An Analysis of Strategies used by Teachers to Foster Independent Learning in Multigrade Classrooms

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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been submitted previously for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

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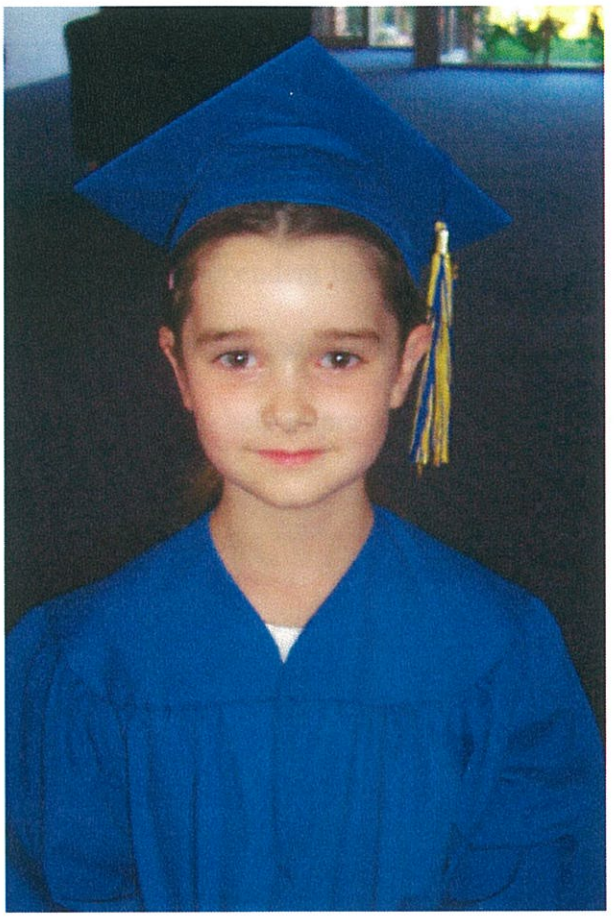
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Dedication



Charlotte,

This is for you my beautiful girl, wise beyond your years. Thanks for hugs and kisses, and for understanding why Mummy had to work and not play some days. I am so proud of you!

Abstract

This thesis constitutes a study of a small primary school in the State of New South Wales, Australia, in the year 2007. It follows a qualitative framework, using a case study methodology with data gathered from interviews, observations and video observations. It addresses the issue of independent learning in multigrade classrooms. The results illustrate that specific strategies can be successfully utilised to foster the development of independent learning among primary age students. Consequently, a model for fostering independent learning in multigrade classrooms has been developed as a guide to help improve teaching practice and pre-service teacher education.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background to the Study

The aim of education is to develop students who can positively contribute and participate in society. "It must be remembered that the purpose of education is not to fill the minds of students with facts...it is to teach them to think" (Robert M. Hutchins, N.D. Original source unknown). Consequently, this means teachers must not only impart knowledge, but provide the skills necessary to enable students to be independent, eventually making themselves redundant (Thomas Carruthers, N.D. Original source unknown).

The researcher's interest in multigrade classrooms commenced during her own primary school education. She started her schooling at a three teacher primary school, and can remember feeling a sense of family belonging. Everyone knew everyone else. The older students looked after the younger ones, responsibility was encouraged, and the teachers were exceptional. When the researcher was fortunate enough to be accepted for professional experience as a pre-service teacher at Green Primary School, she was very curious to see what her impressions of a small multigrade school would be from the other side of the desk.

The researcher was placed with an exceptional multigrade teacher and quickly decided that, though there was a considerable amount of work involved, her memories still seemed to hold true. The ability of the students to work independently, even those in kindergarten, was quite striking when compared to single-grade classrooms, and a search of the literature led her to the current research topic 'An

Analysis of Strategies used by Teachers to Foster Independent Learning in Multigrade Classrooms'.

Significance of the Study

Multigrade classes have been an undeniable part of primary education for decades, but their special needs, and the unique demands they place on teachers, have been almost completely neglected. Conventionally, teachers are trained and instructional materials developed, as if every class was a single grade. This has continued to be the case in Australia, even after the introduction of stage-based curriculum. Individual teachers have used remarkable skill in creating strategies to manage classes of two, three, or sometimes up to seven grades at the same time.

Multigrade classrooms are relatively common in Australian schools. A 2002 classroom audit in NSW found that 6,358 classes, or thirty-eight percent of all primary classes are multi-age or multigrade, and 163,303 students or thirty-six percent of all primary age students are enrolled in a class with more than one grade (*Report on Class Size Audit. New South Wales Department of Education and Training*, 2002) however research in this area is generally lacking.

A common theme appearing in the research, points to the need for an investigation into the strategies employed in multigrade classrooms. There is little research on "teacher strategies for delivering instruction to two or more grades of students at one time" (*Teaching Combined Grade Classes: Real Problems and Promising Practices*, 1990, p. 5). Hatton (1999) proposes that it would be of value to know the proportion

of independent learning that occurs in classrooms, compared with whole-class or small group, direct teaching.

In addition, Williamson (1995) found that, "In recent years, there has been a plethora of rhetoric extolling the importance of independent learning in the education literature" (p. 78). Glynn (1985) contends that we need to uncover and interpret the characteristics of responsive learning environments, which promote and encourage independent learning, in an attempt to address the aims of student autonomy. The ability of students to work independently is crucial in multigrade classrooms. Marland (2004) reported that the establishment of independent learning habits is a very significant aspect of teaching in multigrade classrooms.

Mason & Burns (1996) outline the following suggestion for further research in this area:

> Studies that contrast the teaching strategies used by novice teachers in multigrade classes, experienced teachers in multigrade classes for the first time, and veteran multigrade teachers might identify especially effective instructional methods, classroom management techniques, and curriculum development strategies. (p. 11)

This study makes an original contribution to the relatively small body of research on multigrade classrooms and independent learning in Australian primary schools, and may provide a catalyst for future research in the area.

Focus of the Study

This research constitutes a study of one small primary school in the state of New South Wales, Australia, in the year 2007. It addresses the issue of facilitating independent learning through the specific strategies teachers use in multigrade

classrooms. Consequently, the findings are of potential relevance to teachers and pre-service teachers who are interested in the issues of independent learning and multigrade teaching from a general and holistic perspective.

Specifically, the study was governed by the following research questions:

1. What is the significance of independent learning in multigrade classrooms?
2. Which strategies are effective in fostering independent learning in multigrade classrooms?
3. What implications and recommendations do these strategies suggest for current practices associated with independent learning in multigrade classrooms and for pre-service teacher education?

Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this study was to determine which strategies used by teachers are effective in fostering independent learning in multigrade classrooms. It aims to provide data to support a model for fostering independent learning. This model could then be of use in guiding teaching practice in both multigrade and single-grade classrooms. Further, pre-service teachers should be exposed to this model during the course of their study to raise awareness of strategies that foster independent learning.

Research Methodology

The research describes and interprets data from a single school using a case study approach. The findings of the study are located within a contextual understanding involving multigrade classrooms and strategies used by teachers to foster independent learning.

Given the concern of case study research with developing theory, as opposed to its verification, data were gathered from three major sources over the period of the study. The data were focused and analysed through the method of emergent themes, to arrive at the findings of the study. The findings then led to the development of a model for fostering independent learning. The three sources the data were drawn from were initial and final interviews conducted by the researcher with the participant teachers, non-participant observations by the researcher, and video observations of teaching segments.

Definitions

Throughout this thesis, the term *Multigrade* is used to refer to classrooms in which a teacher is responsible for teaching more than one grade. It includes alternate terms used in the literature e.g., composite, combination, multi-age, multi-stage etc.

The term *Teaching Strategy,* is used throughout this paper to refer to the strategies that are actively utilised by teachers during the course of a lesson or series of lessons.

The term *Organisational Strategy,* is used to refer to the vital organisational structures and procedures implemented by teachers that enable the multigrade classroom to function effectively.

While a variety of definitions for the term *Independent Learning* have been suggested, this thesis defines it as being characterised not by isolation from the teacher or others within the classroom, but by a student's autonomy from constant direction and supervision.

Limitations/Delimitations

The reader should bear in mind that the study is based on a small sample, being limited to a single case, which brought with it all the limitations of case study research including a short time-frame, and its non-transferability.

Structure of the Thesis

The overall structure of the thesis has been divided into seven chapters. The current chapter gives a general introduction and background to the study, the purpose of the study, and an outline of the thesis structure.

In seeking a comprehensive framework for the study, a wide-ranging review of literature was undertaken and is presented in Chapter Two. The first section of this chapter discusses literature specific to the development of context for the study. Literature in relation to specific strategies used by teachers for fostering independent learning is then discussed in the second section.

Chapter Three details the methodological framework of the study. Chapter Four presents the research data and findings relating to *Independent Learning*, Chapter Five presents the results relating to the *Teaching Strategies*, and Chapter Six outlines the findings regarding the *Organisational Strategies*. The final chapter draws upon the entire thesis, to present the conclusions of the study in relation to its findings, to describe a model for fostering independent learning, to provide answers to the research questions and to outline recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Multigrade classrooms form a large section of the Australian education scene. However, research in this area is limited, and is particularly deficient in the area of the effective strategies utilised by teachers to foster independent learning.

This literature review provides an examination of the available literature surrounding: multigrade classrooms, initial teacher education, teaching strategies and independent learning. It highlights a lack of research in this area, and argues the importance of the current study in providing data to assist both current teaching practice and pre-service teacher education.

Multigrade Classrooms

Multigrade classrooms are defined as ones in which a teacher is responsible for teaching more than one grade. In Australia as many as seven grades may be combined in the one class. Multigrade classrooms can be referred to variously in the literature as 'combination', 'multilevel', 'multiple class', 'composite class', 'vertical group', 'family class', 'multi-age', and, in the case of one-teacher schools, 'unitary schools' or 'sole-charge schools' (Birch & Lally, 1995; Little, 1995).

Multigrade teaching requires particular skills and strategies that enable teachers to create environments in which they can deliver instruction to groups of students of varying ages at the same time (Thomas & Shaw, 1992). Teachers are required to

teach key learning areas to several different stage levels in the same time that is available to a single-grade teacher teaching one grade (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007).

Significance

Multigrade classrooms are more common than is acknowledged, however, their extent is difficult to assess. When information is collected on multigrade classrooms it is usually limited, outdated, and hard to source. The little information that is available suggests a relatively high incidence of multigrade classrooms (Little, 2004; Mulryan-Kyne, 2007).

Multigrade classes make up a large sector of the Australian education landscape; in 1988 forty percent of schools in the Northern Territory had multigrade classes (Little, 2004). A 2002 classroom audit in NSW found that 6,358 classes, or thirty-eight percent of all primary classes are multi-age or multigrade (*Report on Class Size Audit. New South Wales Department of Education and Training*, 2002) and their prevalence makes them an important subject for future research. Moreover, multigrade classes are now commonplace in most urban schools, as well as in small country schools. Evidence also exists internationally of high proportions of multigrade classes (Russell, Rowe, & Hill, 1998).

Mason and Doepner (1998) report that due to the widespread and apparently complex nature of multigrade classes they deserve broad and comprehensive research. This is particularly relevant in the Australian context considering the belief in this country that in multi-grade classes, the advantages to students outweigh the disadvantages (Allen, 1996).

Features of Multigrade Classrooms

In multigrade classrooms students learn how to help themselves and others (Miller, 1991a). They are expected to develop independence at an early age, and effective multigrade teachers establish an environment that develops and promotes this independence (Miller, 1991b). The skills required of teachers can be very different to that of a single grade classroom and the challenge of organising and planning for different grade levels can be very difficult (Miller, 1991b).

Multigrade teachers need to be able to develop independent learning skills in their students. They need to facilitate a positive classroom environment, where all students regardless of grade level, feel respected and supported by their classmates. Vincent (1999c) maintains that routines are clearly explained and consistently implemented in multigrade classrooms, thus enabling students to become independent learners.

Students in multigrade classrooms learn from an early age to be responsible for their own learning. They are able to assist others, and willingly accept help from fellow students, when required. In doing so they enable the teacher to work uninterruptedly with other groups or individuals (Vincent, 1999c). The six criteria for successful multigrade teaching that have been identified from research: classroom organisation; classroom management and discipline; instructional organisation and curriculum; instructional delivery and grouping; self-directed learning; and, peer tutoring, all impact on student independence and responsibility for learning (Miller, 1991b).

Initial Teacher Education

Researchers are unanimous on at least one point regarding multigrade classrooms: teachers need to be well prepared, with skills and training over and above those of

single-grade teachers. This is particularly evident in the area of teaching strategies, instructional delivery methods, grouping, time-management, promotion of student independence and timetabling, if students are to learn effectively in multigrade environments (Little, 1995; Marland, 2004; Thomas & Shaw, 1992; Wallace, Nish, & Allen, 2001a).

The incidence of multigrade classrooms justifies the need for initial teacher education programs to include multigrade teaching techniques. These courses should prepare teachers to teach all primary grades, as well as covering how to effectively manage two or more grade levels in the one classroom. Furthermore, these multigrade skills would also be of benefit to single-grade teachers, who also require similar skills to effectively organise groups in their classroom (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007; Thomas & Shaw, 1992).

The majority of teachers have little exposure to multigrade classrooms during their initial training. When they are confronted with multigrade settings, teachers "discovered that the time requirements and skills needed to be effective were simply not part of their prior training and experience" (Miller, 1991b, p. 2). Approximately ten percent of all teachers in multigrade classes have only been teaching for up to two years (Marland, 2004; Watson, Phillips, & Wille, 1995). These teachers claim that their training did not prepare them for teaching multigrade classes. As multigrade classrooms are relatively common, this deficit in training needs to be addressed in initial teacher education programs (Veenman, 1995).

Teaching Strategies

Teaching can be productive or unproductive in both single-grade or multigrade classes, as class composition alone is not the most powerful influence on successful teaching and learning. Rather, effective student learning is dependent on quality teaching, strategies and the skills and understandings exhibited by individual teachers (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007; , *Multi-Age Classes in New South Wales*, 1997).

Differentiated Instruction

Effective teachers use a variety of teaching and learning tactics as they know that students have varied approaches to learning. In selecting teaching strategies teachers consider the content, lesson objectives, time, resources and ability levels of their students (Barry & King, 2003). "No teaching strategy is better than others in all circumstances, so you have to be able to use a variety of teaching strategies, and make rational decisions about when each of the teaching strategies is likely to be most effective" (Killen, 1998, p. vi). The kind of teaching strategies utilised in multigrade classrooms is of critical importance, however, they are often poorly identified or understood (Russell, Rowe, & Hill, 1998).

Teacher-centred instruction usually involves whole class learning, with the teacher controlling what is being taught, how it is presented, student behaviour and directing attention. Student-centered teaching places a much greater emphasis on the student's role in learning, allowing students to exercise control over their own behaviour and learning. (Jarolimek, Foster, & Kellough, 2005). If used repeatedly teacher-centred instructional strategies can result in students believing that it is the teacher's role to provide them with what they need to learn. This negatively impacts on students' independence, problem solving abilities and their ownership of responsibility for

learning (Killen, 1998). Consequently, Vincent (1999c) states, if we seek to develop independent learners we must also utilise other methods of instruction.

