan at Tallis Secondary College

The main strategies adopted at Tallis SC built on developments and programs that evolved from the Navigator programs to engage students and raise student achievement.

The integrated curriculum and professional learning initiative

An integrated curriculum and professional learning initiative was set up in Years 7 and 8 in 1998. This involved designated groups of teachers and students working together on theme-based, cross-curricular learning projects. The number of teachers involved with each group was kept to a minimum.

The interesting thing about this project, in this school, was its disbanding, in 2003.

> I started it in 1998 and I ended it in 2003. So I instigated it and I buried it as well. (Middle Years Co-ordinator)

The reasons for the disbanding are interesting:

> I could see no point in forcing it. It came to the point where it just tended to be the same people who wanted to be involved. We couldn't get other people to shift. It worked a bit as a small model, but it didn't work across the board. People don't necessarily like each other. They see all the meetings as an impost on their time. One person ends up carrying it.

> I wonder if it's a natural model in a secondary school. People like to work in KLA groups where they feel there is such a lot to do. (Middle Years Co-ordinator)

The middle years co-ordinator added that the cross-curricular project model had not been totally abandoned, but was happening more 'naturally' and 'spontaneously', for example the LOTE and Music teachers were collaborating with other teachers to integrate elements of their programs with those of other faculties.

Other Strategies

Strategies included:

- Staff professional development and follow-up, especially in Thinking Curriculum. Every staff member now reports on at least one Thinking Curriculum project.

- Increasing the time fraction of the SSO attendance officer.

- Expanding student welfare support (more time release for student welfare co-ordinators).

- Supporting the appointment of a (.6) literacy teacher who works closely with the English teachers and conducts withdrawal and in-classroom programs.

- More KLA meeting time.

- Fortnightly meeting of KLA leaders with school curriculum and PD leaders.

- Building informal, cross curricular groups and networks to support particular projects.

- Limiting the number of teachers at junior levels, especially Years 7 and 8.

- Timetabling larger blocks of time to facilitate effective teaching and learning and reduce the movement of students between rooms.

- Improved collection and storing of data about students moving from primary to secondary school.

- Improving home, school and community links and partnerships.

Expenditure of *MYRP* funds

MYRP funds were spent on funding increased welfare support and employing a school attendance officer. Two student welfare co-ordinators were appointed (male and female). The funds were also used to support a 0.6 literacy teacher who organised a withdrawal corrective literacy program and provided in-class assistance to students with literacy problems.

Leadership and support

The team leaders said they and their team members felt well supported in attempting to bring about desired changes.

> Teachers said they enjoyed the teams because of the support factor –
> support from each other and from the school leadership. (Team Leader)

Teachers appreciated the time release allocated for team meetings. They also appreciated the whole school professional development sessions that helped them to implement strategies on the basis of agreed goals. The allocation of a specific area for Year 7 was also mentioned as a significant example of the school leadership's commitment to, and support for, the Middle Years initiatives.

Outcomes

The interviewees identified the chief outcome of the Middle Years Reform Program for their school as being the changes in pedagogy and ways of thinking about schooling that had flowed from professional development and the experiences of teachers working in professional learning teams.

There was general agreement that there had been significant gains made among the teachers who participated in teams and that these gains had 'flowed through' to other teachers.

Interviewees reported perceptions, shared they said by most staff, of increased student engagement and better self esteem in previously disengaged students. This perception was supported by the results of a student 'engagement' survey. It was also supported by an increased enrolment of Year 7 students and by the fact that the average absentee rate in Year 7 had dropped by 2.4 days per student since 2001.

Teachers reported fewer incidents of student misbehaviour in Year 7 and 8 and a reduction in reported cases of bullying. The general classroom 'climate' was described as 'now more friendly and relaxed' due to improved relationships.

CSF student achievement data showed improvement in literacy and numeracy for most students. Some students who participated in the literacy and numeracy correction programs raised their achievement by two CSF levels in a twelve-month period.

There had also been gains made as a result of the implementation of Thinking Curriculum projects. Teachers reported an increased ability on the part of many students to reflect on their learning, use metacognitive language and 'think outside the square'.

Corrective reading program results and numeracy program results showed improved outcomes for participating students over a twelve-month period (based on ACER ORCHID test results).

One unexpected outcome was that, contrary to the expectations of some people that increased use of ICT would adversely affect the reading habits of students, the school librarians reported increased use of the library and borrowing of books. The principal and teachers interviewed said they thought this could be related to the Thinking Curriculum initiatives, and also to students' increased curiosity about the world, that was stimulated by access to the internet.

The principal and teachers interviewed had reservations about attributing improvements in student achievement solely to *MYRP* as they felt that other factors were involved. They believed, especially, that 'state of the art' teacher professional development in the use of ICT to support student learning had resulted in the dramatic changes to classroom practices and similarly dramatic improvements in teaching and learning.

Summary of findings

When Tallis SC became a technology Navigator School in 1996, the principal and teachers realised the potential of ICT to develop programs and pedagogy that would reflect the approaches to middle years that were starting to be advocated, following research in the mid nineties.

All interviewees showed a sophisticated understanding of middle years principles and the main features of *MYRP*. They were particularly interested in strategies to improve student engagement, and in the Thinking Curriculum.

The main strategies adopted at Tallis SC built on developments that evolved from the school's status as a Navigator school. Teachers had benefited from extensive professional development in using technology as a tool to promote student engagement and effective learning. Interviewees believed that teachers' pedagogy had shifted dramatically towards promoting student-centred, enquiry based learning.

Integrated professional learning and curriculum teams were established in 1998. These teams were disbanded in 2003, as teachers felt that they were no longer 'working' and were, possibly, unsuited to the culture of secondary schools.

Strategies included, requiring every member of staff to develop and report on at least one Thinking Curriculum project; expanding student welfare support; improving communication with other schools, especially primary schools; more KLA meeting time and greater emphasis on the subject departments as 'units of professional learning and community'; supporting a literacy co-ordinator and corrective literacy program; and improving home and school community links and partnerships.

The chief outcomes of *MYRP* were identified as improved student engagement, attendance and retention, deeper levels of 'higher order thinking' being built in to the curriculum, changes in teachers' pedagogy towards more co-operative, enquiry-based learning strategies and improved student self esteem.

Descriptive Case Study 4: Franklin Secondary College

School profile

Franklin Secondary College is situated in a Victorian provincial town. It has 880 students in classes from Years 7 to 12. The school has a junior (Year 7-10) and senior (VCE campus.) Most students are of English-speaking background and of low to medium socio-economic status. The school is well known for its high levels of participation in many local community activities and projects.

The junior campus has two sub-schools: Years 7-8 and Years 9-10. Years 9-10 are organised in a Vertical Modular Grouping (VMG) elective curriculum program. Years 7-8, the focus levels for the *MYRP* program follow a core curriculum program that is characterised by cross-curricular integrated projects. There are seven classes at Year 7, and six at Year 8

Methodology

The chosen methodological approach centred on semi-structured interviews with the principal, the assistant principal, teaching and learning manager, sub-school leaders, and teachers involved in the delivery of middle years programs. Interviews took place in an interview room and were taped (with the interviewees' consent). Notes were also taken during the interviews. An activity involving Year 6 children from the local primary school and Year 8 students was observed. Relevant documents, provided by the school informed the interviews and analysis. The analysis took the form of interpretation and discussion of the data.

Findings

Reasons for participating in *MYRP*

A major reason Franklin's decision to participate in *MYRP* was that most teachers believed that Year 8 students were becoming increasingly disengaged from schooling. Teachers were also concerned about low levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy, poor school attendance, and problems relating to student behaviour.

An evaluation that included surveys of student opinion and focus groups found that students in Years 9 and 10, who participated in the vertically-grouped elective program, liked the elements of choice that was a feature of that program. They also liked having different teachers for the wide variety of subjects. Consideration was given to including

Year 8 students in this program, but teachers believed that while it appeared to be meeting the needs of the older students, it would be inappropriate for students who were not long out of primary school. By Year 8, significant numbers of these younger students were starting to experience problems relating to low achievement in literacy and poor school attendance. The teachers believed that these students would benefit from such *MYRP* strategies as having contact with fewer teachers and more integrated curriculum. Years 7 and 8 – 'the junior sub-school' – therefore became the focus of the *MYRP* initiatives at Franklin SC.

The school was a very active participant in its local network of schools and the *Schools for Innovation and Excellence* program. Students participated in many community activities. The principal and teachers became aware of middle years and *MYRP* through local networks, contact with the Regional Office and participation in professional development. Two teachers from the school attended a Middle Years conference in 2001.

Interviewees understandings of the main features of *MYRP*

All interviewees showed an excellent understanding of the main features of *MYRP*, which they said 'validated' their own beliefs about teaching and learning.

In the 1990s, groups of teachers had voluntarily set up 'PEEL' (Project for the Enhancement of Effective Learning, developed at Laverton Secondary College and Monash University) groups, that established a variety of 'low key' reflective professional development and action learning projects. PEEL continued to be a vital force among teachers in the school. Groups met on a regular (fortnightly) basis and became a crucible for teachers' growing understandings about how students learn. Interviewees said that the findings of the Victorian Quality Schools project research resonated strongly with their own growing perceptions of student disengagement during the middle years. A significant number of teachers, enough to form a 'critical mass', were keen to further develop their own ideas and knowledge through professional reading and discussion with their peers at Franklin Secondary College and other primary and secondary schools.

The main strategies of the *MYRP* plan at Franklin Secondary College

The *MYRP* plan was developed as part of a whole-school strategy linked to the main Charter priorities of ICT and literacy. The main goals of the plan were to improve literacy, school attendance, school retention and to develop a Thinking Curriculum The job descriptions of the leadership positions in the school strongly reflected this a focus on teaching and learning, including teachers' professional learning. Twelve sub-school leader positions were established; each had a major curriculum role.

