



Transition to Secondary School: Student Achievement and Teacher Practice

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STATEMENT OF ETHICAL CONDUCT

The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University.

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PUBLICATIONS

The author acknowledges that the following publications derive from this research:

Hopwood, B., Hay, I., & Dymont, J. (2012). The impact of transition upon adolescent students' reading and spelling achievement. In *Regional and Global Cooperation in Educational Research. Proceedings of the Joint Australian Association for Research in Education and the Asia-Pacific Education Research Association Conference*. Sydney, Australia. Retrieved from <http://www.aare.edu.au/data/publications/2012/Hopwood12.pdf>

Hopwood, B., Hay, I., & Dymont, J. (In Press). Literacy and students' transition into secondary school. In N. Fitzallen, Reabourn, R., & Fan, F. (Eds.), *The Future of Educational Research*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

ABSTRACT

This research explored the impact that transition, the move students make from Year 6 to Year 7, had upon adolescent students' reading and spelling achievement. The research also sought to investigate teachers' perceptions of the transition phase. Based on Vygotsky's socio-cognitive learning theory and his notion of a student's zone of proximal development (ZPD), the study was guided by six research questions. Three questions explored the impact of transition on students' literacy achievement as determined by the *Progressive Achievement Test in Reading (PAT-R)* and the *Single Word Spelling Test (SWST)*. These included an exploration of the type of transition students undertook (internal transition, staying on the same campus or external transition, changing school campuses) and school socioeconomic status (SES). Three questions were also asked to gather data about the types of programs and practices teachers were using to teach literacy and prepare students for the transition into secondary school.

Ten coeducational government schools from the state of Tasmania were chosen for the research. A combination of primary, secondary and district schools from both rural and urban areas were included. Two groups of participants were included in the investigation: students and teachers. Student participants consisted of 244 adolescents, who ranged in age from 11 to 13 years old. A total of 19 teachers from primary, secondary and district schools constituted the second participant group. The research took place over three phases. In phase 1, students completed the *PAT-R* and *SWST* whilst in their final year of primary school (Year 6). In phase 2, students completed the *PAT-R* and the *SWST* for a second time after they had transitioned to secondary school (Year 7); and in phase 3, teacher participants undertook a series of one-on-one interviews with the researcher.

Data were analysed using a mixed methods approach. Students' test data were analysed quantitatively using a series of statistical analyses, including *ANOVA* and *MANOVA*

tests. The analysis revealed that, for the overall cohort, students' *PAT-R* scores significantly declined from Year 6 to Year 7. In comparison, students' *SWST* scores remained steady from Year 6 to Year 7. Students from only one school experienced increases in both their *PAT-R* and *SWST* scores across transition. Teacher participant data were analysed qualitatively using a modified approach to thematic analysis, and three common patterns emerged from this analysis. The results revealed that teachers from separate primary and secondary school campuses engaged in less communication than teachers from district schools. Primary and secondary school teachers also perceived a greater lack of curriculum continuity and awareness between Year 6 and Year 7 than district school teachers. All teacher participants stated that an increase in teacher support was needed to enhance the transition experience for students.

In conclusion, this study presents three distinctive contributions to the understanding of the primary to secondary transition. First, attention needs to be paid to the transition phase and the impact this can have upon students' literacy achievement. Second, greater communication and increased levels of curriculum continuity and awareness are needed between primary and secondary school campus teachers. Finally, an increase in teacher support is needed to enable teachers to promote and support successful transition experiences.