Teaching Strategies used in Multigrade Classrooms

Effective multigrade teaching practices involve much more than merely grouping students. It involves the skill level, personality and organisational ability of the teacher. These skills, along with effective teaching strategies, form the nucleus of multigrade instruction, and differ in the degree, not necessarily the type of skills, used by single-grade teachers (Thomas & Shaw, 1992; Watson, Phillips, & Wille, 1995).

However, whilst most researchers and teachers agree that teaching practices and strategies in multigrade classrooms are somewhat different from those used in single-grade classrooms, "in most studies of multigrade classes the teaching strategies used are not described and as a result are poorly understood" (Russell, Rowe, & Hill, 1998, p. 5). The need for further investigation in this area was advanced by Mason and Burns (1996) who noted that

> Studies that contrast the teaching strategies used by novice teachers in multigrade classes, experienced teachers in multigrade classes for the first time, and veteran multigrade teachers might identify especially effective instructional methods, classroom management techniques, and curriculum development strategies. (p. 12)

Russell, Rowe and Hill (1998) suggest that research into the actual teaching strategies (rather than the perceived strategies) utilised by multigrade teachers, and the impact these strategies have on student outcomes, is urgently needed.

Independent Learning

Developing students who are life-long independent learners is one of the major goals of education. "The aim of a good teacher should of course, be to make themselves redundant. If we are to properly educate others, we must enable them to become independent learners"(Whitebread et al., 2004, p. 2). Being able to do things for oneself is a sign of independence and increasing one's independence (both in skills and attitudes) is a sign of maturity (Williams, 2003).

Teachers need to imbue students with the 'I'll-figure-it-out-for-myself' habit. Students must be encouraged to work things out for themselves not by themselves. Independence is displayed by autonomy from constant direction and supervision, it is not characterised by isolation from the teacher or others (Atwood, 1974). Williams (2003) claims that: "Schools have a responsibility in this era to instill in children the ability to think for themselves and to make decisions based on clear and well thought-through analyses of needs: these are vital skills for the twenty-first century" (p. xiii).

However, students appear to become more dependent on their teachers, rather than less dependent, in their first years of schooling (Whitebread et al., 2004).

> In primary education, we speak the language of children being 'independent' – encouraging them to think for themselves, make judgments, solve problems and so on – then require them to follow a curriculum regime which is based on an input/output model which can leave little time for independent thinking or action. Close adult direction of every learning experience, can leave children feeling very disempowered and make dependence on the teacher a necessity. (Williams, 2003, p. xii)

Teachers interested in learning styles and multiple intelligences focus on the individual needs and characteristics of their students. This in turn, led to these

teachers valuing independence in their students (Bullock & Muschamp, 2003). Classrooms are contrived and the artificial environments for children, and the tasks and behaviours required of them, are found nowhere else in society. When teachers provide students the opportunity to be independent, they acknowledge their potential for responsibility and positively embrace the students skills and knowledge, thereby developing their self-esteem and confidence in their ability to learn (Williams, 2003).

> Independence has been shown to have two distinct interpretations. The first has been termed the 'isolationist' view where children are required to work alone without recourse to adults. The second is termed the 'interactionist' view, where children have the confidence to investigate, research and seek help as appropriate. (Williams, 2003, p. 26)

The impact on the learner of being independent, as defined by the 'interactionist view', is displayed in their sense of well-being, their social skills and their higher standard of work (Williams, 2003).

How to Foster Independent Learning

Multigrade teaching strategies are powerful pedagogical techniques which promote independent learning and foster skills that will benefit students throughout their lives (Thomas & Shaw, 1992). The first step towards independent learning is to establish a climate that promotes and develops independence and then actively teaches students to work independently. Just telling them to be independent , without this support, is not sufficient (Miller, 1991a; Pasch, Langer, Gardner, Starko, & Moody, 1995).

Research into independent learning is still occurring and strategies for developing this in students are continuing to emerge. However, since "many students do grow into independent learners, it is obvious that some current classroom practices do

encourage independent learning. An excellent starting point for developing self-directed learning is to observe student behaviours" (Vincent, 1999a, p. 3).

In order for teachers to develop and encourage independence in their students they must believe that they have the potential to be responsible and active learners (Williams, 2003). Techniques which are effective in developing independent learning involve teachers offering choices to students, and providing opportunities for them to control their learning (Whitebread et al., 2004). When developing independence in their students, teachers need to recognise the importance of: giving children responsibility; encouraging students to select and use resources; setting clear objectives; encouraging problem solving; not always supplying answers; developing time management skills; using clear questions and explanations; and, allowing time for talk (Williams, 2003).

Importance of Independent Learning in Multigrade Classrooms

According to Marland (2004) independent learning is described by teachers as being a significant aspect of the multigrade classroom. Because of this, multigrade classrooms should be at the forefront of future research into independent learning strategies.

> Students who can work independently, set goals, manage their time, and locate needed resources free the teacher to help students with the most need. However, developing self-direction is difficult and requires a learning environment different than the traditional, teacher-directed classroom. Self-direction is best fostered in a classroom where the teacher structures activities that develop such characteristics as independence, self-management, and cooperation" (Vincent, 1999b, p. 12).

Summary

Multigrade classrooms are common place in Australian schools; however, there is relatively little research in this area. A common theme appearing in the research points to the need for an investigation into the strategies employed in multigrade classrooms and for further teacher training in this area. As the ability of students to work independently is perceived to be crucial in multigrade classrooms this added dimension shapes the study.

The recommendations arising from this study will assist teachers in implementing the strategies which are most appropriate in fostering independent learning in multigrade classrooms. It is expected that the results will also benefit pre-service teacher education.

The following chapter provides a description of the research methodology, the need for ethics approval, and the process of data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

The case study, a qualitative approach, was deemed to be the most suitable for this investigation of strategies used by teachers to foster independent learning in multigrade classrooms. "Classroom studies can provide cases, that is, reports of specific, well-documented and richly described events or teaching incidents" (Watson, Phillips, & Wille, 1995, p. 136), hence the adoption of this approach for the current study.

This chapter sets out to describe the research method used for the study, the method of data collection, ethical considerations and data analysis.

Research Design

This study follows a qualitative framework, using a case study methodology, with data gathered from interviews, observations and video observations. The research was structured to take advantage of the knowledge of experienced multigrade teachers, who according to Watson, Phillips and Wille, (1995) are an untapped fund of tacit knowledge. This knowledge can be revealed through their classroom interactions and through interviews. "Two ways to provide insight into this teacher knowledge are (i) to observe and record what teachers do as they teach composite classes, and (ii) to ask teachers what they know about how best to teach in composite classes. While each of these may be valuable, a combination of the two is desirable" (Watson, Phillips, & Wille, 1995, p. 136).

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is distinguished by certain characteristic features, namely the gathering, analysing, and construal of comprehensive descriptive and visual data. The purpose of gathering this data is to gain insights into a particular occurrence (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006).

Qualitative studies also share the common goal of presenting findings in the form of narrative descriptions. This reflects the qualitative researcher's concern with the processes that lead to outcomes, as opposed to outcomes in isolation. With its origins in descriptive analysis and inductive process, qualitative research does not emphasise a theoretical base. Rather, theory may develop as the research progresses, emerging from a developing picture rather than a picture presumed to be already known. Its significance lies not in its generalisablity, but rather in its findings, to not only the researcher, but also to the research audience (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006).

Case Study

Case study research may be understood as the focused study of a single case (Gerring, 2007). It is a variation of ethnography, in which "the researcher provides an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g. an activity, an event, a process, or an individual) based on extensive data collection" (Creswell, 2005, p. 589), for the purpose of shedding light on a greater number of cases (Gerring, 2007). Bassey (1981) in his commentary on pedagogic research, maintains that "an important criterion for judging the merit of a case study is the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his decision making to that described in the case study. The relatability of a case study is more important than its generalizabilty" (p. 85).

The case study emphasises natural settings, and tends to use multiple techniques of data collection, and multiple sources of data, in order to provide for cross validation or triangulation of the data. As a consequence three techniques of data collection were accommodated in the research design for this study: participant teacher interviews, non-participant observation and video observation. In validating findings evidence must be collected and analysed to determine the accuracy or credibility of the inferences drawn through strategies such as triangulation or member checking (Creswell, 2005; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Triangulation is the process of substantiating evidence from different participants, types of data, or techniques of data collection, in the resulting themes and descriptions in qualitative research (Creswell, 2005). Member checking involves the researcher inviting the participants in the study to verify the accuracy of the account. Participants are asked about different aspects of the study, including the completeness of the description, the accuracy of the themes and the fairness of interpretations (Creswell, 2005). Another distinguishing feature of case study research is that of integration. The procedures of data collection and analysis, whilst distinct, tend to overlap throughout the period of research. Thus the concern for sequencing specific procedures tends to be negligible.

In qualitative research, such as this case study, validity is the degree to which the data collected is appropriate, meaningful and useful in substantiating the inferences the researcher draws from it (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Reliability refers to the degree to which the data consistently measures that which is being studied over time (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Gay, Mills, & Airasian,

2006). In addition to reliability and validity, objectivity and subjectivity impact on the qualitative researcher. "What qualitative researchers try to do is study the subjective factors objectively" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 453). Researchers must consciously manage their biases, by vigorously seeking evidence for their views.

The extensive description used in case study research tends to improve the internal reliability of the research (Creswell, 2005). Qualitative research, generally, and case study research specifically, do not claim to be replicable. However, its naturalistic basis acknowledges the unique nature of the research setting, identifying difficulty of replication as a strength, rather than a weakness of this form of research.

Selection of the Site

The site for the study was selected on four criteria: the provision of multigrade classes that cross stage levels; the existence of good independent learners; accessibility for the researcher; and the goodwill of the participants. The participants consisted of two teachers and twenty-nine students from two classrooms at Green Primary School. The teachers were the formal focus of the study, while the students were only indirectly involved. Green Primary School is staffed by a teaching principal and one teacher (see Table 1).

	Experience teaching in multigrade classrooms	Grades currently teaching	Classroom
Teacher A	11 years	Pre K - 2	Lower
Teacher B	8 years	3 - 6	Upper

Table 1 – Teacher Demographics

The school has a current enrolment of 32 students from 22 families and caters for students from Kindergarten to Grade 6, with Pre-K students (School Readiness) attending one day per week, in terms three and four. The detail of student numbers in each classroom appears in Table 2.

Classroom	Grade	Number of Students	Total
Lower	Pre-K	3	
	K	3	
	1	6	
	2	7	16
Upper	3	4	
	4	3	
	5	4	
	6	2	13

Table 2 – Classroom Demographics

The main school building houses the two classrooms which are connected in the middle by the library. The administration office is located at the end of the building next to the Upper classroom. Two offices are located off the side of the library, one used by the principal and the other by itinerant support teachers. There are two storerooms that are accessed from the library and the sports storeroom is also located in this area. The school has a small quadrangle and on the opposite side to the main building is the canteen and toilet block.

According to Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006) school and classroom maps are useful to qualitative researchers as "they provide contextual insights for people who have not visited the school, [as] ....For qualitative researchers, context is everything!" (p. 422). The following figure (Figure 1) is a map of Green Primary School.

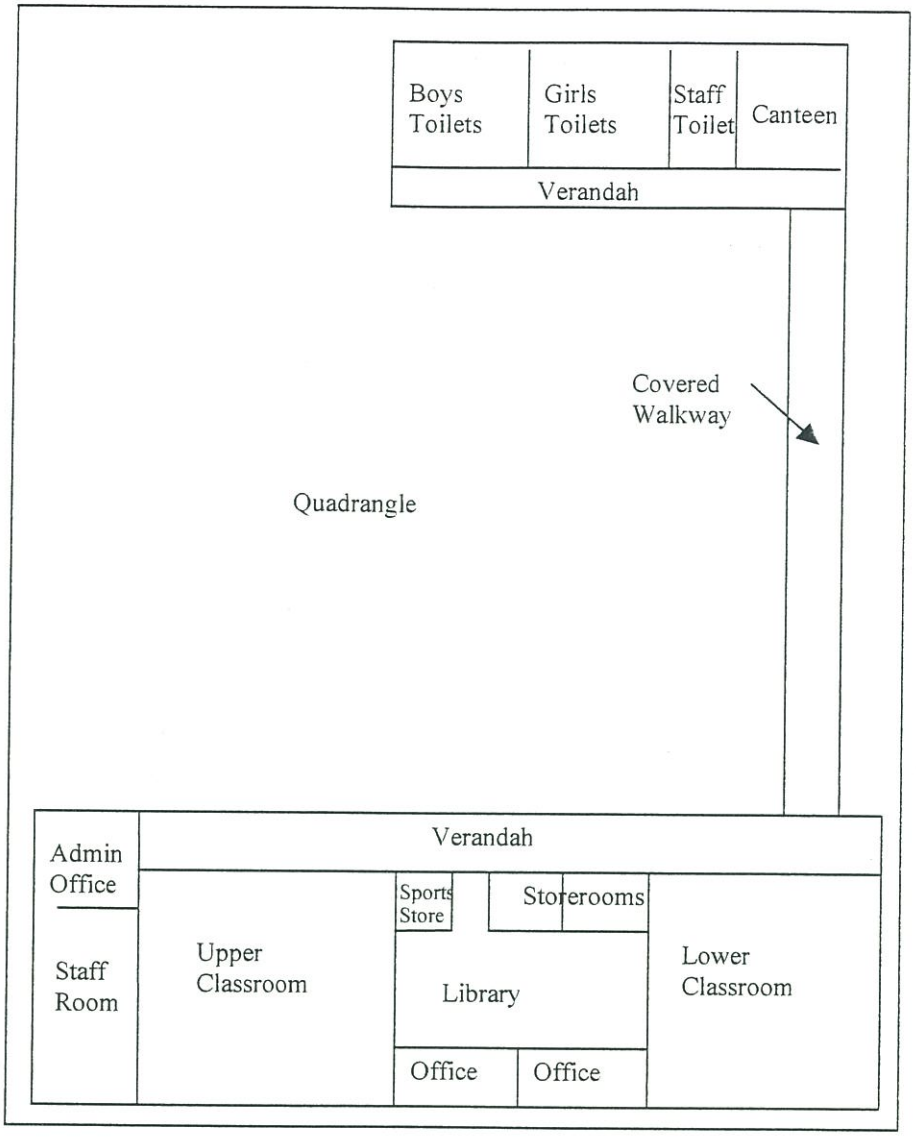


Figure 1 – Map of School

Data Gathering

This study utilised three methods of data collection: in-depth interviews; non-participant observation; and video observation. The various collection methods served two important purposes, the first being that of triangulation which is very significant to the qualitative study, and, secondly, it provided a comprehensive coverage of data.

a) Interviews

The interview is one of the major tools of social research (Creswell, 2005) and, is extensively used as a key technique of data collection in educational research. The tendency of the interview to feature in qualitative research reveals its value not only as a means of providing for the requisite triangulation, but also as a means of learning about, and providing data of, events or activities that cannot be observed directly, thus providing a valuable source of complementary information (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006).