Cross-curriculum teams of teachers, led by the sub-school leaders, were set up in the junior sub-school with the purpose of developing integrated curriculum that was responsive to the diverse needs of students, and addressing welfare needs. These teams met regularly, (every two or three weeks). Most of the cross-faculty team members were also members of the PEEL groups, which were also cross faculty. Both groups acted as 'think tanks' for developing extensive and very well-documented programs and cross-curricular integrated units of work. Improving students' literacy was at the centre of planning for the units, and improving the literacy of all students was seen as 'the responsibility of every teacher'. Teachers were required to report on their students' progress in literacy as part of their Annual Review.

The sub-school leaders interviewed said that, while it was hard to find time for planning, they were prepared to 'make time' after school and on weekends and holidays, to ensure that the cross-curricular programs succeeded. Planning time was seen as essential, as teachers were committed to developing high quality units that would engage students and raise their achievement. Very high levels of commitment and enthusiasm were apparent among the sub-school leaders interviewed. These reflected the strong focus on teaching and learning that was set by the school principal and senior management tem.

Other strategies

These included:

- Limiting the number of teachers for each class in the junior sub-school.

- Designing and moderating of common assessment tasks.

- Formation of ICT Thinking Curriculum and Transition groups.

- Much improved communication with other schools. (This was also part of the school's involvement in the Innovations and Excellence program.)

- Incorporating Thinking Curriculum strategies into integrated curriculum units.

- Integrated homework book for Year 7 students.

- Inter school visits and shared programs with local primary schools.

- Sharing of data with primary schools, especially student achievement data, including CSF data and AIM data.

- A corrective literacy program (withdrawal and in class assistance).

Expenditure of *MYRP* funds

The *MYRP* funds were not 'tagged' but were put into sustaining the teaching and learning focus of school programs. This included support for an Assistant Principal in each sub-school, and a Leading Teacher position dedicated to Teaching and Learning, including responsibility for teacher professional development. The money also enabled numbers of students in Year 7 to be maintained at lower levels and helped to support a corrective literacy program.

Leadership and support

The principal of Franklin Secondary College had previously been the principal of a primary school. She had a clear understanding of, and commitment to, the need for primary and secondary teachers to work co-operatively and learn from each other. Her strong support for integrated curriculum and the development of cross-curricular professional learning teams was, in part, the result of her successful experiences of working as a primary school teacher. She said that she had been greatly influenced by programs like Early Years Literacy, and was able to make links between the pedagogical principles underlying such programs and *MYRP*.

Further evidence of the school's commitment to providing leadership connected to the school's vision for teaching and learning was that responsibility for student learning was written in to the role descriptions of the sub-school leaders. A teaching and learning manager position was also established to help maintain this focus on student achievement.

Teacher interviewees were highly appreciative of the support initiated by the principal and senior management team, most of whose job descriptions included responsibility for leadership of teaching and learning. Leadership support was grounded in the school's vision that placed teaching and learning firmly at the centre of the school's operations. There was also a strong emphasis on professional development and professional collaboration. Teachers believed that resources were allocated fairly to support the learning needs of students in the middle years, and every effort was made to provide time for teachers to meet and work constructively to develop good curriculum and teaching programs.

ICT

Together with literacy, ICT was a School Charter priority at Franklin Secondary College. Teachers interviewed said that ICT was being used effectively to develop curriculum programs, especially in Thinking Curriculum. They were also working on cross-curricular programs and projects, that used computers in the classroom to promote enquiry learning and cater for student diversity.

Teachers' ICT skills appeared to be well developed, and all teachers had participated in relevant IT professional development programs. There was extensive documentation of curriculum on the school's Intranet and the teachers saw this as a useful way of sharing programs and projects that reflected the principles of the *MYRP*.

Outcomes

The principal and several teachers believed that one of the main outcomes of *MYRP* was a major change in relationships between teachers:

> The relationships between teachers are becoming quite different. In the old days, the teachers would say: 'It's my classroom, keep out.'. They can't do that when they're working on [cross-curricular] projects, and they don't want to any more. (Teacher Sub-school Leaders)

Relationships between teachers and students had also improved:

> We've realised how important it is to develop good relationships with the students. How can we expect them to be engaged otherwise? We now give them more say over what they want to do. And we've developed so many more interesting activities and strategies to engage particular students. They're not all the same, the Middle Years PD has helped us to understand that. (Sub-school Leader)

These improvements in relationships were resulting in fewer incidents of reported student misbehaviour, improved morale and more positive attitudes towards school among both teachers and students.

One interviewee described a new enthusiasm among experienced teachers:

> We [teachers] are an ageing population, we were teaching as we were taught ourselves at school. We didn't know better. We didn't want to take risks. Now the money [*MYRP* and other programs, especially Innovations and Excellence] and PD has given lots of people a new lease of life. The older teachers on staff have been revitalised. (Innovations and Excellence Program Co-ordinator)

Teachers reported their perceptions that levels of student engagement were definitely higher than in 2001, the first year of *MYRP*. They also believed that literacy had improved in Years 7 and 8. These perceptions were supported by literacy test results. But interviewees said that this improvement was not yet shown in CSF or AIM student achievement data. This appeared to be at least partly because teachers were still learning how to interpret data and use it to support student learning:

> We do do the AIM, but there is still significant resistance. Teachers are just starting to look at the data and see its value. Secondary teachers are also only starting to become more conscious of the need to get the CSF data more accurate. (*Schools for Innovation and Excellence* Co-ordinator)

Another significant outcome was the increased level of co-operative professional action and learning that was occurring among teachers who taught different subjects:

> The old barriers between teachers – Maths teachers, English teachers – whatever – are coming down. We all breeze in and out of each others' classrooms. (Sub-school Leader)

The integrated units of work were also viewed as developing in students a more holistic view of learning, encouraging metacognition, and facilitating the implementation of many aspects of Thinking Curriculum.

Summary of findings

Franklin Secondary College's decision to participate in *MYRP* was based on teachers' beliefs that the Middle Years reform research and strategies would help them to address the perceived needs of students in Years 7 and 8. They were particularly concerned about student disengagement in Year 8, about flagging attendance and low achievement in literacy. They felt that findings of the middle years research validated their own experiences with students in the middle years of schooling and were keen to implement programs and strategies suggested in the literature.

The main strategy adopted was to establish teams of teachers at Years 7 and 8 under the leadership of 'sub-school leaders'. These teams assumed responsibility for the learning of particular classes, and for their own professional learning, which was linked to the learning of the students. The main work of the teams was to develop integrated curriculum and to share responsibility for designated classes. The number of teachers for each class (the team) was kept as low as possible. Meeting time for the teams was spent mainly in developing cross-curricular integrated curriculum. Units of work were written, revised and changed on the basis of reflection and discussion of their effectiveness. Teachers were also members of PEEL groups that met regularly to devise and discuss various action-learning projects. The learning from PEEL informed the work of the cross-curricular professional learning teams.

Other strategies included better communication with other schools, especially primary schools, including sharing of programs and inter-school visits by teachers and students; limiting the number of teachers for classes in the junior sub-school; sharing data with primary schools, including CSF and AIM data; and a corrective literacy program (withdrawal and in-class assistance).

MYRP funds were spent mainly on sustaining the teaching and learning focus of school programs. This included the establishment of a Leading Teacher position for teaching and

learning, having an Assistant Principal for each sub-school, and keeping Year 7 student numbers low.

The principal and senior management team provided strong 'hands on' leadership that was clearly focused on teaching and learning. Support was given in the form of encouragement, provision of time for planning and fair distribution of resources. ICT, a school charter priority, was seen as a valuable resource for students to use in the classroom and for teachers to plan and organise their work.

The major outcome of the *MYRP* program was seen to be an improvement in relationships among teachers and students in Years 7 and 8. Teachers believed that this, together with better curriculum and the team teaching approach, had led to considerable improvement in student engagement. Incidents of student misbehaviour had decreased, attendance had improved, and teachers reported that there appeared to be more positive attitudes towards school on the part of both teachers and students.

Teachers interviewed believed that student achievement, particularly in literacy, had risen. They made this judgement mainly on the basis of their own assessments and professional judgement. Some moderation of student work was taking place in the team meetings, but this was limited by the amount of time available. The co-ordinator of teaching and learning reported that teachers were starting to use AIM and CSF student achievement data to assess student' development.

The principal and other interviewees said that improvements could not be attributed solely to *MYRP*, as there were many contributing factors, including participation in other programs such as *Schools for Innovation and Excellence*, and the many community-based projects that were a feature of this school. However, the middle years reform initiatives and associated *MYRP* funding were seen as contributing very strongly to the progress that had been made.

Descriptive Case Study 5: Sutherland Secondary College

School profile

Sutherland Secondary College is situated in an outer western suburb of Melbourne. There are 209 students in Years 7 to 9, and 414 in all classes from Years 7 to 12. Students are of twenty-one different ethnic backgrounds and many families are in receipt of the Education Maintenance Allowance. There is a high proportion of single-parent families and students lives are affected by social problems of various kinds and degrees of seriousness.

The physical environment of the school has recently been improved as a result of an extensive 'upgrade' to school buildings.

Methodology

The chosen methodological approach centred on semi-structured interviews with the principal, the assistant principal, the literacy co-ordinator, the middle years co-ordinator and teachers who taught students in the middle years. Interviews took place in the school conference room, and were taped (with the interviewees' consent). Notes were also taken during the interviews. Relevant documents, provided by the school informed the interviews and analysis. The analysis took the form of interpretation and discussion of the data.