Initial data were collected through structured interviews with the teacher participants to determine their experiences and opinions of the research topic (see Appendix A – Structured Interview Questions). Semi-structured interviews with the participant teachers followed the analysis of initial interviews and classroom observations to elaborate on emerging themes and to confirm data previously obtained. This process allowed for Member Checking of the research findings (see Appendix B – Semi-structured Interview Questions).

b) Non-participant Observations

Non-participant observation is defined as being that in which the observer is not actively involved in the situation being observed (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). The researcher's familiarity with both the participant teachers and students lessened the impact of observer influence on the lessons observed. "One strong point of observation is that it shows you something, without the filtering effect of language. All things being equal, you see how something actually happens, warts and all,

including all sorts of things that are so familiar to the respondents that they would never think of mentioning them in an interview" (Rugg & Petre, 2007, p. 110).

Direct observation (by the researcher) was also used to collect data in the classrooms. The Checklist of Independent Learning (Appendix C) was used to guide the researcher's observations, but it was not used to record data in its submitted format.

c) Video Observations

The use of video observation afforded the researcher the option of having an experienced observer confirm initial themes arising from the data. The researcher concentrated on video observing those incidents which she thought may highlight the strategies used to foster independent learning in multigrade classrooms. Then she and an experienced observer, analysed the video together using the Checklist of Independent Learning as a guide (see Appendix C).

Ethical Considerations for the Research

The involvement of human participants as a principal means of data collection in this study, undertaken within the Faculty of Education, was subject to approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Avondale College. This process involved requiring the permission of the participant school and school system. The approval also required the development of pro forma documents pertaining to the data collection techniques. Information Consent Letters were also required to be developed and approved for the teacher participants (Appendix D) and parental approval for student involvement (see Appendix E).

With permission granted from the aforementioned parties, and letters and pro formas completed, the research was approved by the Ethics Committee of Avondale College (Appendix F).

Analysis of Data

A significant feature of qualitative research is that analysis begins, in the interests of generating theory, soon after the collection of data commences (Creswell, 2005). All data collected (Appendix G) were transcribed (Appendix H) by the researcher prior to the commencement of analysis.

Qualitative data analysis requires a process of successive approximations that organise and reduce the data. Hence, the tactic of reading and re-reading data (viewing and re-viewing video tapes), with a view to developing insights, tracking themes, and reviewing interpretations, was adopted.

Qualitative researchers code their own data, and coding may be accomplished in a variety of ways. Essentially, however, coding in qualitative research is a systematic way of developing and refining interpretations of the data, it involves the synthesis of all the data related to themes, ideas, concepts, interpretations, and propositions emerging from the research (Rugg & Petre, 2007). Themes and categories that arise are therefore measured and justifiable, however they may well be subject to alternative organisation (Watson, Phillips, & Wille, 1995). Three principal steps were involved in the coding of data in this study: the development of coding categories; the coding of all the data; and the placement of data into coding categories (see Table 3).

Strategies	
Teaching Strategies	**Organisational Strategies**
Delivery	Foundations
Autonomy	Training
Omnipresence	Planning
	Learning Materials
	Configuration
	Prompts

Table 3 – Coding Categories

Emergent themes were sourced from the collected data, then analysed and classified as they related to the strategies that foster independent learning in multigrade classrooms. These themes and ideas formed the basis for discussion, and for suggested implications and recommendations for current practice.

Data obtained from three sources, (see Table 4), were broadly categorised on the initial analysis of the transcripts and then was further condensed into twenty-five strategies, which were subdivided into two main categories containing the nine themes that emerged during subsequent analysis.

Interviews	Observations	Video Observations
Initial Interviews Teacher A Initial Interview (TAII) Teacher B Initial Interview (TBII)	Observation 1 Lower Classroom Observation 1 (LCO1) Upper Classroom Observation 1 (UCO1)	Video Observation 1 Lower Classroom Video Observation 1 (LCVO1) Upper Classroom Video Observation 1 (UCVO1)
Final Interviews Teacher A Final Interview (TAFI) Teacher B Final Interview (TBFI)	Observation 2 Lower Classroom Observation 2 (LCO2) Upper Classroom Observation 2 (UCO2)	Video Observation 2 Lower Classroom Video Observation 2 (LCVO2) Upper Classroom Video Observation 2 (UCVO2)
	Observation 3 Lower Classroom Observation 3 (LCO3) Upper Classroom Observation 3 (UCO3)	

Table 4 – Data Sources

Presenting the Data

In seeking a comprehensive framework for this in-depth analysis of the strategies used by the participant teachers, a multi-dimensional approach was taken. The findings of the study are presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six, while Chapter Seven pertains to the development of a Model for Independent Learning and the conclusions of this research.

Chapter 4

Results – Independent Learning

Background of the Case

The research was carried out in a small primary school and followed a qualitative approach. Case study methodology was utilised to address the issue of facilitating independent learning through the specific strategies teachers use in multigrade classrooms. Data were gathered from three major sources, then analysed for emergent themes to arrive at the findings of the study. These findings subsequently led to the development of a model for fostering independent learning.

Importance of Independent Learning

Both the participating teachers emphasised the importance of independent learning in their initial interviews, going so far as to state that independent learning is "pretty fundamental" (TBII), to students' success in multigrade classrooms and that it is something that "can be taught and ...can be fostered" (TAII). The teachers' views are supported by Marland (2004) who found that more than ninety percent of teachers perceive the establishment of independent work habits to be a very significant aspect of teaching in multigrade classrooms. Furthermore, parents also recognise the significance of independent learning in multigrade classrooms with over two-thirds agreeing that students learn to work more independently in these environments (Cornish, 2006). Also, educational policy statements "abound with aims and objectives to do with achieving individual autonomy and independence as a learner" (Glynn, 1985, p. 5).

Multigrade instructional strategies are stated to be powerful pedagogical tools which promote independent learning. Students learn how to learn. They learn how to teach others through techniques such as peer tutoring and independent inquiry. The environment promotes and develops students' growing independence (Little, 1995; Miller, 1991a; Thomas & Shaw, 1992). Teachers highlighted the point that, without some independence, students are effectively unable to do anything. A multigrade teacher must divide their time between different groups of students so it is crucial for students to be responsible and able to work independently. Teacher A (TAII) commented, "It's important because if they can't complete a task independently then they can't master that task, and at my level there's a lot of mastery that goes on".

Whilst Veenman and Raemaekers (1995) confirm the teachers' views that "Pupils in multigrade classes work more in an individual seatwork setting" (p. 6). Galton, as cited in Mulryan-Kyne (2007) contradictorily asserts that results from the 1980 ORACLE study in the UK "showed minimal differences between single-grade and multigrade classes in the time pupils spent working alone" (p. 504). However, Teacher B (TBII) maintains that independence is "absolutely imperative. If they can't independently learn in a multigrade classroom they can't learn ...because you need to set them to work at their grade level... [and] without the ability to independently learn, ...carry[ing] on with what you set them its going to be ... impossible".

Impediments to Independent Learning

The teachers in the study detailed a variety of factors that impact on a student's ability to be an independent learner, some are inherent student characteristics and

others are factors controlled by teachers. Glynn (1985) contends that "Individual learners have minimal control over learning interactions and hence are excessively dependent on external control by teachers" (p. 5).

Teacher B (TBII) believes that part of a student's ability to work independently or not is based on personality type, "so you are going to be fighting that straight off", and that behavioural issues or learning difficulties can make independent learning difficult for some students. She went on to say that if a student has self-esteem issues "they will expect more time so independent learning is a really hard task for them" (TBII).

Additionally, according to the teachers' perceptions, previous educational experience plays a major role in a student's ability to be an independent learner. Teacher B (TBII) argues that if a student's schooling has been in a single grade classroom it will be quite obvious they haven't developed the skills necessary to learn independently and they will expect more teacher time, and "to be a bit more hand fed" (TBII) than others in the class.

Moreover, Teacher A (TAII) suggests that teachers impact students' ability to be independent learners by placing limitations on them and discouraging anything "that's not run of the mill, the same as everybody else is doing". If students are restrained from doing extra things or interjecting in a lesson "by having an idea that they want to present, or [suggesting] its time to pack up now" then teachers are discouraging independence. If a teacher discourages students' questions, then they are impeding independent learning (TAII).

Teacher A (TAII) revealed another way teachers can hinder a student's ability to be an independent learner: "if you limit them to their stage, or you limit them that they must stay with the group, you're not fostering [independent learning]. You may not be killing it, but you are not fostering independent learning at that point." She asserts that by making a student who has completed their work wait for the rest of the class, or by not allowing them to progress, you are curbing that child's ability to be an independent learner (TAII).

The type of questioning used in classrooms was foreshadowed as playing a major part in fostering or stifling independent learning. Teacher A (TAII) maintains if a teacher only uses lower order questions then "you are not fostering independent learning you're actually stifling it." This view was supported by Teacher B, who commented that she uses questions to spark students' interest when introducing new topics and to highlight areas students may wish to explore independently (TBII).

Teacher A went on to highlight that

> Discouraging is really, really easy. If you do everything for them... have everything pre-prepared for them so that they don't have to do it on their own, pre-cut things out because you want them to look lovely, but in reality, they will get better if they do it for themselves, but there might be one or two who are slower. Not allowing for them [to complete a task by] taking it off them all the time, and doing it for them. All those things actually foster learned helplessness instead of independence. (TAII)

The teachers' views that arose from the data appear to confirm Glynn's (1985) assertion that "there is growing evidence that in many contemporary classrooms at primary... levels, we may be providing precisely the wrong contexts for students to become autonomous and independent learners" (p. 5).

Teaching and Organisational Strategies Identified

Nine significant strategy themes arose from an analysis of the data. These nine themes were then organised into two broad categories based on the type of strategy being utilised. The first category, 'Teaching Strategies', includes three main themes – *Delivery*, *Autonomy* and *Omnipresence*. The second category, 'Organisational Strategies', includes six main themes – *Foundations*, *Training*, *Planning*, *Learning Materials*, *Configuration* and *Prompts* (Refer Figure 2 below).

Each main theme is made up of the specific strategies which were identified from the data as fostering independent learning (Refer Figure 2). 'Teaching Strategies' will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5, while 'Organisational Strategies' will be discussed in Chapter 6.

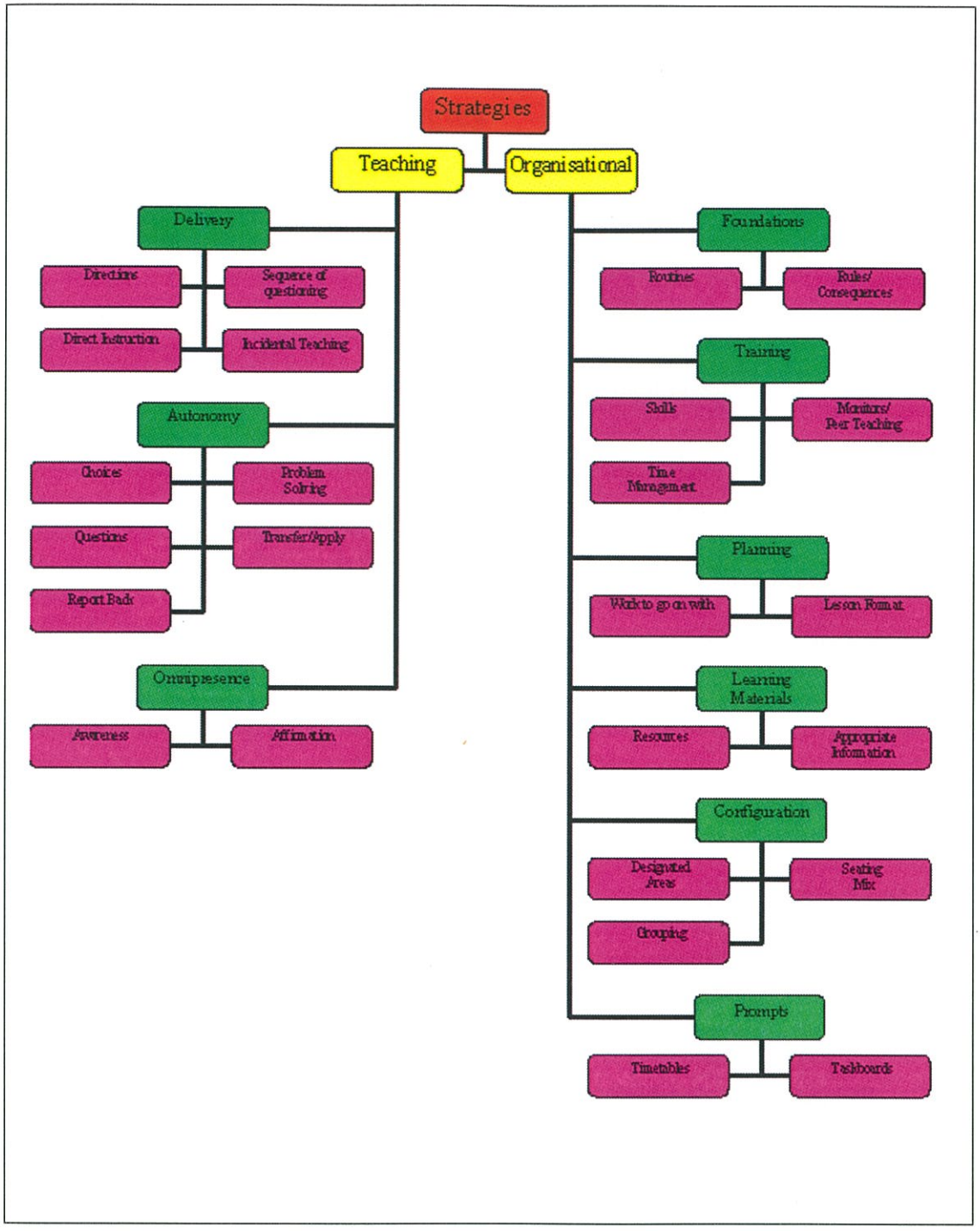


Figure 2 – Strategies Chart

Chapter 5

Results – Teaching Strategies

'Teaching Strategies' are strategies actively utilised by teachers during the course of a lesson or series of lessons. Teachers must maintain a balance between teacher-directed and child-centred activities which cater for all learning styles in order to facilitate the development of independent learning in their classroom.

The following strategies were identified in the data obtained from classroom observations, video observations and teacher interviews. They have been grouped during analysis into the following themes for the purpose of logical discussion: *Delivery*, *Autonomy* and *Omnipresence*.

1. Delivery

The theme of *Delivery* incorporates the way teachers present information to their students and respond to student inquiries or direct students' learning. "Teacher time is frequently spent entirely in issuing instructions, presenting set tasks, monitoring on-task behaviour and giving evaluative feedback on children's performance" (Glynn, 1985, p. 8). The theme of *Delivery* includes the following strategies: *Directions*, *Direct Instruction*, *Sequence of Questioning* and *Incidental Teaching*.

a. Directions

The *Directions* strategy involves teachers giving clear and short instructions or directions to students that tell them specifically how to perform a set task or activity. It also includes instructions that flag what students will be required to do for a future task. This then enables the students to proceed independently of the teacher.