Findings

Reasons for participating in *MYRP*

Sutherland Secondary College was a *MYRAD* school, and the principal and teachers were anxious to continue the work that had begun under *MYRAD*. They gained information about *MYRP* at regional and local network meetings.

In 2001, despite the school's best efforts, enrolments were falling, attendance of students in the middle years was unsatisfactory and teachers were concerned about student disengagement, low levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy and pastoral care issues.

The teachers believed that these students would benefit from continuing the school's focus on a middle years approach to addressing these and other areas of concern.

Interviewees understandings of the main features of *MYRP*

All interviewees showed an excellent understanding of the main features of *MYRP*, gained, in part, from the school's participation in *MYRAD*, which they said 'validated' their own beliefs about teaching and learning. In addition to attending a middle years conference in 2001, most staff had taken part in a variety of professional development activities related to middle years, including PD on boys' literacy. All teachers have participated or will participate in a Middle Years professional development course at Deakin University.

The main strategies of the *MYRP* plan at Sutherland Secondary College

The main strategy of the *MYRP* plan was to implement a comprehensive corrective literacy program in which students with high needs were identified through a testing program.

The principal said that, for some students, education was not highly valued at home. This led to students being often absent from school, with parents' permission, and subsequent literacy problems.

> A lot of teachers' energy and time goes in to getting the kids to come to school. Education is not a priority for a lot of families and so it's not surprising that they have problems with literacy. We need to stop and take stock of kid's literacy needs, because if they're not able to read, the rest of school – classes and programs – won't make much sense to them. But that means looking at the whole picture – why they're not coming to school in the first place, and sometimes those stories are very sad. (Principal)

The literacy co-ordinator, who was responsible for the corrective literacy program was a person with advanced skills and training in the teaching of literacy. As well as co-ordinating the program and teaching students in a withdrawal program, she also team taught with individual teachers, gave literacy support to students in classrooms and offered whole-staff professional development programs to encourage a whole-school approach to literacy across the curriculum.

While cross-faculty professional learning teams had been established to share ideas and strategies and develop integrated units of work, most middle years and other curriculum discussion was still occurring in KLA meetings, which occurred fortnightly. The main 'vehicle' for *MYRP* implementation was seen to be the faculty groups.

Other strategies

These included:

- Focusing teaching strategies on enquiry learning and catering for the needs of individual students.

- Establishing cross-faculty professional learning teams for teachers of Years 7 and 8.

- Developing integrated units of work.

- Limiting the number of teachers for most classes in Years 7 to 9.

- Providing Home Rooms and Home Room teachers for classes in Years 7 to 9.

- Changing teaching strategies to emphasise active, purposeful enquiry-based learning.

- Displays of products of literacy strategies in the staff room.

- Organising of a mini Olympic Games involving feeder primary schools.

- Building home-school partnerships.

- Setting common assessment tasks for students in Year 7 to 10.

- Much improved communication with other schools .

- Improving transition arrangements with primary schools, and improving communication with them, including video conferencing among teachers.

- Moderating samples of student work in meetings with primary school teachers.

- Timetabling double periods, where possible, to provide longer blocks of time for learning.

Expenditure of *MYRP* funds

Because of the high pastoral care needs of many students, a considerable proportion of the *MYRP* funds was spent on limiting student numbers to around seventeen or eighteen at Year 7. The money was also spent on supporting the position of the literacy co-ordinator, teacher professional development, providing middle years co-ordination time and support, and meeting time for teachers.

Leadership and support

The principal and senior management team of the school were strongly committed to the principles that underpin middle years reform. Support provided included additional literacy resources, the establishment of the literacy co-ordinator position and providing time for middle years co-ordination and teachers' planning. The principal had an 'open door' policy that encouraged teachers to discuss ideas and issues with him. The position of middle years co-ordinator was established to advance the middle years reform agenda by providing strong and effective leadership in the area.

ICT

ICT was seen as a priority for teachers' professional development. Teachers had participated in relevant IT professional development programs. Teachers used ICT to share programs and projects that reflected the principles of *MYRP* and to organise their work. Students in the middle years were encouraged to use the school's 'theatre' room, to show power point presentations using the data show equipment.

Two computer pods were connected to SOSE classrooms, and the school also had several dedicated ICT rooms. Teachers said that access to computers was a very important factor in designing learning activities that would encourage middle years students to assume responsibility for their own learning.

Outcomes

The main outcome was perceived by teachers to be improved student engagement. This was not a result only of the *MYRP*, but they said that such factors as the middle years teacher professional development, which had brought about changes in the pedagogy of some teachers, and the literacy corrective program, which had increased students' ability to participate in schooling were, probably, important of improvement. These could also be reasons for improved attendance and retention rates.

Literacy testing, using DART, showed that there had been marked improvement in the literacy of students who participated in the corrective literacy program. The CSF student achievement data showed that students' results in English were below like schools, but teachers said this could reflect inaccurate data. The principal said that teachers were still learning how to use CSF and/or AIM data as measures of improvement in student learning outcomes and he believed this to be the case in many secondary schools.

School data showed that student attendance was improving.

Because of the many influences on student learning, the principal and teachers were hesitant to claim direct, exclusive links between *MYRP* and positive student learning outcomes. They mentioned the school's involvement in other programs, including *Restart,* the *Successful Interventions in Literacy Research Project* and *Access to Excellence*. They also said that the recent upgrade of school buildings had contributed greatly to a general improvement in student and staff morale.

The principal and teachers saw the school's emphasis on student welfare and pastoral care as an essential priority. They believed strongly that this emphasis on caring for individual students through teachers' dedicated commitment to their students was the most important

factor in encouraging students to attend school and feel comfortable about being there. They believed that the school's strong, warm, community-based culture was making it a better place to be, not only for students, but for teachers as well.

> How can they learn anything if they're not even here? And how can they concentrate on their work if they don't even know if their parents will still be at home when they get there? Some really hairy things happen sometimes, and we have to be there for the kids. That takes its toll, but it's all worth it in the end. We are a very supportive group here. (Middle Years Teacher)

Summary of findings

Sutherland Secondary College was a *MYRAD* school. It's interest in participating in *MYRP* arose from positive perceptions of *MYRAD* that were held by the principal and staff. In 2001, social problems in some families were exacerbating the situation of student disengagement in the middle years. With their knowledge of middle years principles and strategies, the principal and staff were anxious to continue the work they had started under *MYRAD*.

The main strategy of the *MYRP* plan at Sutherland Secondary College was the establishment of a literacy program which included identification of students at risk through a comprehensive testing program, team teaching with the literacy co-ordinator and staff professional development to support literacy across the curriculum, organised and presented by the literacy co-ordinator.

Other strategies included, pedagogical change towards more active, purposeful enquiry based learning, closer links with other schools, including feeder primary schools, establishing cross-faculty professional learning teams for teachers of Years 7 and 8, reducing the number of teachers in Years 7 and 8, developing integrated units of work and moderating student assessment tasks in groups that included primary school teachers.

MYRP funds were spent on limiting student numbers in Years 7 classes, supporting the position of the literacy co-ordinator and middle years co-ordinator and providing meeting time and professional development for teachers.

The main outcome of *MYRP* in the school was perceived as improved student engagement, which led to improved attendance and retention. Teachers also believed that there was improvement in student literacy across the middle years, especially in students who participated in the literacy program. This perception was supported by test data (DART) and by some CSF student achievement data.

Because of the many influences on student learning, and other programs in which the school was participating, the principal and staff were hesitant to identify direct links between *MYRP* and improvements in the middle years. They placed strong emphasis on building a positive student welfare culture in the school.

Descriptive Case Study 6: Britten Secondary College

School profile

Britten Secondary College is situated in a small Victorian country town. There are 142 students in Years 7 to 9, and 240 in all classes from Years 7 to 12. Most are of English-speaking background and of low to medium socio-economic status. The principal said that the school demographics were changing: property values were rising, the area was gradually becoming less 'rural' and more 'suburban'. Increasing numbers of parents commuted to work in the city and did not arrive home until late. The number of single-parent families was growing.

Methodology

The chosen methodological approach centred on semi-structured interviews with the principal, the assistant principal, the middle years co-ordinator and members of the Year 7 core team. Interviews took place in an interview room and were taped (with the interviewees' consent). Notes were also taken during the interviews. Relevant documents, provided by the school informed the interviews and analysis. The analysis took the form of interpretation and discussion of the data.

Findings

Reasons for participating in *MYRP*

The principal was informed of *MYRP* at a regional meeting. The principal and teachers had also heard about middle years reform from others at meetings of local schools, some of whom had been involved in *MYRAD*. The principal said the research that showed a 'plateau' of student achievement in the middle years 'struck a chord' in the Britten SC school community. Teachers read about middle years reform in the 'School News' and were interested in learning more. Several staff attended a Middle Years Conference in 2001:

> They were keen to do something about those students who were clearly underachieving. They went along to the conference and found it really useful. They came back with lots of info and ideas about how to implement it. (Principal)

A major reason for Britten's decision to participate in *MYRP* was that most teachers believed that students in Years 7 to 9 were becoming increasingly disengaged from

schooling. Teachers were also concerned about low levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy, poor school attendance, and problems relating to student behaviour.

The teachers believed that these students would benefit from such *MYRP* strategies as having contact with fewer teachers and more integrated curriculum.

Interviewees understandings of the main features of *MYRP*

All interviewees showed an excellent understanding of the main features of *MYRP*, which they said 'validated' their own beliefs about teaching and learning. In addition to attending a middle years conference in 2001, most staff had taken part in a variety of professional development activities related to middle years, including an extended course offered at Deakin University.