Teachers signal important facts by slowing down or repeating key points to focus student attention.

During observation in the lower classroom this strategy was evident in an interaction between the teacher and a kindergarten student. While the teacher was waiting for the student to clear his desk so she could begin a whole class lesson, she gave explicit directions on how she wanted the student to pack up "Freeze – put it on the bench" (LCVO1). Due to the unambiguous nature of the direction the student was able to comply immediately, as the short and clear direction told him specifically what to do.

The *Directions* strategy was further demonstrated by the teacher during observations. When setting a task for one grade to carry out, while working with another group, the teacher simply stated "So you need sheet, scissors and glue – off you go" (LCVO1). This concise direction was easy for the students to remember and enabled them to collect the equipment they needed, whilst allowing them the freedom to choose which order they would carry out the steps.

Vincent (1999b) states that the teacher should "begin each class by telling the students exactly what will be happening. The teacher outlines what he [she] and the students will be doing this period" (p. 7). When issuing directions multigrade teachers give advance warning of the tasks that are expected to be completed in a particular block of time and issue reminders of what is expected. Thus the students are able to plan their work. This aspect of the *Directions* strategy was observed when the following command was given, "Things to be done: conferences with me,

borders and biographical recount writing, remember it's a draft – leave a blank line in between" (UCO2).

In a multigrade classroom the teacher expects that directions will be acted on without further prompting. A direction is given to one group and then the teacher immediately directs their attention to another group without waiting for compliance. This strategy was frequently seen during observations, "You have to the count of 10 to be settled doing that..." (UCO1), this technique frees up valuable teacher time and develops independence and responsibility in the students.

b. Direct Instruction

This strategy involves teachers explicitly teaching new concepts and skills to students, beginning lessons with a statement of goals and a review of prior learning. New material should be presented in small chunks and opportunity should be given for guided student practice before independent practice is expected (Veenman & Raemaekers, 1995). This strategy allows for students to build confidence and expertise before expecting them to continue independently of the teacher.

The *Direct Instruction* strategy was clearly illustrated during observations when Teacher A was introducing a new concept to the class. She began by giving an overview of the lesson, summing up "things you know, things you don't know, and others for the future" (LCVO1). She gave the students advance warning of an independent labeling activity they would be required to carry out, following a period of guided practice. The students were called on to classify animals into set categories on the whiteboard and give justification for their responses. Sufficient guided

practice is a key component of the *Direct Instruction* strategy in multigrade classes as it allows the teacher to determine if the students are ready for independent learning. If they are not sufficiently prepared errors and frustration may negatively impact on their learning (Veenman & Raemaekers, 1995).

c. Sequence of Questioning

The *Sequence of Questioning* strategy is characterised by an ordered or planned use of questioning. Lower order questions should be followed by higher order questions. This allows teachers to cater for individual student needs and prepare them for independent learning. "Most teachers waste their time by asking questions which are intended to discover what a pupil does not know, whereas the true art of questioning has for its purpose to discover what the pupil knows, or is capable of knowing" (Albert Einstein, N.D. Original source unknown).

This strategy was profiled during the initial interviews as follows, "you know when you actually say ok if I take them along this line and then I ask this question, if they've listened and they've taken each step with me, they can take this next leap" (TAII). Multigrade teachers specifically plan for higher order questioning in their teaching, they lead the students in the direction they need to be heading and then use appropriate higher order questioning to help them take the step to the next level and continue on with learning independently of the teacher.

The *Sequence of Questioning* strategy was observed during a worship lesson in the upper classroom. The students' listened to a story about Coventry Cathedral, and then the teacher asked a series of lower order questions before prompting the

students to individually and independently explore the topic by carefully introducing selected higher order questions that highlighted areas that were lacking in their knowledge (UCO2).

d. Incidental Teaching

This strategy is based around the concept of a responsive learning environment (Glynn, 1985) where student comments are valued and incorporated into lessons. Watson, Phillips and Wille's (1995) research asserts that multigrade teachers should "seize incidental teaching opportunities to promote learning" (p. 151).

Teacher A drew the researcher's attention to this strategy in the initial interview when she outlined a previous incidental teaching opportunity in her classroom. "We were talking about amphibians and we were saying you know how they can go in the water and on the land, and then one of the students said is that why they call some vehicles amphibious? Now that is exactly what we are talking about that's encouraging independence in the learning, and encouraging them to go further" (TAII).

The *Incidental Teaching* strategy was observed in the classroom when the teacher incorporated a student's 'news' story of the devastating storm that hit the local area into a whole class discussion and recount task (UCO3). The teacher's approach is in stark contrast to Glynn's (1985) assertion that "In tightly controlled learning contexts, as provided by many 'efficient' teachers, there may be little opportunity for child initiation and so little chance for incidental teaching" (p. 6).

2. Autonomy

The theme of *Autonomy* in multigrade classrooms is characterised by the fact that teachers aren't seen as the sole source of knowledge or assistance in the multigrade classroom. Multigrade teachers relinquish some of the control over different aspects of learning in their classroom, trusting in students to take responsibility for their own learning and assisting other students to learn. They don't interfere with students learning unless they are asked for assistance, and in doing so, they help students to develop their independence (Wallace, Nish, & Allen, 2001b). "The... challenge will be to convince teachers... that the more they relinquish control, the more their learners will utilise opportunities for independent learning" (Glynn, 1985, p. 13). The theme of *Autonomy* includes the following strategies: *Choices and Responsibility*, *Questions*, *Transfer/Apply*, *Problem Solving* and *Report Back*.

a. Choices and Responsibility

The *Choices and Responsibility* strategy is rooted in the idea that teachers should give up direct control over student behaviour and by doing so allow students to make choices and develop responsibility for their own learning and actions (Glynn, 1985).

During the initial interviews this strategy was foreshadowed by the teachers as being one way to foster independent learning, "You can also encourage them to take control of their own learning ... and that helps them as well" (TAII).

The *Choices and Responsibility* strategy was evident during observations on a number of occasions and it took many different forms. It took the form of a general reminder issued at the beginning of the school day, "today will be hot, 'think drink'" (LCO1), and was further evidenced by the expectation that students would mark their

own work (UCO2). Finally the students were responsible for their own work being completed. If it wasn't, they knew to return to class after eating their lunch, and finish the incomplete work (UCO1).

The strategy was shown at a more advanced level in the teacher's response to a student with Diabetes. His blood sugar level monitor alarmed during a lesson and the teacher simply asked, "do you need to deal with that now?" and relied on the Grade 5 student to take appropriate action (UCO1).

b. Questions

This strategy is founded on the idea that students learn through asking questions. They gather pieces of information, make connections, and then use the new understanding to ask additional questions until they reach a conclusion that they are happy with. The key to the *Questions* strategy is in not providing answers to student questions, but rather in guiding them to come up with their own solutions, by assisting them to find their own answers. Students need the freedom to explore areas of interest, however, "many learning environments are arranged so that the learner can only *respond* to questions or stimuli under the control of someone else" (Glynn, 1985, p. 6), which give them little if any opportunity for independent learning.

The importance of this strategy was expressed by teachers in the initial interviews. Teacher A comments "did they [the students] have a chance to ask [what] does this mean? To explore their new options, to make links and to ask questions" (TAII). If not then independent learning was not being encouraged.

The *Questions* Strategy was depicted during an exchange where the teacher deliberately did not answer a student's question, but rather kept putting the question back onto the student by providing additional information and asking "What do you think? You tell me? What could you try?" (LCVO1).

c. Transfer/Apply

The *Transfer/Apply* strategy is based on the principle of teaching students how to carry out a particular task. It also teaches how to deal with a specific type of question. Teachers then encourage students to make links and transfer their knowledge to other situations. Then apply the information to completely different tasks. Glynn (1985) asserts that "in handing over much greater control to the learner they [teachers] would be providing for strong generalization of what is learned into new contexts, particularly to contexts where the learner must perform independently of teacher control" (p. 13).

Both of the participant teachers emphasised this strategy in the initial interviews. Teacher B commented that students "need to be able to independently focus and take the knowledge that you've given them and transfer that across to different question types" (TBII), whilst Teacher A stated that once students have "accomplished a skill and they can apply it to some other area where they are working, or they have acquired a piece of knowledge and they can apply, cross apply it in another subject and they go oh that's like" (TAII), the student has the ability to be independent in their learning.

The *Transfer/Apply* strategy was observed during a graphing lesson when a student asked, "Do I need to count them [the items in each column] or is it always just the tallest one?" The teacher's response was, "As a matter of fact if it's in proportion absolutely. But that's also why I insist that you do it in proportion darling because it is a pictorial representation, therefore you can have a quick look and this is why graphs are so handy" (LCO2).

d. Problem Solving

This strategy puts responsibility on the students to solve their problems independently of the teacher, this is particularly crucial in multigrade classrooms as it enables the teacher to work uninterrupted with one group while the remainder of the class continues without assistance.

Teacher B outlined the strategy as follows, "So they've gotta actually think, ok do I actually need to ask a question, how else could I deal with that question" (TBII). Whilst Teacher A, contends that

> Putting problem solving strategies in place in your classroom actually helps with small things, if they have a problem, teaching them what could you do about that, what other things could we do, which things do you think might be the best, if none of those work then you can do this. and teaching them to actually think along those lines, provides them with the skills they then need to go, oh I can solve this problem on my own – I haven't got a pencil sharpener and my pencil is blunt, but I could borrow a pencil, I could borrow someone's sharpener and sharpen my pencil I could get one of the spare pencils from the pencil box and put it back. That's a really simple example to show that even with the kindys you can start training them to think how can I solve my problem, there are certain things I can do on my own. (TAII)

During observations this strategy was illustrated by students asking each other if they could borrow pencils so they could continue working without seeking assistance

from the teacher (LCO1). They were dealing with their own problem. An example of this was when a Grade 1 student was working on a task on the floor and his foot was bumping the desk of a Grade 2 student, rather than seeking assistance from the teacher who was teaching the kindies, he politely explained the problem to the Grade 1 student. He suggested that if the Grade 1 student moved a little further from his desk it would solve the issue (LCVO1). The strategy was also triggered by the teacher when a student said she didn't have a spider sheet that she needed to complete a task; the teacher's response was, "You don't have a spider? What could you do?" the student thought about it and then went and solved her own problem (LCVO1).

e. Report Back

The *Report Back* strategy is characterised by allowing students the freedom to carry out a task independently, and then to demonstrate their knowledge or share their work with the teacher or other students. "If we value educational goals such as autonomy and independence in the learner, we need to establish contexts in which learners can have access to learning tasks free from excessive control by teachers or instructors" (Glynn, 1985, p. 12).

In the initial interviews, Teacher A outlined the importance of this strategy. "Giving them [students] the time to report back if it's a long term project where they have had too do a project, giving them the time to tell you what they did, what they learnt, what they achieved from that, its an affirmation of what they have done and an encouragement for them to continue along that line" is so important (TAII).

The *Report Back* strategy was implemented during a lesson whereby students were asked to read a set segment of text and then report back on the particular 'features' they identified to the remainder of the class (LCVO1).

3. Omnipresence

The theme of *Omnipresence* is characterised by the requirement for multigrade teachers to know exactly what is going on in their classroom. Their room awareness needs to be heightened, and they constantly need to be aware of who to praise and give positive reinforcement. "Children are developing a sense that they are responsible for their own actions and this ... approach gives them maximum scope to exercise their own emerging sense of responsibility. In this way it fosters independence" (Watson, Phillips, & Wille, 1995, p. 156). It includes the following strategies: *Awareness* and *Affirmation.*

a. Awareness

The *Awareness* strategy requires that the teacher is alert to what the different grades are doing at any given point in a lesson. Though their attention maybe focused on the grade they are working with, the teacher's positioning in the classroom heightens overall awareness (Watson, Phillips, & Wille, 1995).

Teacher B mentioned this strategy during initial interview, stating "being aware of what you're doing and doing the teacher thing of five things at once sort of thing," "just being really aware of whether they are maximising their learning time, which is quite tiring really as a teacher," and to "make sure where they are at, asking them how many questions they have done" (TBII).

The *Awareness* strategy was illustrated by Teacher A, looking up while teaching another grade and remarking "John you are lost, find yourself please" before continuing on with the lesson (LCO1). In the upper classroom the teacher maintained awareness of the grades, other than the one she was working with on the floor, by periodically questioning different students who were working independently at their desks as to how many questions they had completed (UCVO2).

b. Affirmation

The *Affirmation* strategy is based on the theory that students need to be trained to be independent learners, and teachers can assist them to achieve this through the use of positive reinforcement. Teachers must always emphasise the importance of being able to work independently and responsibly. Glynn (1985) highlights the importance of reinforcing task completion rather than for attention to the task, stating that the former approach "may be a form of behaviour control that interferes with independent learning" (p. 10). Students should be praised frequently and have good behaviour acknowledged, either verbally or by a 'thumbs up' to reinforce the desired behaviour (Vincent, 1999c).

The strategy was laid out by the teachers during initial interviews. Affirmation provides students with praise for what they have done and an encouragement for them to continue along that line, "providing affirmation every step along the way, you have done a wonderful job, fancy thinking of that on your own, that is very clever, I'm so impressed I wonder what you do next? You know the affirmation thing" (TAII).

The *Affirmation* strategy was observed as being used regularly in the classroom, it took both verbal and non-verbal forms. Students were rewarded for going on with the next task independently by having points placed on the board next to their names (UCO1). They received 'thumbs up' for correct responses and the phrases "How clever" and "She's right!" were used on a liberal basis (LCVO1).

The multigrade teacher must continually adjust and respond to the requirements of their students, judging which combination of 'Teaching Strategies' will best assist the students to function as independent learners. However, 'Teaching Strategies' are only one part of the puzzle, their success in fostering independent learning is also dependent on the 'Organisational Strategies' used in the classroom.

Chapter 6

Results - Organisational Strategies

The 'Organisational Strategies' used by teachers provide the vital structure that allows the multigrade classroom to function effectively. Little (2004) outlines the use of whole class teaching, small group, paired, and independent learning as significant apects of organisation. The involvement of student monitors in the running of the classroom, and in the management of resources is another crucial aspect of efficient multigrade classroom organisation.

The following strategies were identified in the data obtained from classroom observations, video observations and teacher interviews. They have been grouped during analysis into the following themes for the purpose of logical discussion: *Foundations*, *Training*, *Planning*, *Learning Materials*, *Configuration* and *Prompts*.

1. Foundations

The *Foundations* theme is found at the heart of multigrade classrooms. It sets out the routines, procedures, rules and consequences that alert students to the teacher's expectations regarding the responsible use of learning time and appropriate behaviours (Veenman & Raemaekers, 1995). It includes the following strategies: *Routines* and *Rules/Consequences*.

a. Routines

The *Routines* strategy is crucial to the successful multigrade classroom. Teachers establish classroom routines so that learning may continue in the absence of direct supervision, or direction from the teacher. Routines "are defined as behaviour

patterns triggered by the teacher that the class performs without further instruction" (Watson, Phillips, & Wille, 1995, p. 159). Students understand what is expected of them and they will follow well established and logical routines (Miller, 1991a).