The main strategies of the *MYRP* plan at Britten Secondary College

The main strategy of the *MYRP* plan at Britten SC was the establishing of 'core teams' of teachers at Year 7. These teachers met each week, in a planned timeslot, to plan integrated curriculum and discuss the pastoral/welfare needs of students. A number of thematic units of work were prepared by these teachers. Other activities of the group included arranging excursions and devising ways of helping students with poor organisational skills. The group was particularly interested in finding ways to improve relationships with and among students and communicating effectively with parents. Core team members were keen to develop a consistent approach to discipline.

The team approach was being extended to Years 8 and 9. In Year 9 some teachers, working in pairs, were developing 'active learning units' on a cross-faculty basis.

Other strategies

These included:

- Limiting the number of teachers for each class in Years 7 to 9.

- Introduction of ability grouping in Years 8 and 9.

- Emphasis on 'product-orientated' student learning.

- Setting common assessment tasks for students in Year 7 to 10.

- Expectations of rigour in terms of the products the students develop.

- Much improved communication with other schools.

- Timetabling double periods, where possible, to provide longer blocks of time for learning.

- Changes to school reports, after consultation with parents.

- Corrective literacy program (withdrawal).

- A corrective literacy program (withdrawal and in class assistance).

Expenditure of *MYRP* funds

The *MYRP* funds were put into sustaining the teaching and learning focus of school programs. This included the funding of a corrective literacy and numeracy program, providing middle years co-ordination time, and employing a school attendance officer to provide clerical and other support related to student attendance.

Leadership and support

The principal was committed to the principles that underpin *MYRP* and was very keen to see middle years reform implemented in her school. Support was provided in the form of timetabled time for planning and additional literacy resources. The principal had an 'open door' policy that encouraged teachers to discuss ideas and issues with her. The position of middle years co-ordinator was established to advance the middle years reform agenda by providing strong leadership in the area.

ICT

Teachers interviewed said that ICT was being used effectively to develop curriculum programs. The cross-curricular projects used computers in the classroom to promote enquiry learning and cater for student diversity.

Teachers had participated in relevant IT professional development programs. Teachers used ICT to share programs and projects that reflected the principles of *MYRP* and to organise their work.

Outcomes

The middle years co-ordinator believed that some teachers had developed a more 'product-orientated' way of teaching that could be related to middle years approaches. More emphasis was being place on teaching approaches that set clear expectations about what student should be expected to know and do.

The core teams' work in assisting students become more organised – helping them to maintain their workbooks, keep their diaries, manage homework schedules, clean out lockers – had, in the opinion of the core team teachers, resulted in students becoming more positive, responsible, and focused on their learning.

> It's hard for kids – especially boys – to get involved in their learning when they're so disorganised. We really concentrated on the organisational stuff as a team, organising their workbooks and homework. Now the kids have had help with this they feel more confident and in control. Now they can start to concentrate on their learning with a clear head.

Surveys and information gained from focus groups showed that students in Years 7 to 9 had developed more positive attitudes towards school.

TORCH testing showed improvement in literacy, especially for the students involved in the corrective literacy groups.

Teachers in the core teams gained broader understandings of other subject areas, which they were able to use in their teaching.

Fewer students were 'failing' in terms of getting unsatisfactory marks. The middle years co-ordinator said that several teachers were still unclear about how to use CSF and/or AIM data as measures of improvement in student learning outcomes, but this situation was changing. Some teachers were setting and moderating common assessment tasks using CSF outcome statements.

School data showed improvement in attendance.

Because of the many influences on student learning, the principal and teachers were hesitant to claim direct links between *MYRP* and positive student learning outcomes. They did believe, however, that *MYRP* had 'had an impact.' Because of its small size the school finds it difficult to attract funding. The principal was anxious for *MYRP* funds to continue.

Summary of findings

The major reason for Britten SC's decision to participate in *MYRP* was that teachers perceived a need to address the problem of student disengagement and consequent misbehaviour in Years 7 to 9. They were also concerned about low levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy and falling attendance rates. They believed that, with the aid of *MYRP* funding, they could bring about positive changes in middle years classes in their school.

The principal and all teachers interviewed showed an excellent understanding of the guiding principles of *MYRP*. The main strategy adopted was the setting up of 'core teams' of teachers at Year 7. The groups met weekly in a timetabled planning slot to develop integrated units of work and consistent approaches to discipline and classroom management and to discuss the pastoral needs of students, especially with regard to building their organisational skills. The core team approach was also being advocated in Years 8 and 9. Numbers of teachers were, as far as possible limited for the middle years classes; teaching strategies included emphasis on a 'product orientated' approach, with expectations of rigour. Communication with local schools, especially primary schools, was improved; a corrective literacy/numeracy program was established; improved communication with parents led to changes in the reporting system and format.

The *MYRP* funds were spent on supporting the corrective literacy and numeracy program, the position of the middle years co-ordinator and on employing a school attendance officer to provide clerical and other support related to student attendance.

The principal and senior management provided strong leadership and support in the form of extra resources and time for the core teams to plan. ICT was used in classrooms to support curriculum and student activities that emphasised enquiry learning. Teachers were developing ICT skills, which they saw as necessary to develop appropriate curriculum, maintain records and organise their work.

The principal and teachers interviewed said that there had been some 'pedagogical shift' towards more active forms of student learning. They also said that most – but by no means all – teachers were realising the importance of monitoring student learning outcomes, using common assessment tasks and moderating student work samples. TORCH testing confirmed teachers' belief that improvement in literacy was occurring. Attendance rates were up and students' appeared to be more engaged. There were fewer incidents of students' misbehaviour and fewer students appeared to be 'failing'.

Summary and conclusion

The *MYRP* model for school reform was well understood and accepted by all principals and teachers in the six case study schools. However, we found that multiple interpretations of the reform agenda led to a range of developments and activities. These ranged from attempts to bring about holistic change through teacher professional development and the encouragement of collaborative professional community to concentration upon single interventions to improve literacy and numeracy.

In all schools, *MYRP* built on existing strengths. This is unsurprising because, most of the schools already had policies and practices in place that reflected *MYRP* principles. In some

cases *MYRP* was merged into existing programs, so that it became difficult to know whether effects could be attributed to *MYRP*, or to some other program, or to a combination of various factors. In the schools where change appeared to have had deepest impact, *MYRP* was integrated into other programs and activities, e.g. in the technology Navigator school, teachers were developing ICT-based strategies, programs and activities that were strongly influenced by *MYRP* principles and directed towards the achievement of *MYRP* goals. Similarly, in the school with a strong PEEL program, teachers were combining the reflective action-research principles and activities of PEEL with initiatives developed as a result of *MYRP*.

All six schools had corrective literacy/numeracy programs in place. These operated with varying degrees of sophistication and complexity, from the setting up of simple small withdrawal classes, to larger programs that combined withdrawal, in-classroom teacher support and teacher professional development. Common to all programs was the use of assessments that enabled teachers to monitor students' progress. Teachers of these corrective programs were able to provide data-based evidence of students' improvement over time.

We discovered some differences of opinion and tension between teachers who advocated developing integrated cross-faculty curriculum in inter-faculty teams (seen as a *MYRP* approach) and those who were in favour of more traditional KLA and subject/department-based curriculum, professional community and action. Teachers and principals advanced arguments for both. In some schools, vertical modular grouped (VMG) elective programs had been operating successfully for many years for 'middle school' students and teachers saw no reason to change. There are some fundamental differences between VMG and *MYRP* approaches. These aspects may warrant further investigation.

While school data showed improvement in attendance, retention and such things as reduction in the incidence of bullying and suspensions and evidence of improvement in student achievement in mainstream classes was more difficult to find. This is not to say it was not occurring. On the contrary, teachers were confident that there had been an improvement in students' learning that could, at least in part, be attributed to *MYRP*. In some schools, they had developed common assessment tasks and moderation processes to arrive at consistent judgements. *MYRP* had an influence on such processes, although it was not the main trigger. Another possible effect of *MYRP* was that teachers were discovering the importance of using data to monitor students' learning and were developing skills in this area.

Principals said that they had used the *MYRP* funds to support positions – such as those of literacy co-ordinators and middle years co-ordinators – to set up corrective programs, reduce numbers of students in middle years classrooms and support teacher professional development. *MYRP* funds were, in several cases, combined with funding from other

sources and used in ways that were not always targeted to the achievement of a specific *MYRP* goal or program.

We can confidently assert that there were extremely positive outcomes in the areas of student engagement, attendance, retention, literacy and numeracy, and teachers' professional growth in the case study schools between 2001 and 2003. *MYRP* played a role in the achievement of these outcomes but the extent to which they can be directly attributed to *MYRP* remains problematic.

CHAPTER 10: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Middle Years Reform Program (*MYRP*) was conducted in all Victorian government secondary and P-12 schools over the period 2001-2003. The program was designed to provide these schools with financial support to employ additional classroom teaching capacity to develop and implement initiatives in the areas of literacy, attendance and the 'thinking curriculum' in Years 7-9. The Collaborative Institute for Research, Consulting and Learning in Evaluation (CIRCLE) at RMIT University in collaboration with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) were commissioned by the Department of Education and Training, Victoria to undertake an evaluation of the program.

The original plan for the evaluation was based on the development of a program logic model that, it was anticipated, would provide an integrating framework for the research by identifying key desired outputs and outcomes of *MYRP*, and the resources and strategies that might be utilised to achieve them. It was anticipated that this program logic would assist in clarifying the specific questions to be addressed in the evaluation. Analysis of the available program documentation and supporting literature, together with the results of three initial consultations with regional office and school representatives suggested, however, that the multiple, overlapping goals and understandings of the program could not be readily and simply captured by a single outcomes hierarchy or other simple logic model.

Rather, the various recommendations for ways of thinking and strategic action focussed on the middle years of schooling were characterised for the evaluation as a group of wide-ranging 'evidence-based principles' informing the character and direction of school reform. Five key themes were identified as summarising the implied intentions of these evidence-based principles for Years 7 to 9 in secondary schools. These themes were abstracted from the background literature that supports the 'middle years reform agenda' in Victorian government schools more generally and was available to schools on DE&T websites prior to and during the period of the program. The key themes are:

1. A 'design approach' to reform and a focus on the whole school community;
2. Specialised teachers who use integrative strategies and are all skilled to promote literacy and numeracy;
3. A core curriculum taught by small teams in larger blocks of time than at present that supports sustained thinking and the study of topics in depth;
4. A specific focus on managing the transition from primary to secondary schooling and the development of 'convergent structures' that are neither solely primary or secondary as we now know them;

5. The building up of systems of assessment, monitoring, explicit standards and targets that provide high expectations for student achievement along with identification and individualised assistance for students falling behind.

In addition to this background literature, a PowerPoint presentation was developed to assist regional offices inform schools about *MYRP*. This presentation outlined a number of specific principles for *MYRP* that were expressed in somewhat different language from those in the background literature but nonetheless presented a very similar vision for the program. The identification of these key themes from among the evidence-based principles for middle-years reform provided the evaluation team with a general guide to the framing of questions that were explored in the various data gathering strategies employed.

Data for the evaluation were gathered from five complementary sources, including:

a. Literature and document review;
b. Three preliminary consultations with representative groups of regional office personnel, school principals, middle-years co-ordinators and other teachers familiar with middle-years issues;
c. A questionnaire that was distributed by e-mail to all schools with students in Years 7-9 that achieved a response rate of just over 80%;
d. Analysis of school-level aggregate data for the period 1998-2003 on Year 9 literacy, Years 7, 8 and 9 attendance, and retention to Year 11;
e. Six brief case studies of purposefully selected schools with Year 7-9 students.

The questionnaire data formed a key component of the evaluation of *MYRP*. On the basis of the high response rate and demonstrated absence of any significant bias in representation of DE&T regions and Like School Groups it was argued that these data were suitably representative of all government schools in Victoria. Data from the school questionnaire were used to provide, *inter alia*, the following important information for the evaluation:

a. School perceptions of the 'key ideas' behind *MYRP*;
b. The activities that schools indicated were specifically funded by *MYRP*;
c. The broader range of middle years activities conducted by schools over the five-year period 1999-2003;
d. The outcomes that schools believed resulted from their implementation of *MYRP*.

These reported outcomes from *MYRP* were balanced against analyses of the available school aggregate data for literacy achievement, attendance and retention for *MYRP* schools that had not previously been involved in the *MYRAD* project.

Finally, the six case studies yielded detailed information of the implementation of *MYRP* in very different school settings and provided some key insights into issues around the adaptation of a very general school reform program like *MYRP* to specific school contexts.

School Perceptions of the 'Key' Ideas Behind *MYRP*

A detailed content analysis of responses to a survey question that asked schools to indicate their initial understandings of the ideas behind *MYRP* provided a rank order of the extent to which schools regarded particular ideas as important. Predominant among these 'key ideas' that schools perceived underpinned *MYRP* was improvement in the engagement of middle years students with learning. Improved teaching and pedagogical practices more generally, improved literacy per se and generally improved outcomes for middle years' students were also seen by many schools as important ideas that underpinned the program. There was, however, little evidence that schools, at least initially, saw the improvement in thinking skills as a key area for *MYRP* despite this being a formally stated objective of the program.

Activities Specifically Funded by *MYRP*

'Staffing' and 'literacy' appeared to be the predominant focus for the allocation of *MYRP* resources by schools. Schools typically allocated their *MYRP* funding to staffing, and, more specifically, to staffing of literacy programs or activities. Other key areas to which *MYRP* funding was allocated included staffing for literacy *and* numeracy, staffing for student attendance activities, professional development for literacy, coordination time and programs for literacy.

There was some evidence in the questionnaire data that schools had diversified the focus of the allocation of their *MYRP* resources in the area of staffing over the period of the program. The number of areas of specific focus appeared to increase over the funding period as allocations of teaching resources to a combination of literacy and numeracy, student attendance, and co-ordination time increased somewhat.

The Broader Range of Middle Years Activities Conducted by Schools Before and During the Period of *MYRP* Funding

The initial consultations the evaluation team had with regional office and school personnel suggested that there might have been, in effect, two *MYRP* programs in schools:

a. A program specifically funded under *MYRP*;
b. A broader program that implemented middle years reform values, 'target' areas for action, and strategies more generally.

It was hypothesised that schools may have been encouraged to develop this broader program by specific promotional or professional development activities in relation to the middle years and/or the more general climate of interest and concern in the area. It was proposed that this broader program might have been supported in various ways by *MYRP* funding and 'targeted' information, but not specifically 'activated' by it.

A number of significant observations stood out from an analysis of schools' responses to a complex questionnaire item that requested an indication of the extent to which they engaged in a range of middle years activities. They included:

    a. Activity in virtually all areas designated in the questionnaire increased each year over the five-year period under review (1998-2003).

    b. Schools previously involved in the *MYRAD* project were more likely to be involved in each area of activity in 1998 than schools not involved with *MYRAD*, but the latter group of schools 'caught up' so that there was no apparent difference in involvement by 2002 and 2003.

    c. Fewer schools were involved with activities focussed on *Standards and Targets*, *Monitoring and Assessment* and *Curriculum Change* than with activities in other areas.

    d. Early activity appeared to be most strongly focussed on the areas of *Home, School and Community Links*, and *Managing the Transition between Primary and Secondary Schools*;

    e. There was some evidence that *MYRP* may have 'triggered' engagement by some schools with a number of key middle years activities in 2001 or 2002 in that there was a modest increase over and above the underlying trend in reports of engagement between 2000 and 2002 in non-*MYRAD* schools. These areas included *Standards and Targets*, *Monitoring and Assessment*, *Classroom Teaching Strategies*, *School and Class Organisation* and *Leadership and Coordination*.

    f. More generally, though, the pattern of growth in reported engagement in middle years activities by both *MYRAD* and non-*MYRAD* schools suggested a process of 'reinforcement' and 'support' for an evolving trend in interest and concern in middle years reform activities rather than a sharp 'initiation' or 'triggering' of activity by *MYRP*.

Reported Outcomes of *MYRP*

Schools attributed a large number of outcomes to their involvement with *MYRP*. Four outcomes were identified by over 20% of *MYRP* schools. They were:

    a. Improvement in literacy for students in general;

    b. Improved engagement with school for students in general;

    c. Increased awareness and/or improved pedagogical skills for teachers in the area of cognitive or thinking skills;

    d. Improved engagement of students in general in areas of the curriculum other than literacy.

Similarly, the following nine outcomes were identified by between 12% and 20% of schools:

    a.   Improved attendance at school by students in general;

    b.   Improved literacy specifically for students at risk;

    c.   Improved thinking skills for students in general;

    d.   Improved retention for students in general;

    e.   Improved teaching strategies in curriculum areas other than literacy;

    f.   Improved teaching strategies in relation to student engagement;

    g.   Improved curriculum integration in areas of the curriculum other than literacy;

    h.   Improved teaching strategies in literacy;

    i.   Improved teacher knowledge in relation to literacy.

Three predominant themes summarised schools' perceptions of these diverse outcomes from *MYRP*. They were:

    a.   Increased achievement for students in general in the areas of literacy and thinking skills together with increased achievement for students at risk in the area of literacy. Each of these achievement outcomes was identified as important by upwards of 18% of *MYRP* schools.

    b.   Improvements in various aspects of engagement, attendance and retention, including improved engagement for students in general both overall and in areas of the curriculum other than literacy, improved attendance, and improved retention for students in general. These outcomes were identified by upwards of 15% of schools as important.

    c.   Improvement in teaching and pedagogical practices, including improved teaching strategies in curriculum areas other than literacy, improved teaching strategies related to student engagement, improved curriculum integration in areas other than literacy and improved teaching strategies and teacher knowledge of student achievement in literacy. Each of these areas of improvement was mentioned by 12% of schools or more.

Additionally, 'organisational and curriculum restructuring' and 'teachers' were the predominant focus of responses that asked about 'other planned changes' and 'unexpected positive outcomes' relating to *MYRP*. Schools gave a wide range of examples in these categories. Outcomes more frequently described included restructuring of the school day, establishment of middle years teaching teams and curriculum 'action' groups, greater teacher awareness and/or interest in working with middle years issues, and interest and work around a 'systems' approach to organisation and pedagogy in the middle years.

A perceived reluctance by some teachers to change; increases in teacher workload from various additional tasks and roles; a feeling that expectations for *MYRP* had not been fully met; and insufficient funding were noted by schools as unexpected negative outcomes or experiences associated with *MYRP*.

'Measured' School-level Outcomes of *MYRP*

The possible impact of *MYRP* on literacy achievement (as measured for individual students against CSF standards), absence rates and apparent retention to Year 11 was examined using school aggregate data for a group of schools that had not participated in the earlier *MYRAD* program.

Some evidence was found for the anticipated increase in literacy achievement across the first two years of the implementation of *MYRP*, although the effect size of the increase was small and the statistical results equivocal. Results for absences in Years 7 and 9 were found to follow a trend opposite to that which would indicate a positive impact of *MYRP* in reducing student absence and there was a similar (but statistically non-significant) trend for Year 8. There was no detectable impact of *MYRP* on apparent retention to Year 11.