During the initial interviews, Teacher B emphasized the importance of routines to independent learning. "Routines are really important to independent learning, like massively important. Just to spend time so they know exactly where they are at" (TBII). The teacher's view is supported by Watson, Phillips and Wille (1995) who noted "Routines were also used to foster independence, for example when students finished set work they knew they had to proceed immediately with a range of other tasks without interrupting the teacher" (p. 159).

During "MOBB" (make our books beautiful) week in the lower classroom, this strategy was strikingly evident. As the students returned from a library lesson, all but three students entered the classroom and immediately commenced work without seeking direction from the teacher. The three students who did not know what to do were prompted by the teacher to look at the class. This was all the direction required for them to realise what was expected to begin work. Students were moving around collecting their tagged workbooks from labeled drawers, completing the designated pages, and placing the books in marking trays, before moving on to another workbook (LCO1).

One simple example of this strategy is where students in the lower classroom just had to write their name on the board before leaving the classroom to use the toilet. They could do this independently without interrupting the teacher when she was

working with another grade. Students knew that only one person at a time was allowed to go, and if there was already a name on the board they must wait for that person to return (LCO1). In the upper classroom, students were observed coming to stand silently beside the teacher if they required assistance. The teacher would then attend to them without interrupting the flow of the lesson she was teaching another grade (UCO1).

b. Rules/Consequences

Clear behavioural and academic expectations, and enforced consequences for non-compliance form the core of the *Rules/Consequences* strategy. Classroom management should not pose any special problems in a multigrade classroom provided that students know the rules and know what is expected of them (Miller, 1991a; , *Teaching Combined Grade Classes: Real Problems and Promising Practices*, 1990; Thomas & Shaw, 1992; Watson, Phillips, & Wille, 1995).

The necessity of implementing this strategy was raised by Teacher B at the initial interview. She stated that, processes need to be in place that enable students to function within a clear set of rules, knowing full well that non-compliance will result in the application of predetermined consequences (TBII). This was evident when a student in the upper classroom was instructed to not sharpen another pencil as he was wasting time. Another student then decided to share her sharpener with him, to use at his desk, while the teacher was busy teaching another grade. When the teacher noticed the student using the sharpener at his desk, the student immediately acknowledged he had broken the rules and unprompted proceeded to the whiteboard and wrote his name. This indicated that he had to stay in at lunch. At the end of the

lesson the girl who had given him the sharpener approached the teacher and informed her of her part in the incident, volunteering to stay in at lunch, as she also had broken the class rule (UCO3).

2. Training

The theme of *Training* incorporates all the skills that are explicitly taught to students. It is unreasonable to just expect students to naturally want to work independently. They must firstly be taught how to do it. Miller (1991a) claims "success depends on the ability of the teacher to organize and manage instruction so that cooperation, independence and a motivation to learn become environmental norms"(p. 5). It includes the following strategies: *Skills*, *Time Management* and *Monitors/Peer Teaching*.

a. Skills

The *Skills* strategy involves students being provided with instruction on the skills necessary for them to become independent learners. Then allowing the students the opportunity to practice the skills until they become automatic responses.

Teacher B revealed that "at the start of the year you've got to take it really slow until they get those skills and so that's an issue" with implementing the skills strategy, because "if we don't spend enough time then they're not going to be able to do it" (TBII). She further suggests that "lots of kids are still pretty egocentric, and independent learning isn't really the thing in their minds, it's pretty egocentric learning, and I want the answer to my question now, so you have to try and train them out of that, it's pretty important" (TBII).

During a lesson, Teacher A was observed modeling a skill that she wanted the students to develop. She specifically talked about what colour pen to use for a labeling task, then questioned the students as to why it was important (so that the information stands out) and also what else they could use (pencils, crayons or textas) for the same task (LCVO1).

b. Time Management

This strategy is based on the teacher giving indications of the time frame for each unit of work, or sequence of activities. Teachers actively demonstrate time management techniques and model effective use of time, they point out "time requirements, they keep track of elapsed time, they distribute time according to tasks and they schedule sufficient time" (Vincent, 1999b, p. 4) for task completion.

The teachers were frequently observed using this strategy in the classroom. Teacher A gave students time to comply with a request by saying, "when the big hand gets back to the 3, I want you packed up and sitting at the story chair" (LCO1), and she alerted students to the time they had to complete a task "Look at the clock, we are going to do this until the big black long hand gets to the 6. What time will that be?"(LCO1). She also encouraged students to make appropriate time decisions, asking "Do you have time to colour it in?" (LCVO1).

c. Monitors/Peer Teaching

The utilisation of class monitors and peer teaching techniques is crucial if the teacher is not to be viewed as the sole source of knowledge within the multigrade classroom. Teachers develop students' skills so they can serve as 'teachers' to other students within and across grade levels. This encourages students to seek assistance and

receive help from their peers (Vincent, 1999c). Having students serve as tutors within and across grade levels can be a very effective tool for learning, with benefits for both the tutor and the learner. It is a powerful way of extending teacher influence within the classroom (Little, 2004; Thomas & Shaw, 1992).

Teacher A utilises monitors in her classroom. A Grade 2 student is allocated to each row of desks to provide assistance when the teacher is occupied teaching another grade. The strategy was articulated by a student's comment "Jordan helps me" and the teacher responded "That's right he's your monitor isn't he" (LCO1).

In the upper classroom students are actively encouraged to help each other. Unprompted, a Grade 4 student took on the role of teaching a new student how to use the SRA reading program while the teacher was working with another group (UCO1).

3. Planning

The theme of *Planning* highlights the critical importance of careful planning to the success of multigrade classrooms. Teachers must thoroughly prepare in multigrade classrooms. They must plan carefully in order to be able to spend quality time with each grade. An important factor to successful multigrade teaching is the teacher's ability to plan and organise lessons that are productive and easy for students to follow. This skill alone will help maximise student's time on task (Birch & Lally, 1995; Miller, 1991a; Thomas & Shaw, 1992). *Planning* includes the following strategies: *Work to Go on With* and *Lesson Format*.

a. Work to Go on With

Multigrade teachers' ensure that all grades are kept engaged and on task. They achieve this by providing meaningful work and enabling the students to independently proceed from one activity to another (Thomas & Shaw, 1992; Watson, Phillips, & Wille, 1995).

Teacher A noted the importance of the *Work to Go on With* strategy during her initial interview. Students should "not be left without clear instructions as to what they are to do next should they be one of those people who are ready to go on" (TAII). She stressed the need for having "a ready supply that they can go on and do that will interest them" (TAII), and the importance of providing "what they need to continue on with" (TAII).

In the upper classroom there were three display boards that identified tasks the students could work on if they had finished their assigned work. These display boards were: The *Fast Finishers* (Figure 3), the *Reminders* (Figure 4) and the *Catch Up* Board (Figure 5).

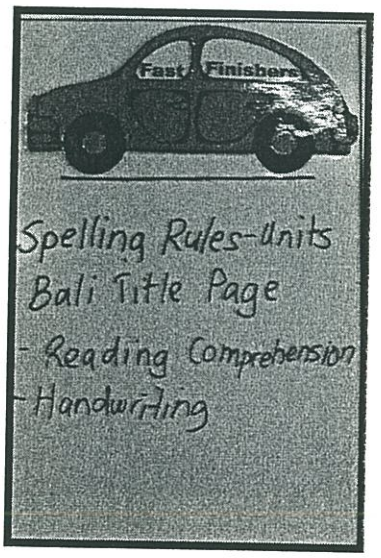


Figure 3 – Fast Finishers Display

The fast finisher's display identified work that was still in progress and that students could continue to complete (Figure 3).

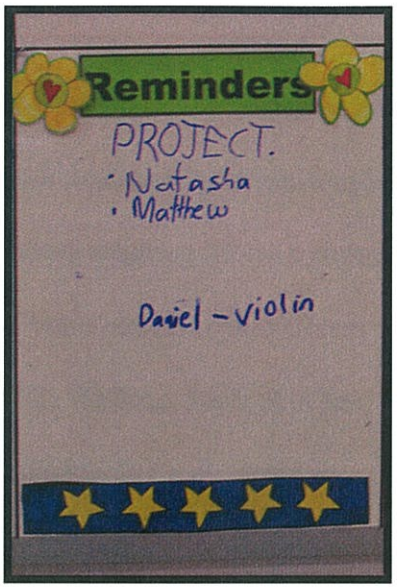


Figure 4 – Reminders Display

The reminders display was used to prompt specific students to complete overdue work (Figure 4).

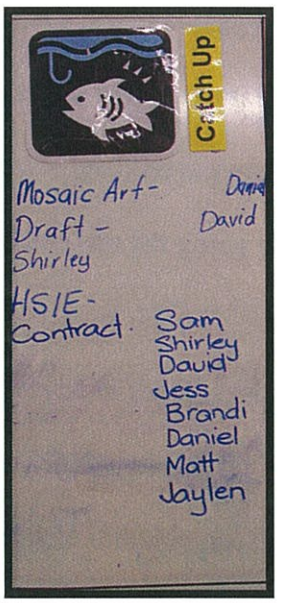


Figure 5 – Catch Up Display

While the Catch Up display (Figure 5) was used to remind students about work that should have already been finished.

b. Lesson Format

The *Lesson Format* strategy is based on the teacher organising instruction for either whole class teaching, or a combination of independent learning and small group teaching. The key to whole class teaching lies in a common concept that can be enjoyed by the whole class , but is explored in different ways for each grade (Miller, 1991a; Thomas & Shaw, 1992; Wallace, Nish, & Allen, 2001b; Watson, Phillips, & Wille, 1995). Alternatively, the teacher may structure a lesson so that one group works with the teacher, while the remainder of the class work independently (Allen, 1996; , *Teaching Combined Grade Classes: Real Problems and Promising Practices*, 1990; Wallace, Nish, & Allen, 2001b). This format helps students to develop valuable skills relating to 'learning how to learn' (Thomas & Shaw, 1992).

Teacher B foreshadowed the *Lesson Format* strategy during the initial interview. She stated that lessons may be aimed at the whole class, single-grade levels, individuals or alternate groupings. She acknowledged the importance of planning by stating "planning, plan it so you know where you are going with your lessons" (TBII).

A version of this strategy was observed in the lower classroom with the teacher presenting a lesson on Arachnids to the whole class. The different grade level tasks were designed for students to complete individually (LCVO1). In the upper classroom a maths lesson was observed which demonstrated the alternative version

of this strategy, the teacher worked with one group, while the other students worked independently on a set task (UCO1).

4. Learning Materials

The *Learning Materials* theme covers the types and quantities of learning materials required in multigrade classrooms. As Wallace, Nish and Allen (2001b) assert that "for multi-grade teaching more learning materials may be needed, due to the need for pupils to work independently of the teacher" (p. 53). The organisation and storage of these learning materials greatly impacts on independent learning. It is crucial that materials are stored so that students can find, use and return them independently. They need to be positioned so they are accessible to students without causing disruption to others. The theme includes the following strategies: *Resources* and *Appropriate Information.*

a. Resources

Resources are logically organised, clearly labeled and prominently displayed in the classroom when teachers utilise this strategy. It enables students to access and use the resources independently (*Multi-Age Classes in New South Wales*, 1997).

The *Resources* strategy was detailed during initial interviews by Teacher A, who put forward the importance of "providing the children with ...the supplies that they need so that they can go on and do a task" (TAII).

In the upper classroom this strategy was clearly portrayed by students accessing brightly coloured and labeled crates located on a low cupboard that contained

resources for, English, Maths, Bible, Homework, Theme, etc (UCO2). The strategy was further demonstrated during a lesson in the lower classroom with the teacher stating to students during the course of a lesson "you know where the magnets are" (LCVO1).

b. Appropriate Information

Care must be taken to ensure that materials used in multigrade classrooms contain information that is clear, coherent, readable and unambiguous in order to facilitate students' ability to work with minimal supervision and guidance (Miller, 1991a; Thomas & Shaw, 1992).

During initial interviews, Teacher A conveyed the importance of "providing the children with the information that they need in abundance ...so that they can go on and do a task" (TAII). The strategy was further endorsed by her assertion that "if you've got everything at hand that they need, they can then continue on" learning (TAII).

Students were observed accessing colour-coded self-marking templates that had been designed by the teacher to be easily understood and used by the students (UCVO2). The *Appropriate Information* strategy was also evident in the provision of a variety of dictionaries, appropriate for use by students of different ages, for student use during the course of independent learning (UCO2).

5. Configuration

The theme of *Configuration* is grounded in the knowledge that, out of necessity there are many different activities occurring at the same time in multigrade classrooms. How the classroom is set out, and students are grouped for learning, is of critical importance to its functioning. "The classroom is arranged so that chairs, tables and floor space facilitate whole-class, small-group and independent learning" (*Multi-Age Classes in New South Wales*, 1997, p. 19). It includes the following strategies: *Designated Areas*, *Grouping* and *Seating Mix*.

a. Designated Areas

This strategy focuses on the importance of the classroom layout. A good layout is conducive to the teaching of different groups of students. It includes the provision of sufficient space, and the availability of flexible furnishings to accommodate the students' individual needs (Thomas & Shaw, 1992).

The *Designated Areas* strategy was immediately evident on entering both of the classrooms. Both teachers utilised portable whiteboards and had designated teaching chairs for working with groups. The layout of the lower classroom is depicted in Figure 6 below which clearly illustrates the separation of areas within the room.