Acknowledging the caveat that the analysis of school-level aggregate data to draw conclusions about the impact of schools and teachers on individual student achievement is acutely problematic, the apparent increase in literacy in the first two years of *MYRP* provides some evidence that small improvements may be occurring in a number of schools. It is, however, difficult to explain the apparent drop in 2003, when it could be expected that any 'lag' in the potential impact of *MYRP* on literacy achievement would be least critical.

It is possible that *MYRP* may have encouraged an increased vigilance and accuracy in recording student absences and this may explain the apparent increase in absence rates, rather than the anticipated decline. The apparent decrease in absence rates between 2002 and 2003 at Year 9 could be an indication that the attention of many schools to the issue of engagement and student attendance encouraged by *MYRP* may be starting to have the desired impact.

Notwithstanding the widespread belief among schools that *MYRP* activities had positive impacts on student engagement and literacy achievement, these results should be interpreted with extreme caution. An analysis of the relationship between school assertions of an increase in literacy achievement at Year 9 and observed change in school-aggregate literacy levels over the three years of *MYRP*, compared with the three preceding years, showed a trend in the data in the anticipated direction, but the trend was not statistically significant (see Appendix 3). A strong claim for the validity of the school judgements of an increase in literacy achievement cannot, therefore, be sustained.

Insights from the School Case Studies

Clearly, the *MYRP* model for sChool reform was well understood and accepted by the principals and teachers in the six case study schools, who said that the findings of the *MYRAD* research (1998-1992) and the subsequent *MYRP*, reflected their own experiences and resonated with their own existing beliefs and understandings about student learning and engagement in the middle years of schooling. These people identified critical issues of concern among students in Years 7 to 9 in their own schools, particularly in the *MYRP* target areas of literacy/numeracy, student engagement, attendance and retention. They also made the point that while they had been aware of problems in these areas for many years, the *MYRAD* research and subsequent *MYRP* had helped them to crystalise their ideas and focus on possible solutions.

We found that there were multiple interpretations of the reform agenda in the case study schools. These led to a range of developments and activities. In some schools, the emphasis was on changing teachers' pedagogy through professional development and collegiate interaction. In others, the focus was on corrective literacy and numeracy programs. For some, the development of integrated curriculum by teachers working in cross-faculty teams was at the head of the reform agenda. But despite these differences, teachers in all six schools, spoke of a fundamental change (described by one teacher as a 'sea change') in secondary teachers' beliefs and classroom practices, away from an information delivery mode of teaching towards one that emphasised active, purposeful and student-centred enquiry learning.

In all schools, the *MYRP* initiative was seen to be building on existing strengths. This was especially the case in three schools: the first a city school that was a 'Navigator' technology school, the second a suburban school with strong history of curriculum innovation, and the third a country school whose teachers were deeply involved in PEEL groups. In these three schools there appeared to be a core group of teachers and teacher leaders who saw *MYRP* as an opportunity to develop and share some fundamental beliefs, understandings and strategies. They described *MYRP* as having validated and strengthened their own existing ideas and philosophies about teaching and learning. They now felt that they could move ahead as legitimate 'change agents', supported by a sound body of research and literature. This would seem to underline the value of such programs as *MYRP* in supporting the important work of teacher-leaders and agents of change in schools.

The effects of interaction between *MYRP* and ICT curriculum initiatives were particularly interesting in the Navigator school. The principal and teachers interviewed at this school, claimed that the *MYRP* initiatives were highly compatible with the ICT-based learning strategies and programs the school had been required to develop and share as a result of its Navigator status. This conjunction between *MYRP* and the Navigator activities grew out of

the various ways in which ICT was used to engage students by 'putting them in charge' of their learning. It was also observable in a range of specific programs developed to improve literacy and numeracy, in improved ways of gathering and storing information about student achievement, attendance and retention, and in the ways teachers had used various applications to organise and share their work and ideas.

All six case study schools had corrective literacy/numeracy programs in place as designated *MYRP* interventions. Some schools placed more emphasis on, and provided more resources for, these programs than others. Corrective programs were the 'lynchpin' of the *MYRP* plans of at least two schools. The generally positive results of the programs provided evidence of their capacity to significantly improve student performance in literacy and numeracy.

A feature of all of the corrective programs was the data collected, through the administration of tests such as DART and TORCH, to reliably track students' progress. The teachers were able to claim with apparent confidence that student learning outcomes had improved as a direct result of the intervention. Importantly, they were able to support their own professional judgements with 'hard' evidence from tests and other assessments given at various points along a learning continuum.

This capacity to measure improvement in student learning outcomes that may have resulted from *MYRP* strategies was less evident for students in the mainstream programs. Teachers in several schools reported being 'still uncomfortable' with using the CSF as an assessment tool. The use of testing materials such as DART and TORCH was much more apparent in the corrective programs than in the mainstream. While there appeared to be growing acceptance of the AIM in most of the case study schools, teachers, on the whole, did not appear to be confident about gathering, interpreting and using student achievement data as a means of improving student learning outcomes. Lack of reliable data made it difficult to gauge the effectiveness of the *MYRP* initiatives in raising levels of student achievement, especially for students in the mainstream.

The extent to which teachers were working in cross-faculty teams, and of the use of integrated curriculum strategies also varied among the case study schools. In one school, the team/integrative approach had been tried and abandoned after four years. As a contrast, in at least one other school, teachers described how teams of teachers were working together to develop integrated units of work across subject areas, saying that this was the main feature of their *MYRP* implementation plan.

Some teachers spoke almost evangelically about moving right away from KLA-based faculty organisation and curriculum and of 'breaking down 'old' subject barriers'. They saw this as a brand new idea that had arisen out of the middle years reform agenda. Other teachers, e.g. teachers at Vivaldi SC, some of whom had had experience of integrated

curriculum as part of the General Studies movement in the seventies, claimed that this approach had long ago been tried and found wanting in secondary schools. In contrast to those teachers in some case study schools who were enthusiastically pursuing a cross-curricular organisational model, teachers who supported the retention of KLA-based curriculum and faculty organisation were adamant that the subject department was the main unit of professional community and curriculum development in a secondary school. They were generally supportive of the idea of increased inter-faculty co-operation and the development of some cross-curriculum integrated units of work. However, they felt that to fundamentally alter school organisational structures away from the KLA/subject department model and towards cross-faculty integration would result in time-consuming inefficiency and 'contrived collegiality'. Information from the case studies seemed to indicate that the jury was still out on this issue.

Another interesting point was that three of the case study schools were operating established vertical modular grouped (VMG) elective programs for students in Years 9 and 10, and were not inclined to change them, although some of the features of these programs were very different from the *MYRP* approach (e.g. they involved more, not fewer, teachers for each student.) In these schools, middle years activities were either concentrated at the junior (Years 7 and 8) levels, or focused less on changing school organisation than on teacher professional development and the Thinking Curriculum. The aspect of the VMG programs that teachers argued most strongly in favour of was that of choice.

The issue of providing choice and variety in subject offerings to students at the upper end of the middle years, given the apparent success of some VMG programs, may warrant further consideration. Comparison of the VMG approach with middle years reform may be an area for further investigation and research.

The extent to which successful outcomes in the case study schools could be directly attributed to *MYRP* was difficult to gauge. Principals and teachers were reluctant to commit themselves on this issue, pointing out that many other factors, including participation in other programs, such as *Restart* and *Schools for Innovation and Excellence*, were involved. The difficulty was exacerbated by the fact of the diversity of the case schools' responses to *MYRP*. It was further complicated by the ways in which *MYRP* funding was, in several cases at least, combined with funding from other sources and used in ways that were not always targeted to the achievement of a specific *MYRP* goal or program. It is important to remember that, for some years before *MYRP*, the schools already had policies and programs that reflected many of the central ideas and philosophies of *MYRP*. These were continued and strengthened, but not initiated, by the *MYRP* project.

This said, we can confidently assert that there were some extremely positive outcomes in the areas of student engagement, attendance, retention, literacy and numeracy, and teachers' professional growth in the case study schools between 2001 and 2003. The middle

years initiatives were, undoubtedly, associated with these outcomes, although the extent of the association is difficult to assess. The increased levels of professional awareness and activity that were found among teachers and teacher-leaders in the schools provide further evidence of *MYRP*'s contribution to genuine and positive change.

Conclusion

The *MYRP* program was characterised by a diverse range of responses by schools. These responses could be characterised as reflecting local program theory, informed by the Hill and Crevola evidenced-based approach. There was no evidence that we could find which suggested that there was an overall program logic implemented by *MYRP*. It seems as if it saw innovation as needing to come from within the schools – where an understanding of the needs, issues, constraints and solutions was likely to be most keenly understood.

This diversity, while hinted at during its implementation, only became fully apparent as the evaluation unfolded. Increasingly, it became apparent that the critical evaluation question was whether or not changes occurring in the middle years during the 2001-2003 period could be attributed to *MYRP*. Thus the focus of the study shifted to a concern with the possible impact of *MYRP* on observed outcomes.

MYRP was a program that was implemented at a time when there was increasing awareness from the Department of a range of issues to do with the middle years. *MYRAD* is evidence of this concern. There was also a pre-existing concern in schools, and it appears from the data used for the evaluation that many – including those that had not been involved with *MYRAD* – had begun to develop policies and implement them before *MYRP*. Thus disentangling the unique effects of *MYRP* has been fraught with complexity. To do this required a careful appreciation of the information provided by the various sources available to the evaluation.

It is our judgement, based upon the data collected for this evaluation – the voices of staff in participating schools from the case studies, the questionnaire data, the advice of departmental officers, and trends evident in official statistics – that *MYRP* did have a positive effect in schools. We cannot make claims about its cost-effectiveness – could the same outcomes have been achieved more cheaply? Could more have been achieved with the resources used by *MYRP*? We believe, however, that it is fair to claim that *MYRP* has been associated with positive outcomes for middle years students and teachers. It has also been associated with an increasing in the level of awareness and of activity within schools in dealing with the particular problems of the middle years. Literacy levels and engagement seemed to have improved. Teachers have learned new skills and appear to be more effective. So, while the evaluation of *MYRP* has not directly helped to address the question of what conditions will "result in all students in early adolescence wanting to pursue

productive learning".[21], it has established that it is possible for schools to successfully tackle these problems.

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[21] *Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) Project Executive Summary, February – December 2001.* Centre for Applied Educational Research, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, April, 2002.

APPENDIX 1 'EVIDENCE-BASED PRINCIPLES' UNDERPINNING *MYRP*

1. System-level Reform

"Habits of Mind" of High-Performing Schools	-
Strategic Intentions	<u>Overlaps with "School Personnel"</u> <u>'Tooling up' for reform by ensuring</u>: (Pre and in-service education and training) and support structures for schools organised to reflect the distinctive nature of schooling in early, middle and later years
	<u>Overlaps with "School Personnel"</u> <u>'Tooling up' for reform by ensuring</u>: All teachers in middle years have two specialist areas, integrative strategies, are qualified to promote high standards of literacy, numeracy and other core knowledge including IT)
	<u>'Tooling up' for reform by ensuring</u>: Development, implementation, implementation and evaluation of comprehensive design approaches for the middle years of schooling
General Design Elements	-

2. School structures, Organisation and Governance

"Habits of Mind" of High-Performing Schools	Wherever possible <u>devolve decision making down to the local school level</u>
Strategic Intentions	<u>Manage transitions</u>: by increasing co-ordination of transitions
	<u>Manage transitions</u>: by promoting regular interchanges of primary and secondary-trained teachers
	<u>Create a new model of provision that is neither primary or secondary:</u> where there is a convergence of structures between the final year of primary and the first year of secondary schooling

	<u>Create a new model of provision that is neither primary or secondary</u>: where the middle years core curriculum is taught by small teams of teachers responsible for 70-80 students
	<u>Create a new model of provision that is neither primary or secondary</u>: teams of teachers are organised to facilitate planning and coordination of teaching programs and ongoing improvement of teaching and learning
	<u>Create a new model of provision that is neither primary or secondary</u>: Changes to the 'internal organisation of schools' are made to develop larger blocks of time for learning and close relations between students and teaching teams
	<u>Create a new model of provision that is neither primary or secondary</u>: Schools will set up high status, intensive programs ('academies') to cater for the identified needs of students and to offer the opportunity to achieve at a high level in a specific area of the curriculum
General Design Elements	<u>School and class organisation</u>: larger blocks of time, minimisation of interruption and withdrawing students; team teaching structures
	<u>Home/School/Community links</u>: between primary and secondary schools, with parents/guardians in respect of individual students, with business, industry and community

3. School Leadership

"Habits of Mind" of High-Performing Schools	-
Strategic Intentions	-
General Design Elements	Leadership and coordination. "The consistent and continuing support of leadership is critical to the success of the whole school design" "…leaders have the key role in implementing and institutionalizing an approach that incorporates (the other General Design Elements)"

4. School Personnel – Development of Capacities, Understandings, Beliefs etc.

"Habits of Mind" of High-Performing Schools	Build capacity among school leaders
	Change beliefs about the capacity of students to benefit from schooling
	Understand reasons for variations among and within schools in performance
	Build up commitment and capacity among staff and within the school community to support a set of agreed priorities for improvement and change
	Focus efforts on helping teachers to identify starting points for teaching, to build up a repertoire of effective teaching strategies, and to use classroom organisation and management strategies to facilitate learning for all students
Strategic Intentions	'Tooling up' for reform by ensuring: (Pre and in-service education and training) and support structures for schools organised to reflect the distinctive nature of schooling in early, middle and later years
	'Tooling up' for reform by ensuring: All teachers in middle years have two specialist areas, integrative strategies, are qualified to promote high standards of literacy, numeracy and other core knowledge including IT)
General Design Elements	Teachers beliefs and understandings about professional efficacy: teachers can make a difference, virtually all students are capable of learning

5. Curriculum and Assessment

"Habits of Mind" of High-Performing Schools	Seek high-level consensus on the core elements of the curriculum and on standards of achievement …
	Require evidence-based accountability arrangements to drive improvement and change
Strategic Intentions	Secure the curriculum essentials by: Articulating the aims of education specific to the middle years of schooling
	Secure the curriculum essentials by: focussing the curriculum on a 'manageable core of knowledge', thus allowing 'greater opportunity' for (inter alia) 'in-depth learning'

General Design Elements	Specific school targets to be set against relevant system-wide standards
	Regular, frequent and detailed monitoring, assessment and recording of student learning progress

6. Teaching and Learning

"Habits of Mind" of High-Performing Schools	-
Strategic Intentions	Transform teaching and learning: Generally, to produce autonomous learners who find schooling worthwhile, challenging and enjoyable
	Transform teaching and learning: By a 'massive increase' in the use of new information technologies
	Transform teaching and learning: Close monitoring of students who 'fall behind' in achieving high standards in core areas of the curriculum and the provision of special assistance
General Design Elements	Classroom teaching strategies: high expectations for student achievement, engaged learning time, structured teaching focussed on student learning needs
	Intervention and special assistance for students failing to make regular progress: to be integrated with regular classroom teaching

APPENDIX 2: SURVEY FORM

Middle Years Reform Program Evaluation

SCHOOL QUESTIONNAIRE

Who is asking you to complete this questionnaire?

The *Collaborative Institute for Research, Consulting and Learning in Evaluation* (CIRCLE) at the RMIT University and *The Australian Council for Educational Research* (ACER) have been commissioned by the *Department of Education and Training* (DE&T) to evaluate the *Middle Years Reform Program* (MYRP). This program ran for three years from 2001 to 2003 with a focus on literacy, student engagement and the thinking curriculum across Years 7 – 9.

The aim of the evaluation

The main aims of this evaluation are to identify the most important activities and outcomes of MYRP, and the factors that are associated with these outcomes. Information provided by this questionnaire will be central to the evaluation of MYRP.

Who should complete this questionnaire?

The principal of the school, or the middle years co-ordinator should complete this questionnaire. If neither of these is available, then some one from the school who is familiar with middle years issues in general, and MYRP in particular, should complete this questionnaire.

How long will it take to complete?

It should take about 30 minutes to complete this questionnaire.

What will happen to the data from this questionnaire?

The data will be transferred to a data file, which will be used to generate statistical analyses for a report to DE&T. No schools or individuals will be identified in this report. The data will be stored in a secure environment for five years after which time it will be destroyed.

All replies to this questionnaire will be treated as confidential.

Where can I find out more information about this evaluation?

You can find out more information about the evaluation and your school's role in it by phoning Dr Gerald Elsworth at RMIT University on 03 9925 2832, or Dr Elizabeth Kleinhenz at ACER on 03 9277 5654. Or you can send an email to myrp@acer.edu.au.

How to complete this questionnaire

To start, <u>save the questionnaire on to your computer</u> and work with this saved file.

This is an electronic questionnaire and we ask you to complete it by typing directly into it. Please do not print it off and complete it on paper, as it is not designed to be used in this way.

To answer questions either place the cursor in the greyed area – it looks like this   – provided after a question, or press the 'Tab' key to move from one question to the next. (This means you should be careful not to use the 'Tab' key when typing in your answers.) There is no limit as to how many words you can type within these grey areas.

You can only type in the grey areas.

If you wish to change something you have written, you can delete this text. You cannot delete text outside of the grey boxes. You can try this out here:

Some questions require you to just mark a box. For these questions, click on the appropriate box and it will display an X. If you wish to change your mind, click on the box again and the X will be deleted. You can try this out here ☐.

You do not have to complete the questionnaire at one sitting. You can stop at any time, save the file and re-open it later. You can review and change anything you have entered at any time. **We strongly suggest that you save the file each time you enter some information.**

If when you open this file you seen hidden characters, for example, ¶ at the end of each paragraph, the questionnaire will be easier to read if you turn off the *Show Hidden Characters* by clicking on the ¶ button on the Standard Toolbar, and by clicking on *Hide Gridlines* under the *Table* menu item. You should view the questionnaire in *Print Layout View*.

If you have any problems or questions about how to complete this survey, please ring Adrian Beavis – (03) 9277 5573 – for help.

Where to send the completed questionnaire?
Email the completed questionnaire to myrp@acer.edu.au

Please do not send it to the DE&T email address from which you received this questionnaire.

About your school

Q 1   **What is the name of your school?**

A 1

Q 2   **What is the postcode of your school?**

A 2

Q 3   **In what region is your school located?**

Please click one box.

A 3

Barwon South Western	☐
Central Highlands Wimmera	☐
Loddon Campaspe Mallee	☐
Goulburn North Eastern	☐
Gippsland	☐
Southern Metropolitan	☐
Eastern Metropolitan	☐
Northern Metropolitan	☐
Western Metropolitan	☐

Q 4   **What is your school's current *Like School Group* (LSG)?**

Please click one box.

A 4

1	☐
2	☐
3O	☐
3S	☐
4	☐
5	☐
6	☐
7	☐
8	☐
9	☐

Q 5   **Does your school have a designated special status?**

Please click on the appropriate box(es).

A 5

No	☐	
Yes, it has a select entry accelerated learning (SEAL) program	☐	
Yes, music	☐	
Yes, VET	☐	
Yes, language	☐	
Yes, other	☐	*Please specify*

Q 6 **What year levels does your school cover?**

Please click one box.

A 6

7 to 12	☐
7 to 10	☐
P to 12	☐
Other	☐ *Please specify*

Q 7 **How many students are enrolled in your school?**

Please write a number in each box using Equivalent Full-Time Student Units (EFTSU).