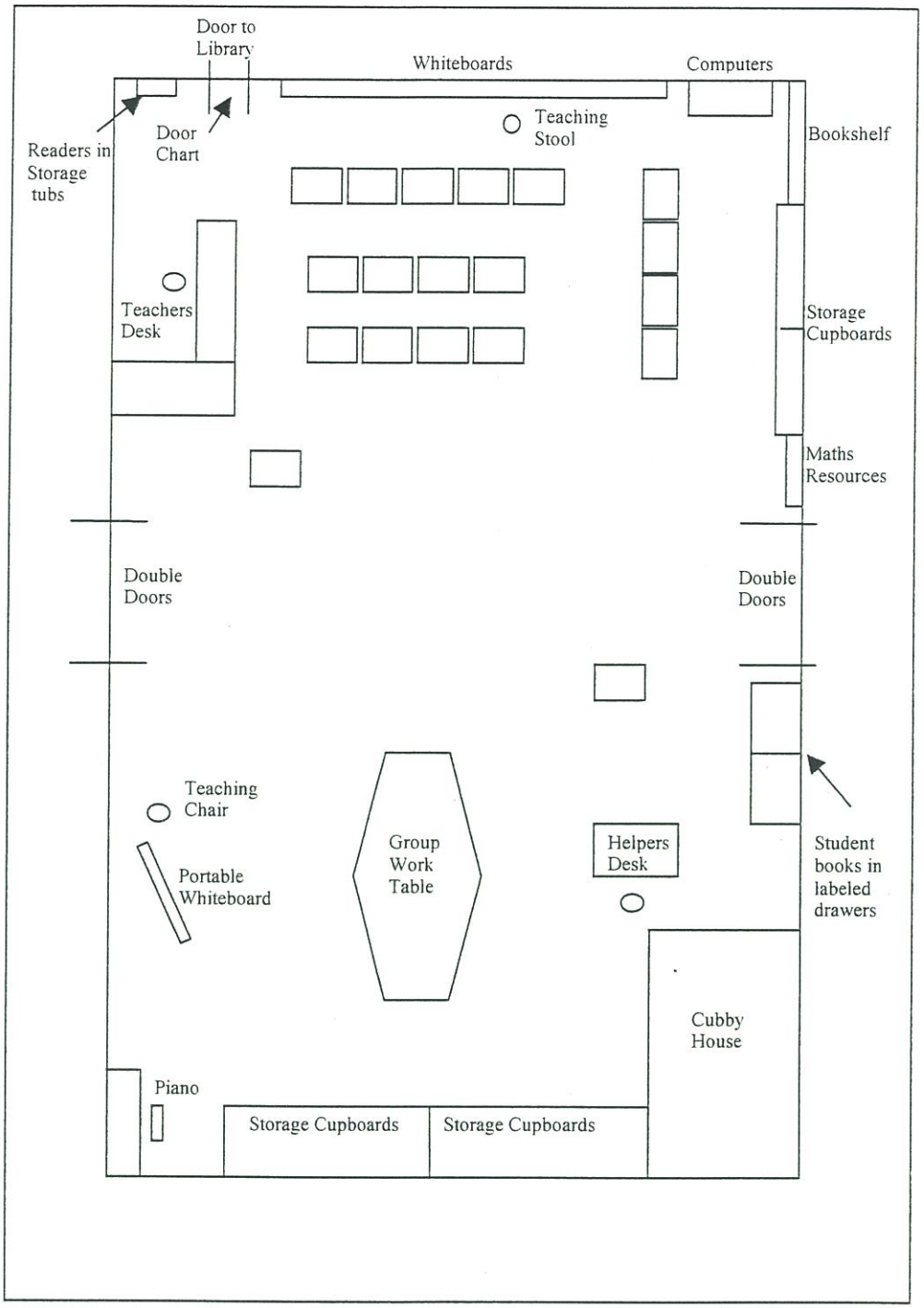


Figure 6 – Lower Classroom Layout

Students in the lower classroom were observed bringing their own chairs to work at the group table. This reduced the number of chairs cluttering the classroom and also ensured enough chairs the right size for all students (LCVO2). The layout of the upper classroom is shown in Figure 7.

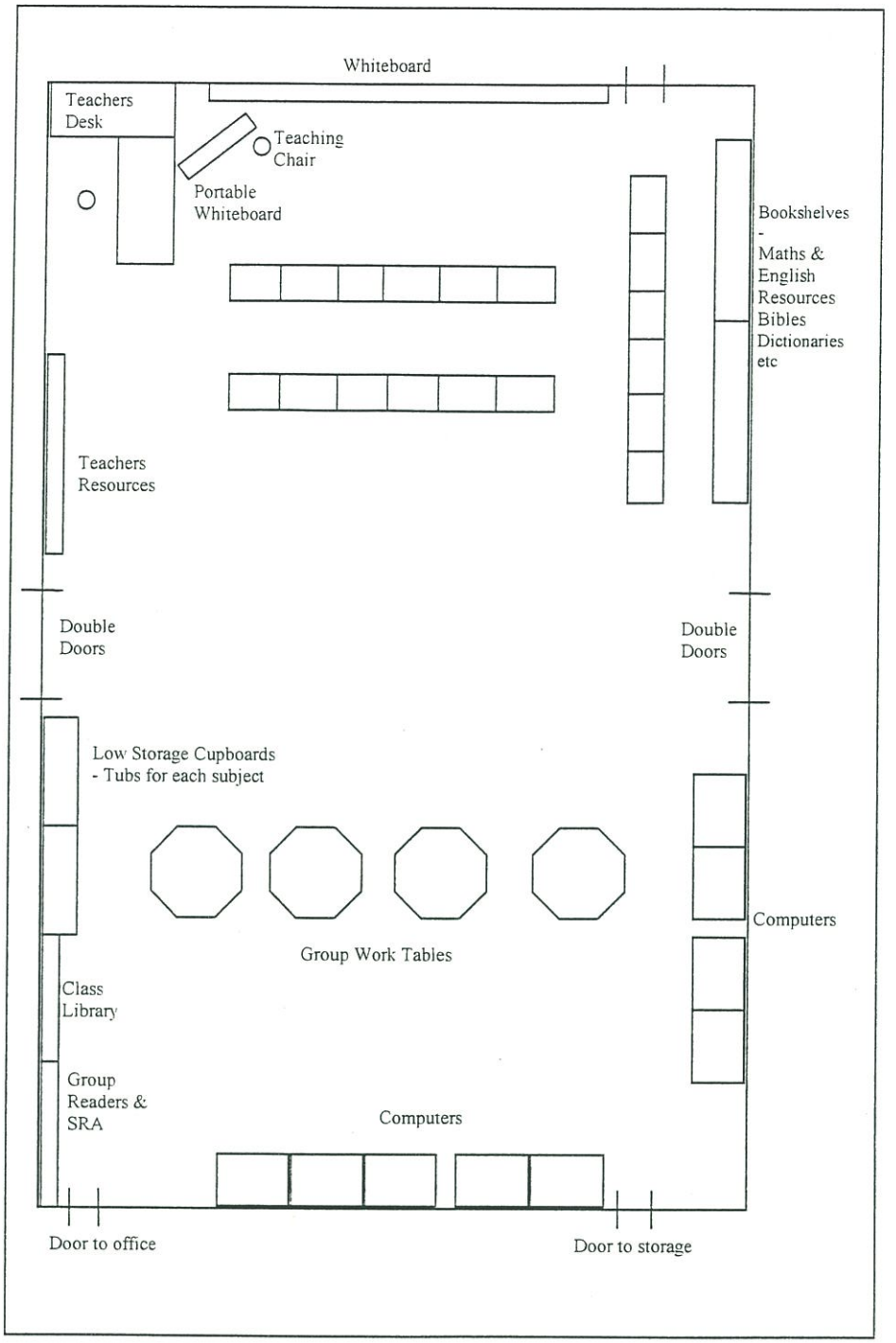


Figure 7 – Upper Classroom Layout

Once again, there are specific group work areas evident in the upper classroom layout.

b. Grouping

In grouping students for learning, multigrade teachers need to consider the requirements of individual students as well as that of the whole class. Using a variety of groups and methods is one way to accommodate for these needs (Thomas & Shaw, 1992). Teachers may group students as a whole class, large group, small group, grade level group, in pairs, or working individually depending on the requirements of a particular lesson (*Multi-Age Classes in New South Wales*, 1997). Wallace, Nish and Allen (2001b) outline the strategy as follows "Grouping entails physically placing groups of students in different areas of the classroom for particular purposes" (p. 28).

At the initial interview Teacher B mentioned the *Grouping* strategy in several different forms. She identified that she uses set groups for some lessons but varies the order that the groups work with her "its not the same rotation every day...I'd try and ...have two groups come and see me for in-depth that day and two just for checking up" (TBII). So the teacher needs to "work out who's going to get good time off me so that they can then go and independently learn" (TBII). On other occasions the teacher utilises grade level grouping, teaching one grade, after another. Figure 8 details the set Reading Groups used in the upper classroom.

Reading Groups				
Oak	**Pine**	**Birch**	**Kauri**	**Gum**
John (Grade 4)	Michael (Grade 4)	Troy (Grade 3)	Paul (Grade 5)	Ben (Grade 6)
	Sarah (Grade 3)	Harry (Grade 3)	Terri (Grade 5)	Julie (Grade 5)
	Sue (Grade 3)	Nicole (Grade 4)	Andrew (Grade 6)	
			Bek (Grade 5)	

Figure 8 – Reading Groups Board

Figure 9 identifies the Maths groups used in the upper classroom. Each group works with the teacher daily, on a rotational basis.

Maths Groups				
Eagles	**Hawks**	**Kiwis**	**Parrots**	**Tuis**
Sarah (Grade 3)	John (Grade 4)	Paul (Grade 5)	Andrew (Grade 6)	
Sue (Grade 3)	Michael (Grade 4)	Terri (Grade 5)	Ben (Grade 6)	
Troy (Grade 3)	Nicole (Grade 4)	Bek (Grade 5)		
Harry (Grade 3)		Julie (Grade 5)		

Figure 9 – Maths Groups Board

In the upper classroom the grouping strategy was observed in action when students split into spelling groups for testing, with groups moving to and from the group work tables to work with the teacher (UCO1). Figure 9 portrays the Spelling Groups observed.

Spelling Groups				
Green	**Blue**	**Red**	**Orange**	**Purple**
John (Grade 4)	Michael (Grade 4)	Troy (Grade 3)	Bek (Grade 5)	Ben (Grade 6)
Sarah (Grade 3)	Sue (Grade 3)	Harry (Grade 3)	Andrew (Grade 6)	
	Paul (Grade 5)	Nicole (Grade 4)	Julie (Grade 5)	
	Terri (Grade 5)			

Figure 10 – Spelling Groups Board

c. Seating mix

The *Seating Mix* strategy is characterised by a mixed grade seating pattern that has been found to be supportive of optimum learning in multigrade classrooms

(Mulryan-Kyne, 2007; , *Teaching Combined Grade Classes: Real Problems and Promising Practices*, 1990).

The *Seating Mix* strategy is clearly illustrated in Figure 11, which depicts the seating plan for the lower classroom.

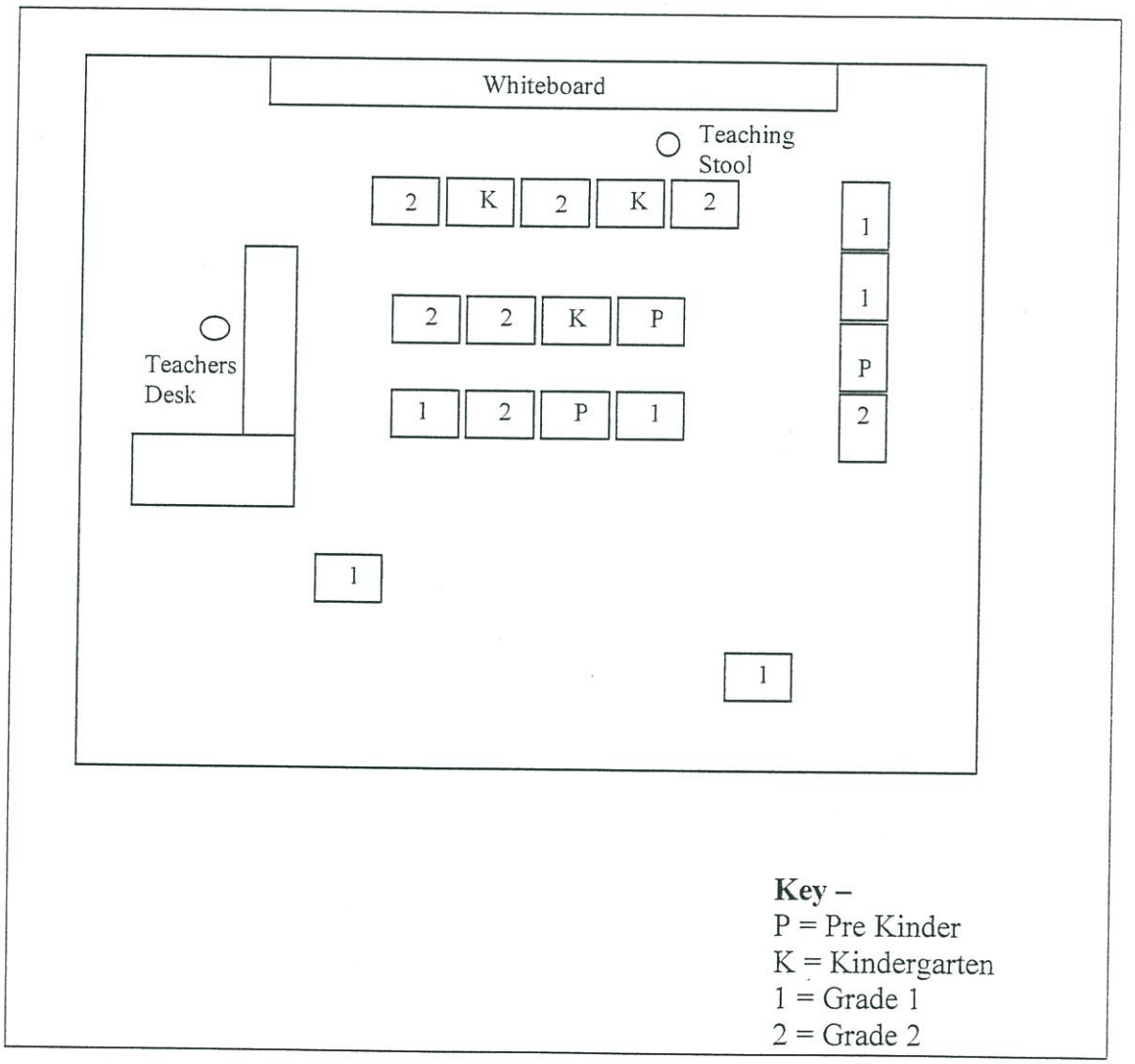


Figure 11 – Lower Classroom Seating Plan

The *Seating Mix* strategy is also utilised in the upper classroom as depicted in Figure 12 that follows.

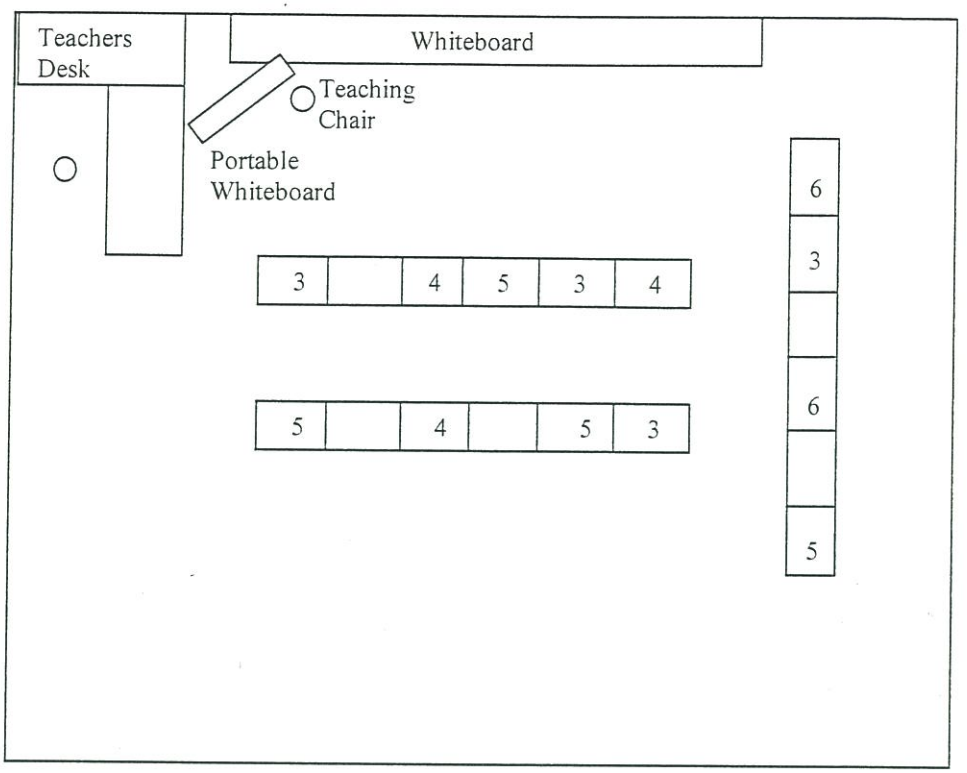


Figure 12 – Upper Classroom Seating Plan

This strategy of arranging student seating so that they are not seated next to someone in their grade, is very useful in fostering independent learning. Students cannot rely on looking at what the person next to them is doing in order to complete their work.

6. Prompts

The theme of *Prompts* incorporates a variety of visual reminders which are displayed in multigrade classrooms to assist students to be independent learners. They enable students to work out what they need to be doing without having to interrupt the teacher if they are busy working with another grade. It includes the following strategies: '*Timetables*' and '*Taskboards*'.

a. Timetables

The prominent display of a daily timetable enables students to know what is happening throughout the day, and what work they are expected to go on with next if they are ready to move on. Wallace, Nish and Allen (2001b) contend that "timetables help the teacher to develop a structured approach to the management of a class" (p. 22).

The use of the *Timetables* strategy was detailed during the initial interview with Teacher A where she stated, "Simple strategies like this one here [points to door chart] ensures while you are teaching them you have additional backup" (TAII).

Timetables were prominently displayed in both classrooms indicating the use of this particular strategy. In the upper classroom the timetable is located on one side of the whiteboard, as shown in Figure 13.

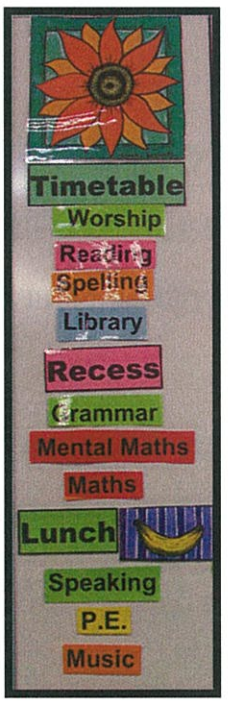


Figure 13 – Upper Classroom Timetable

Whereas, in the lower classroom, the timetable is displayed on a felt covered board at the front of the room. This timetable features pictorial representations to assist pre-readers, and is shown in Figure 14.

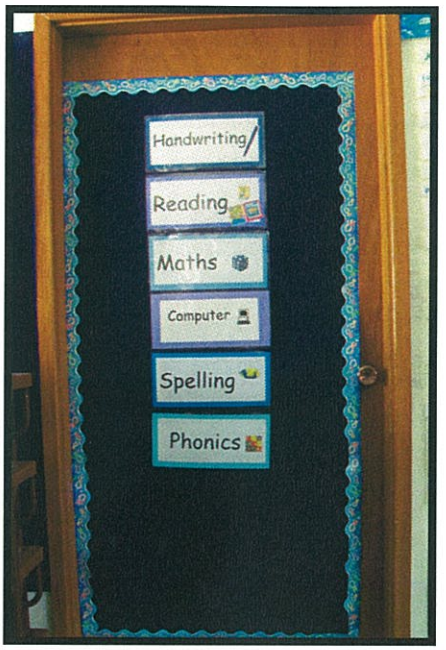


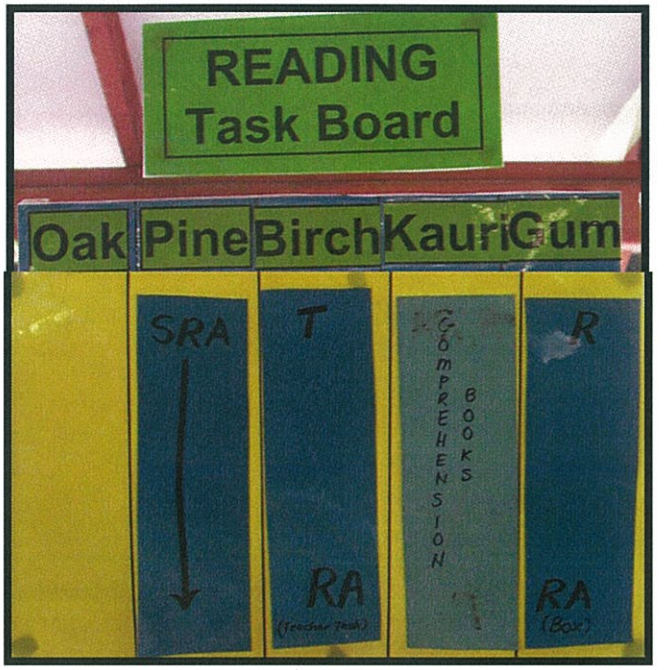
Figure 14 – Lower Classroom Timetable

b. Taskboards

This strategy involves positioning displays around the classroom that set out what task is required of students, for a particular subject, on a given day. This allows students to proceed with their work independently.

Teacher B outlined the *Taskboards* strategy at the initial interview stating that, "task boards are used a lot, they know where to look for what they are up to, they know what all the little codes mean" (TBII).

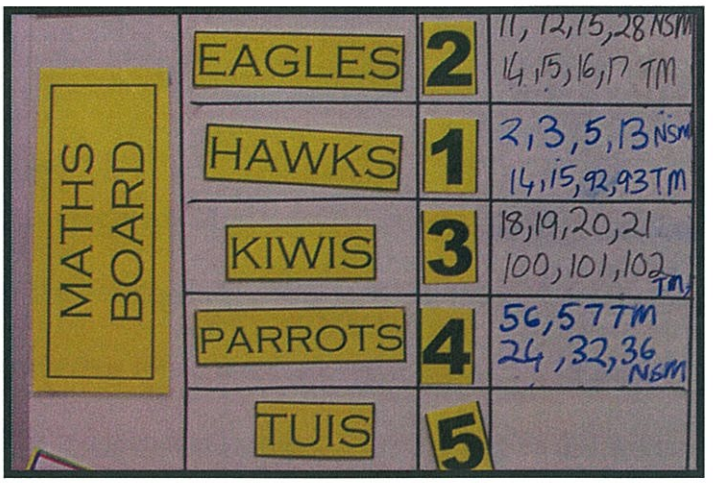
The strategy was effectively utilised for both Reading and Maths lessons in the upper classroom. Students' checked the Reading Taskboard, illustrated in Figure 15 below, and commenced work without any direction from the teacher (UCO1).



Key -
R = Reading
RA = Reading Activity
SRA = Reading Program
T = Working with Teacher
Comprehension = Workbooks

Figure 15 – Reading Taskboard

Students also checked the Maths Board, as shown in Figure 16, to see what they should be doing for the lesson. The 'Hawks' came quietly and sat on the floor at the front of the classroom, while other students worked independently on the textbook pages identified (UCO2).



Key
TM = Targeting Maths Book
NSM = New Signpost Maths Book
1 = first group to meet with teacher
2 = second group to meet with teacher
3 = third group to meet with teacher
4 = fourth group to meet with teacher

Figure 16 – Maths Taskboard

The 'Organisational Strategies' are the foundation that assists in the development of independent learning in multigrade classrooms. Through the use of 'Organisational Strategies', teachers in multigrade classrooms, provide students with an environment that enables them to exercise their independent learning skills when specific 'Teaching Strategies' are employed. It is through a combination of both 'Organisational Strategies' and 'Teaching Strategies' that independent learning is truly fostered in multigrade classrooms.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Major Findings

The results of this case study illustrate that specific strategies can be successfully utilised to foster the development of independent learning among primary aged students. The researcher found that there were significant strategies that teachers could use to foster independent learning. These strategies fell within two broad categories, 'Teaching Strategies' and 'Organisational Strategies'. These two distinct categories at first appeared to operate independently. However, it became apparent after further analysis of the data that 'Teaching Strategies' and 'Organisational Strategies' needed to be implemented in conjunction with each other for optimal independent learning to occur. From analysing the connections between the various strategies, a Model of Independent Learning was designed (see Figure 17 following).

Model of Independent Learning

'Teaching Strategies' and 'Organisational Strategies' when combined, lead to an ideal environment that fosters students' ability to learn independently. When teachers utilise the strategies outlined in *Delivery*, *Autonomy*, and *Omnipresence* in conjunction with *Foundations*, *Training*, *Planning*, *Learning Materials*, *Configuration* and *Prompts*, then students are able to use the routines, resources and skills to make choices, solve problems and transfer knowledge to different situations while independently learning in the multigrade classroom.

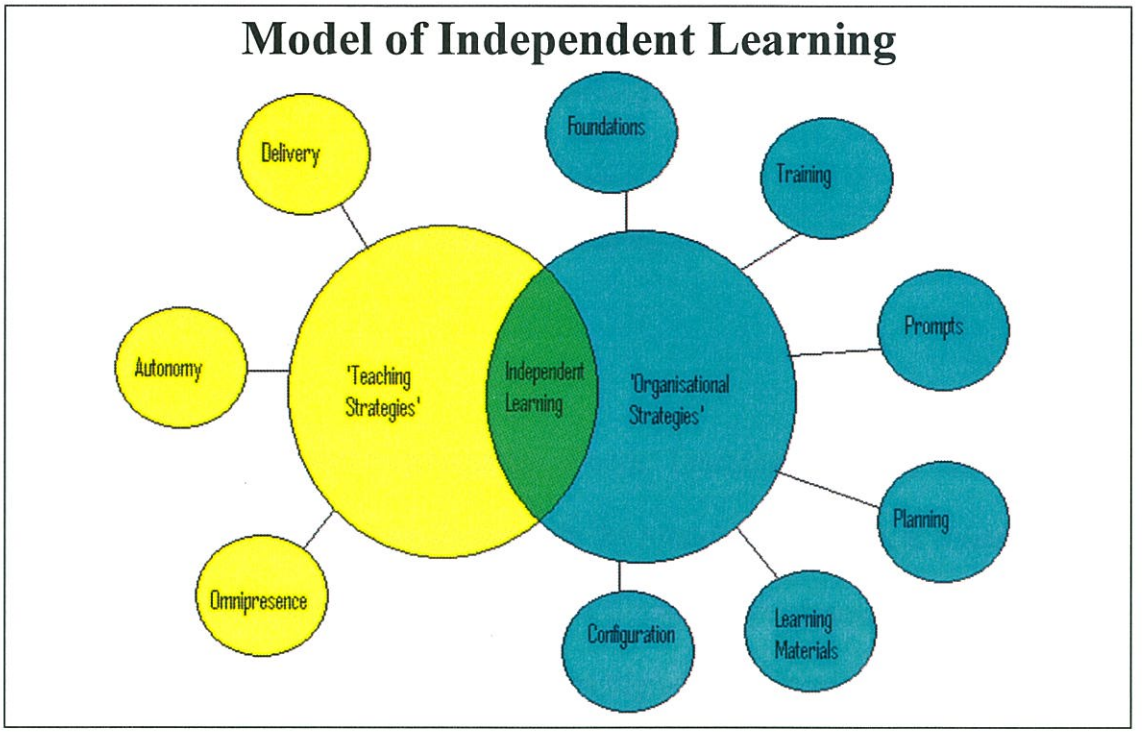


Figure 17 – Model of Independent Learning

Conclusions

Given the concern of the research with strategies that foster independent learning in multigrade classrooms, the following research questions were explored.

1. What is the significance of independent learning in multigrade classrooms?

The study found that independent learning was an extremely significant component of effective multigrade classrooms. It allowed teachers to successfully manage more than one grade or stage at a time. Teacher B (TBII) expressed the view that "It's absolutely imperative. If they can't independently learn in a multigrade classroom they can't learn basically, because you need to set them to work at their grade level… without the ability to independently learn and carry on with what you set them its going to be basically pretty impossible". The importance of independent learning in multigrade classes was supported by Marland (2004), who found that

more than ninety percent of teachers perceive the establishment of independent work habits to be a very significant aspect of teaching in multigrade classrooms.

2. Which strategies are effective in fostering independent learning in multigrade classrooms?

This study concludes that a combination of both 'Teaching Strategies' and 'Organisational Strategies', as illustrated in the Model of Independent Learning (Figure 17), is fundamental to establishing a climate in which students are supported and encouraged to work independently in multigrade classrooms. It is through "the use of strategies, [that the] teacher and learner become a team with announced goals and clearly identified procedures for reaching these goals" (Silver, Hanson, Strong, & Schwartz, 1996, p. 8). The 'Organisational Strategies' outlined must be put in place, and taught to the students prior to, or concurrently with, the use of the outlined 'Teaching Strategies' if independent learning is to occur. The 'Teaching Strategies' or the 'Organisational Strategies' can be used in isolation. However, independent learning will be more limited than that derived from an intelligent combining of the 'Teaching Strategies' and 'Organisational Strategies'.

3. What implications and recommendations do these strategies suggest for current practices associated with independent learning in multigrade classrooms and for pre-service teacher education?

The findings of this study suggest that the Model of Independent Learning developed (see Figure 17) would be of use in guiding teaching practice in both multigrade and

single-grade classrooms. Further, due to the prevalence of multigrade classrooms, pre-service teachers should observe and be exposed to the 'Teaching Strategies' and 'Organisational Strategies' that were found to be effective in fostering independent learning during the course of the study.

Recommendations

The findings of this in-depth analysis of the strategies used by teachers to foster independent learning at one small primary school, suggest two principal avenues for further research: recommendations relating to purpose, and recommendations relating to further study.

Recommendations Relating to Purpose

Pre-service teachers should be exposed to the strategies that have been found to foster independent learning during their initial teacher education courses, in order to prepare them for effective management in a multigrade class. Even teachers working in single-grades, need to utilise multigrade strategies when grouping students for lessons in Reading and Mathematics, and so forth. Furthermore, the implementation of the strategies in the Model of Independent Learning (Figure 17) would provide a guide for current teachers to assist in the development of independent learning in their students.

Recommendations Relating to Further Study

As this is a case study of one particular school, a broader study involving different sites is needed to confirm the significance of the 'Teaching Strategies' and 'Organisational Strategies' and to determine the validity of the proposed model.

Also, a study that contrasts the strategies used by experienced multigrade teachers, and novice multigrade teachers, and how this impacts on students' abilities to be independent learners, would help further expand knowledge in this area.

In conclusion, the results of this study illustrate that specific strategies can be successfully utilised to foster the development of independent learning among primary age students. The Model of Independent Learning (Figure 17) developed could be used for pre-service teacher education, and by practicing teachers, to foster independent learning in multigrade classrooms.