A 7

Total school enrolment	**All students Years 7 to 9**	**Fee paying overseas students (all year levels)**

Q 8 **Does your school have more than one campus?**

Please click on the appropriate box.

A 8

Yes	**No**
☐	☐

About you

Q 9 **What is your position in the school?**
Please click on the appropriate box.

A 9

Principal	☐
Middle years co-ordinator	☐
Other	☐ *Please specify*

Middle Years activities 1999 to 2003

Q 10 **Below are listed 10 specific areas where some form of middle years reform <u>activity</u> may have been undertaken in your school during the years 1999 to 2003. (It does not ask about outcomes. These will be addressed later.)**

If your school undertook no middle years reform activity in an area, tick the *No* box and go to the next area.

If your school undertook any middle years reform activity in an area:

    a. **tick the *Yes* box,**

    b. **tick the box (or boxes) for each year this activity took place**

    c. **then briefly describe the most important activity that was undertaken in the area.**

A 10		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003

Item 1 **Standards and targets (e.g. benchmarking of standards for middle years against best practice)**

- **Was this type of activity conducted at your school**
  No ☐ *Please go to **Item 2***
  Yes ☐

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
- **If *yes*, when was this type of activity conducted by your school?**	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

- **Please briefly describe it here:**

Item 2 **Monitoring and assessment (e.g. changes to assessment and reporting processes)**

- **Was this type of activity conducted at your school**
  No ☐ *Please go to Error! Reference source not found.*
  Yes ☐

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
- **If *yes*, when was this type of activity conducted by your school?**	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

- **Please briefly describe it here:**

A 10		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003

Item 3

Classroom teaching strategies (e.g. collaborative development of new teaching strategies, cooperative learning groups)

- **Was this type of activity conducted at your school**

No ☐ *Please go to Item*

Yes ☐

- **If *yes*, when was this type of activity conducted by your school?**

- **Please briefly describe it here:**

1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Item 4

Teacher professional development (e.g. establishment of multi-disciplinary professional learning teams)

- **Was this type of activity conducted at your school**

No ☐ *Please go to Item*

Yes ☐

- **If *yes*, when was this type of activity conducted by your school?**

- **Please briefly describe it here:**

1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Item 5

School and class organisation (e.g. timetabling larger blocks of time, assigning students to fewer teachers)

- **Was this type of activity conducted at your school**

No ☐ *Please go to Error! Reference source not found.*

Yes ☐

- **If *yes*, when was this type of activity conducted by your school?**

- **Please briefly describe it here:**

1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

A 10		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003

Item 6

Intervention and special assistance (e.g. development and implementation of action plans to assist at-risk students)

- **Was this type of activity conducted at your school**
  No ☐ *Please go to **Item***
  Yes ☐

- **If *yes*, when was this type of activity conducted by your school?**

- **Please briefly describe it here:**

1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Item 7

Home, school and community links (e.g. links with feeder primary schools, partnerships with community organisations, improved reporting to parents/guardians)

- **Was this type of activity conducted at your school**
  No ☐ *Please go to **Item***
  Yes ☐

- **If *yes*, when was this type of activity conducted by your school?**

- **Please briefly describe it here:**

1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Item 8

Leadership and co-ordination (e.g. increased leadership focus on student learning, support through provision of resources)

- **Was this type of activity conducted at your school**
  No ☐ *Please go to Error! Reference source not found.*
  Yes ☐

- **If *yes*, when was this type of activity conducted by your school?**

- **Please briefly describe it here:**

1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Item 9	**Curriculum change (e.g. integrating KLAs)**					
	• **Was this type of activity conducted at your school** **No** ☐ *Please go to **Item*** **Yes** ☐					
	• **If *yes*, when was this type of activity conducted by your school?** • **Please briefly describe it here:**	☐ **1999**	☐ **2000**	☐ **2001**	☐ **2002**	☐ **2003**

Item 10	**Managing transition between primary and secondary schools (e.g. improved sharing of information between primary and secondary teachers)**					
	• **Was this type of activity conducted at your school** **No** ☐ *Please go to **Item*** **Yes** ☐					
	• **If *yes*, when was this type of activity conducted by your school?** • **Please briefly describe it here:**	☐ **1999**	☐ **2000**	☐ **2001**	☐ **2002**	☐ **2003**

Item 11	**Other middle years activities in your school**					
		1999	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**
	1 When was this activity conducted by your school? **Please briefly describe it here:**	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	2 When was this activity conducted by your school? **Please briefly describe it here:**	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	3 When was this activity conducted by your school? **Please briefly describe it here:**	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q 11   **What middle years DE&T programs, apart from the MYRP, has your school been involved in over the previous five years?**

Please click on the appropriate box(es).

A 11

Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD)	☐
Middle Years Literacy Research Project	☐
Middle Years Literacy Training	☐
Successful Interventions in Literacy Research Project	☐
Middle Years Numeracy Research Project	☐
Middle Years Numeracy Training	☐
Access to Excellence	☐
Restart	☐
Schools for Innovation and Excellence	☐
Middle Years Pedagogy Research & Development (MYPRAD) Pilot	☐
Student Action Teams Pilot	☐
Other *(Please specify)*	☐

About MYRP in your school

Q 12   **How did your school find out about MYRP?**

In answering this question, please describe, as fully as you can the initial information your school received about MYRP.

A 12

Q 13 **When your school first implemented MYRP, what did the school believe were the key ideas behind the program?**

A 13

Q 14 **Has your school changed its view of the key ideas behind MYRP?**

Please click on the appropriate box.

A 14

Yes	No
☐	☐

Q 15 **If yes, what does your school now believe are the key ideas behind MYRP?**

A 15

Q 16 **List the total funding your school received for MYRP for each of the three years of the program.** *(Your school's Business Manager should be able to provide this information.)*

A 16 **2001 $**

2002 $

2003 $

Q 17 **For each year of the program, on what specific activities did your school allocate the MYRP grant?**

A 17 **2001**

2002

2003

Outcomes of MYRP in your school

Q 18 **Thinking of student learning in the area of literacy, what were the major outcomes of MYRP at your school?**

A 18

Q 19 **What evidence is there that these student learning outcomes in the area of literacy relate directly to MYRP?**

A 19

Q 20 **Thinking of student learning in other areas, what were the major outcomes of MYRP at your school?**

A 20

Q 21   **What evidence is there that these other student learning outcomes in other areas relate directly to MYRP?**

A 21

Q 22   **Thinking of student development of cognitive skills, what were the major outcomes of MYRP at your school?**

A 22

Q 23   **What evidence is there that this development of cognitive skills relate directly to MYRP?**

A 23

Q 24   **Thinking of student attendance and retention, what were the major outcomes of MYRP at your school?**

A 24

Q 25   **What evidence is there that these student attendance and retention outcomes relate directly to MYRP?**

A 25

Q 26 **Thinking of student engagement, what were the major outcomes of MYRP at your school?**

A 26

Q 27 **What evidence is there that these student engagement outcomes relate directly to MYRP?**

A 27

Q 28 **Were there other planned changes that resulted directly from MYRP in your school?**

A 28 **Yes** ☐

No ☐

Please describe the other planned changes that you observed and mention the evidence that links them to MYRP:

Q 29 **Were there any positive outcomes from MYRP in your school that you didn't expect?**

A 29 **Yes** ☐

No ☐

Please add any comments you may have:

Q 30   **Were there any negative outcomes from MYRP in your school that you didn't expect?**

A 30   **Yes**   ☐

             No   ☐

             Please add any comments you may have:

Q 31   **Please add any further comments about MYRP that you may wish to make.**

A 31

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Please save the file and email it to myrp@acer.edu.au.
Please do not send it to the DE&T email address from which you received this questionnaire.

APPENDIX 3: VALIDITY OF SCHOOL JUDGEMENTS OF LITERACY IMPROVEMENTS

In order to gain some insight into the validity of school judgements of changes in reading achievements, the evaluation team was requested to explore the relationship between these school judgements and the data on Year 9 literacy that was available from the DE&T.

An index of *CSF Literacy Gain* was calculated by regressing the school aggregate Year 9 literacy levels against those for 1998, 1999 and 2000 and calculating the residuals from the regression. These residuals represented the extent to which a school's Year 9 aggregate literacy level in 2003 was greater or less than the level predicted from the three years prior to *MYRP*.

A dichotomous variable was constructed from the qualitative data available from the school questionnaire that indicated whether or not the school had specified improvement in literacy (for 'students in general' or 'students at risk') as an important outcome of *MYRP* in their schools. This (*Literacy Improvement Specified / Not Specified*) variable was then related to the variable indexing *CSF Literacy Gain* in a simple analysis of variance. The mean *CSF Literacy Gain* in the *Literacy Improvement Specified* group was 0.14 compared with –0.08 in the *Literacy Improvement NOT Specified* group while there was a greater spread of gain scores in the *Literacy Improvement Specified* group (s.d. = 1.11 compared with s.d. = 0.91). The effect size is small (0.22). The difference between the means was not significant (F = 1.85; 1, 159 d.f.; pr = 0.175). Parallel analyses for *CSF Literacy Gain* to 2001 and 2002 yielded similar results.

Thus, while the direction of the apparent difference in CSF *Literacy Gain* between the two 'subjective judgement' groups was in the anticipated direction, the analysis does not warrant a claim that schools were accurately reporting measurable gains in literacy.

It should be noted, however, that a number of schools made their claims for observable gains in literacy over the period of *MYRP* on the basis of the results from a variety of published standardised tests. It is possible that these tests provide a more valid index of literacy achievement than the CSF-based indices and that the latter may, therefore, not be the best benchmark to establish the validity of school judgements about middle years literacy achievement.