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Appendix A – Structured Interview Questions

An Analysis of Teaching Strategies used to foster Independent Learning in Multigrade Classrooms

Structured Interview Questions

1. Do you believe independent learning is an important skill for students in multigrade classrooms? Why or why not?

2. Do you feel certain subjects lend themselves more readily for independent learning then others? What subjects and why?

3. What do you regard as being indicators of independent learning?

4. What teaching strategies to you feel foster independent learning?

5. What strategies do you feel hinder students abilities to learn independently?

Appendix B – Semi-structured Interview Questions

An Analysis of Teaching Strategies used to foster Independent Learning in Multigrade Classrooms

Semi-structured Interview Questions

The interview questions will be based on the data obtained from observations.

Questions would be similar to the following examples:

1. Why did you choose _____ strategy for this lesson?

2. Do you think this strategy is helpful in fostering independent learning among your students?

3. This is what I observed_____, how did you feel? Do you agree or disagree with my observations?

Appendix C – Checklist of Independent Learning

Checklist of Independent Learning

Teaching Strategy utilised _____

Grade _____

Emotional Elements of Independent Learning	Observed	Comments
Can speak about others behaviour and consequences		
Tackles new tasks confidently		
Can control attention and resist distraction		
Monitors progress and seeks help appropriately		
Persists in the face of difficulties		
Prosocial Elements of Independent Learning	**Observed**	**Comments**
Negotiates when and how to carry out tasks		
Can resolve social problems with peers		
Is aware of feelings of others; helps and comforts		
Engages in independent co-operative activities with peers		
Shares and takes turns independently		
Cognitive Elements of Independent Learning	**Observed**	**Comments**
Is aware of own strengths and weaknesses		
Can speak about how they have done something or what they have learnt		
Can speak about planned activities		
Can make reasoned choices and decisions		
Asks questions and suggests answers		
Uses a strategy previously modelled		
Uses language previously heard for own purposes		
Motivational Elements of Independent Learning	**Observed**	**Comments**
Initiates activities		
Finds own resources without adult help		
Develops own ways of carrying out tasks		
Plans own tasks. targets and goals		
Enjoys solving problems and challenges		

(Whitebread et al., 2004)

Appendix D – Letters of Consent for Teacher Participants

Avondale College

CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Letter of Consent for Teacher Participants in:

"An Analysis of Teaching Strategies used to foster Independent Learning in Multigrade Classrooms."

I _____, hereby give my consent to participate in the abovenamed research study, conducted by Kelli Stocker from Avondale College, as part of her Honours program.

I understand that I will be directly observed in the classroom by the researcher and will also be videotaped teaching on two occasions. The videotapes will be analysed to determine the effectiveness of various teaching strategies and then they will be erased.

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher regarding her observations.

I understand that my details will remain confidential and be known only to the researcher, and that I will not be identified by name in any presentation or publication arising from the study.

I know I can withdraw from the study at anytime.

The data from this study will be used to formulate recommendations regarding which teaching strategies are most effective in fostering independent learning, hopefully benefiting teaching practice and the training of Pre-service Teachers at Avondale College.

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box 19, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265 or phone (02) 49802121 or fax (02) 49802118.

Signed: _____ Date:

Researcher: _____ Date:

Appendix E – Letter of Consent for Parents of Student Participants

[redacted]

Avondale College
CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Letter of Consent for Parents of Student Participants in:

"An Analysis of Teaching Strategies used to foster Independent Learning in Multigrade Classrooms."

I _____, hereby give consent for my child/ren _____ to participate in the abovenamed research study, conducted by Kelli Stocker from Avondale College, as part of her Honours program.

I understand that teachers and students will be directly observed in the classroom by the researcher and will also be videotaped on two occasions. The videotapes will be analysed to determine the effectiveness of various teaching strategies and then they will be erased.

I understand that my child/ren's details will remain confidential and be known only to the researcher, and that they will not be identified by name in any presentation or publication arising from the study.

I know I can withdraw my child/ren from the study at anytime.

The data from this study will be used to formulate recommendations regarding which teaching strategies are most effective in fostering independent learning, hopefully benefiting teaching practice and the training of Pre-service Teachers at Avondale College.

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box 19, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265 or phone (02) 49802121 or fax (02) 49802118.

Signed: _____ Date:

Researcher: _____ Date:

Appendix F - Facsimile of Ethics Approval Letters

[redacted]

Avondale College

CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

22 November 2006

Kelli Stocker
C/- Avondale College
PO Box 19
Cooranbong NSW 2265

Dear Kelli

On Monday 13 November, the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee met and considered your research application for the project titled *An Analysis of Teaching Strategies used to Foster Independent Learning in Multigrade Classrooms.*

I am pleased to formally advise you that this project has been granted approval by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee subject to the following amendments being submitted to the Chair for review:

1. The information letter to all participants needs to (a) mention what will be done with the videotapes in terms of the research and once they are finished with (i.e. they will be erased), and (b) be printed onto Avondale College letterhead.

2. It is recommended that the length of storage time be extended to five years instead of the stated one year.

Once these changes have satisfied the Chair, the following additional standard conditions apply:

1. That you notify the committee of any changes to circumstances or research design, which might require a review of the ethics approval.

2. That you provide an annual interim report of your progress to the committee, and a final report once this project is completed. The first report will be due twelve months from the date you commence the research.

We wish you well in this valuable research endeavour.

Sincerely

Gwen Wilkinson
Chair
Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee

Avondale College

20 December 2006

Kelli Stocker
56 Macquarie Road
FENNELL BAY NSW 2283

Dear Kelli

On Wednesday 22 November the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee sent out a letter requesting the submission of further information in support of your research application for the project titled *An Analysis of Teaching Strategies used to Foster Independent Learning in Multigrade Classrooms.*

The Chair has now reviewed the additional material submitted and is satisfied with its content. Therefore I am pleased to formally advise you that this project has been granted approval by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee.

The following additional standards apply:

1. Notify the committee of any changes to circumstances or research design, which might require a review of the ethics approval.

2. Provide an annual interim report of your progress to the committee, and a final report once this project is completed. The first report will be due twelve months from the date you commence the research.

We wish you well in this valuable research endeavour.

Sincerely

Gwen Wilkinson
Chair
Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix G - Transcript Listing

Transcript Listing

Initial Interviews

6th March 2007 - Teacher A Initial Interview (TAII)

6th March 2007 - Teacher B Initial Interview (TBII)

Final Interviews

4th September 2007 - Teacher A Final Interview (TAFI)

26th September 2007 - Teacher B Final Interview (TBFI)

Observation 1

21st March 2007 - Lower Classroom Observation 1 (LCO1)

21st March 2007 - Upper Classroom Observation 1 (UCO1)

Observation 2

23rd March 2007 - Lower Classroom Observation 2 (LCO2)

23rd March 2007 - Upper Classroom Observation 2 (UCO2)

Observation 3

26th March 2007 - Lower Classroom Observation 3 (LCO3)

26th March 2007 - Upper Classroom Observation 3 (UCO3)

Video Observation 1

14th June 2007 - Lower Classroom Video Observation 1 (LCVO1)

14th June 2007 - Upper Classroom Video Observation 1 (UCVO1)

Video Observation 2

18th June 2007 - Lower Classroom Video Observation 2 (LCVO2)

18th June 2007 - Upper Classroom Video Observation 2 (UCVO2)

Appendix H - Sample Interview Transcript

Transcript of Initial Interview

Teacher B

Interviewer: *Do you believe independent learning is an important skill for students in multigrade classrooms? Why or why not?*

Teacher B: It's absolutely imperative. If they can't independently learn in a multigrade classroom they can't learn um basically, because you need to set them to work at their grade level and you'll be pulling kids up and down, without the ability to independently learn and carry on with what you set them its going to be basically pretty impossible, but you will still be teaching them the task, but they still need to be able to independently focus and take the knowledge that you've given them and transfer that across to different question types depending on what it is, you know thinking about Maths your not going to go through every single question type, your going to give them the skills, but they've got to then go away and apply that. It's pretty fundamental in a multigrade room. All those things are tied into independent learning like focus and application a lot of those things are absolutely important, they won't cope.

Interviewer: *Do you feel certain subjects lend themselves more readily for independent learning then others? What subjects and why?*

Teacher B: Certainly you require more independent learning in certain subject areas, say something like Bible doesn't require it quite so much, you can do a full class lesson and just require different things at different levels from that, same with

something like doing text type writing you'll start them together and then you'll have some constructs more for the lower grades and then send the older ones can go away with what you've given them and keep the younger ones back and do some stuff with more constructs and working with you a bit more. But certainly Maths needs to be, where it's pretty obvious you've got a lot of independent learning going on with that. Last year I had 5 different levels of maths going on at the same time so you have a fair bit of independent stuff going on there. Routines are pretty important in independent learning. That they know the routines and then can do that within that. Readings the same, has to be independent, spelling definitely, a lot of those things where they are really just spread across different levels. Some of your more thematic subjects like HSIE, certainly in my classroom a lot of that's at the same topic area and then your just spreading across that what your expectations are so that's less so as well but certainly there are some subjects, particularly some parts of your core subjects where independently learning is pretty obvious, it has to be so.

Interviewer: *What do you regard as being indicators of independent learning?*

Teacher B: Your obvious outward indicators that they are managing independent learning is that they are going to be coping with the work on their own, that they're not at you every 5 seconds if its not their time, and that's certainly something that takes time to get to, particularly if you've got a student, I had one student come in from a single grade room and just expect my time all the time, and independent learning really wasn't happening. So part of that is a training thing to get to learn independently, or just work independently, to not expect that they can have your time all the time, you'll have processes in place, particularly if I'm doing maths and I've

got another group down they know to come and stand beside me, not just put their hand up at their desk because I can't come over there anyway. So they've gotta actually think ok do I actually need to ask a question, how else could I deal with that question, and then come over and stand beside me and that takes a lot of training. Cause you know lots of kids are still pretty egocentric, and independent learning isn't really the thing in their minds its pretty egocentric learning and I want the answer to my question now, so you have to try and train them out of that, its pretty important. So those outward things that they are learning independently, yeah its just to see whether they can actually sit at their desks for 5 minutes and answer the questions, that's a pretty good indicator of whether they are actually focusing or not. And just seeing if they are getting through what you've already taught them today and you'll notice if you watch me teach that I will sit particularly with maths, I use that a lot because that is so independent like that, but you'll see them you know sitting at their desks and you can tell just by scanning the room whether they are on task or not, or whether there's a confusion face, and if I've got the ones down in front of me doing something I can say Fred are you having problems with a question come and see me, so you kind of check how they are independently learning or not learning, or focusing or not focusing. It's the product of what your getting out of them as well, so if your actually getting good quality from them, whether they've actually taken what you've taught them and carried on, but that's just something you'd do in a single grade room anyway, monitoring where their at, so yeah what your receiving back from them. So does that answer that question?

Interviewer: *What teaching strategies do you feel foster independent learning?*

Teacher B: Routines are really important to independent learning, like massively important. Just to spend time so they know exactly where they are at, task boards are used a lot, they know where to look for what they are up to, they know what all the little codes mean. They know what pages they are on if its maths, if it's reading, whether they are with me, they look up and see the "T" and think ok and they know that they've got to the count of 10 to be on the floor all those sorts of things. Certainly like the teaching tactics, like I said just looking up, make sure where they are at asking them how many questions they done, just one of those things of being aware of what your doing and doing the teacher thing of 5 things at once sort of thing, so down in front of you and where they are at, just being really aware of whether they are maximising their learning time, which is quite tiring really as a teacher. But routines is your main thing, and your planning, plan it so you know where you are going with you lessons, like I have for maths I have a board, on my task board its magnetised and the numbers so they know whose coming to see me first that day, its not the same rotation every day. So what I'd have worked out when I looked at their maths pages what I'd try and do is have two groups come and see me for in-depth that day and two just for checking up. So the next day if they've had in-depth with me one day they'll be further down in the numbers to see me the next day because it should just be review of what they've done the day before, so just trying to work out who's going to get good time off me so that they can then go and independently learn and review what they've done the day before. So it sounds a bit complicated, it kinda is really, but that's how it works. You kinda need to see it.

Particular teaching styles (Discussion, explaining etc) are more useful with the senior students not so much with the grades 3 & 4 I don't think, so getting them to go off

and find out their own information, we quite often do that sort of thing particularly in the more thematic subjects. So we will discuss what we might want to know, what questions to we have about the concept and so particularly if they are wanting to just, yeah learn something that they are interested in within the realms of the topic we would certainly use discussion where that was concerned. We'll be doing some of that in HSIE at the moment, we're doing British Colonisation of Australia so they are doing some research about those sorts of things about questions they've always wanted to know the answer to, or not necessarily didn't always want to but now that they've got part of the information what other questions do they have and they get to go off and try and write their own questions and go off and have a look at it and that doesn't work as well with grade 3/4 there not, they quite like to have a question given to them. Its just one of those things, training them to research themselves which is quite often, students given the choice they would like things given to them, make it a bit easier for them, instead of working for it. Human nature I think.

Interviewer: *What strategies do you feel hinder students abilities to learn independently?*

Teacher B: Part of their ability to work independently or not is going to be personality type, and so you are going to be fighting that straight off, their previous educational experience will certainly affect that or not, a child whose previous educational experience up to now has been in a single grade room will be quite obvious if they haven't developed any of those skills, they'll want more teacher time, they will expect to, quite often but not always be a bit more hand fed then they are going to be, certainly if they've got behavioural issues or learning difficulties then

independent learning doesn't always happen, umm self esteem issues, certainly have had that with students I've taught, if they've got self esteem issues they will expect more time so independent learning is a really hard task for them and they want a lot more of your time than they can have in a multigrade room so that doesn't always help.

Curriculum issues, if you talk to any teacher we've got a crowded curriculum, there's more and more and more that we've got to get through. To get a child to independently learn and to be able to cope in a multigrade room quite often at the start of the year you've got to take it really slow until they get those skills and so that's an issue, you've got curriculum you've got to get through by the end of the year xyz has to still be done, it's a bit of a juggling act how much time do we spend to get them to a level where they can independently work on their own and how much time do we, it's a catch 22, if we don't spend enough time then they're not going to be able to do it, but if we spend to much then we are behind because of the curriculum, there's so much we've got to do, it's a bit of a problem really and its not an over night thing too, what week are we in now, week 6 and we've still got problems with some of the students with what our requirements are for book work and things like that which might seem pedantic and I guess its not really a learning curriculum thing but if we're not on top of them my release time teacher and I, we'll have them writing in the middle of the page, instead of next to the margin and those sort of things that they are just independently yet are not automatically doing themselves and that's just a small indicator of the fact that you know even though we've spent time on trying to get them to do things independently and something like book work will go out the window if we are not continuing to maintain it, and it will

be the same with any type of independent learning they are not, you've still got to try and maintain it, you've still got to be on top of it. With some of them if you're not on top of them they won't get their maths questions or their summary written for reading or whatever it is their doing, cause they just won't, given the choice they take a holiday. What can I get out of?

AVONDALE COLLEGE LIBRARY