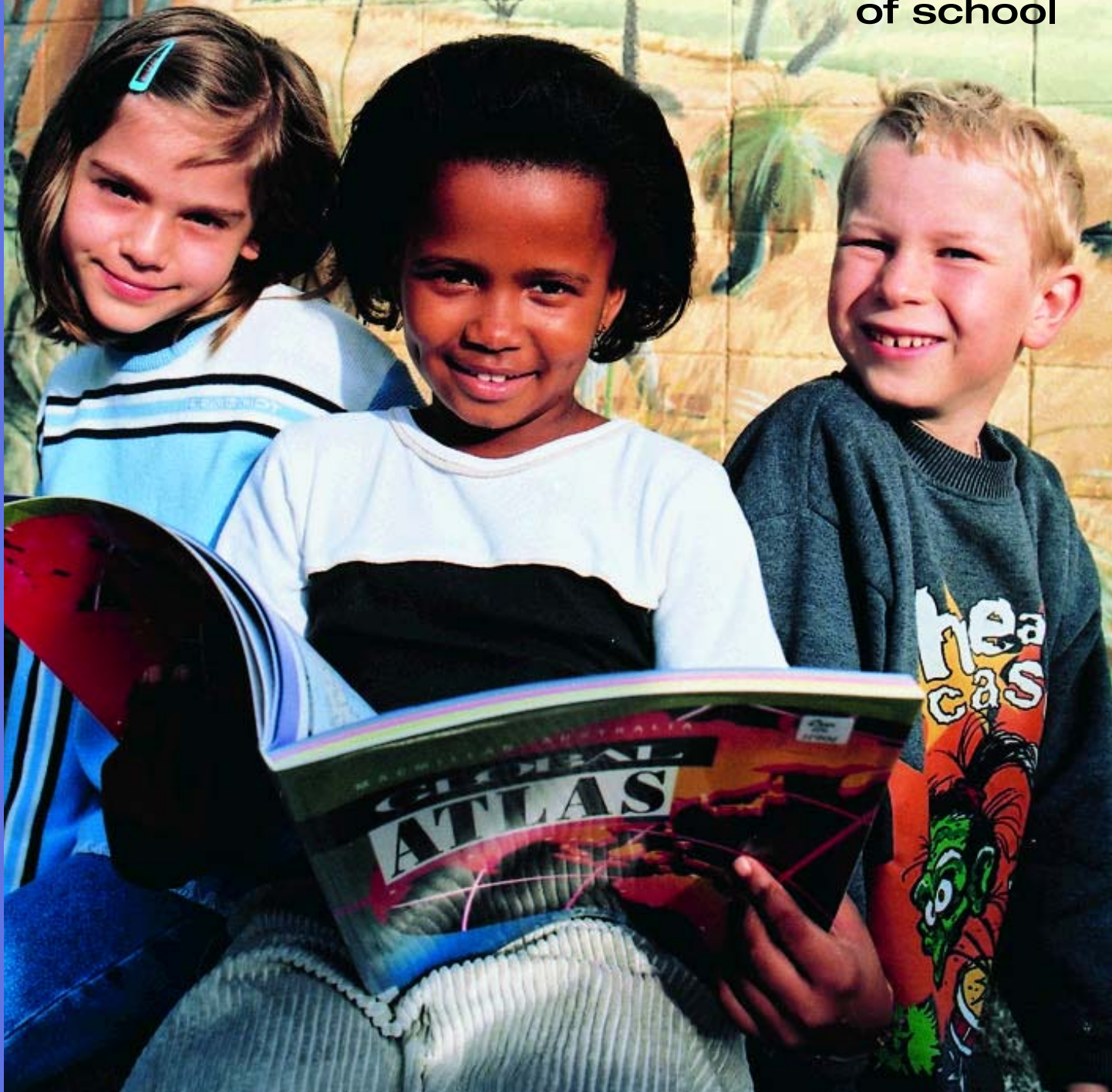


100 CHILDREN TURN 10

A longitudinal study of
literacy development from
the year prior to school
to the first four years
of school



A note to the reader

This two-volume report offers a longitudinal study of literacy learning from the year prior to school to the fourth year of school. The study, funded by the Australian Commonwealth Government, provides an extensive literature review of previous longitudinal studies of literacy development. It examines the measurable literacy outcomes for a corpus of one hundred children, and provides detailed case studies of a sample group of twenty children, chosen to represent a range of Australian contexts, including family financial resources, home language, ethnicity and geographic location and focusing on literacy learning in their lives, preschools, daycare centres and schools. Please note that pseudonyms are used for locations and named individuals to protect the privacy of all concerned.

The report comprises:

Volume 1: Project overview, major findings and recommendations, methodological issues, literature review, quantitative assessment and summary.

Volume 2: Site studies.

Copies of this report are available from:

DEST Clearinghouse
Centre for Literacy Education Research
Griffith University
NATHAN QLD 4111
AUSTRALIA

URL: <http://www.gu.edu.au/school/cls/clearinghouse/>

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The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the view of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.

100 children turn 10

**A longitudinal study of literacy development
from the year prior to school to the first
four years of school**

This project was funded by the
Department of Education, Science and Training,
Commonwealth of Australia

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**COMMONWEALTH
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
SCIENCE &
TRAINING**

Volume 2

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Site Studies

Introduction

The longitudinal site reports and case studies

This is the second volume of a two-volume report on a Children's Literacy National Project entitled *100 children turn 10: A longitudinal study of literacy development from the year prior to school to the first four years of school*. The project was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training through the Children's Literacy National Projects Programme. The researchers involved in the study were Associate Professor Susan Hill and Associate Professor Barbara Comber of the University of South Australia, Professor William Louden and Associate Professor Judith Rivalland of Edith Cowan University in Western Australia and Dr Jo-Anne Reid of the University of New England in New South Wales.

The study has been conducted in three phases. Phase one was the study conducted during 1996-1997 and published in 1998 under the title *100 children go to school: Connections and disconnections in literacy development in the year prior to school and the first year of school*. In this study the researchers followed 20 focus children and compiled literacy assessment data on 120 children in five contrastive research sites in South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria. The second phase of the project (1998) was a university funded round of assessment tasks towards the end of the second year of schooling and used the same assessment tasks as in 1996 and 1997. Only quantitative assessment data were collected in 1998. Phase three of the study extends the original study and consists of a five-year longitudinal study from 1996-2000 titled *100 children turn 10: A longitudinal study of literacy development from the year prior to school to the first four years of school*. The second phase of the study continued the case studies of the focus children and assessment data was once again collected on the wider cohort of children up to and including the fourth year of schooling.

The project *100 children turn 10* sought to examine the connections between literacy development in the year prior to school through to the fourth year of formal schooling, with a recognition of the diversity of children's family and community and school lives. The study identified and documented literacy practices in relation to how these met the needs of culturally diverse groups of children who very often bring to school a variety of experiences and resources. A feature of this research was its emphasis on locality and the construction of literacy in community and school sites.

There were three key aims of the current phase of the project:

1. To provide a brief literature review of research into literacy development in the preschool and early years of school with a focus on diverse communities and home and school connections. This literature review was to be written for easy access by practicing teachers (see Volume 1).
2. The production of longitudinal, measurable literacy outcomes of a sample group of children's prior-to-school experiences, kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2 school experiences.

3. The production of longitudinal, qualitative case studies of the literacy development of 20 focus children within five different cultural and socioeconomic research sites.

Volume 1 of the report presents the project overview, methodology, major findings and recommendations, a literature review of longitudinal studies of literacy development, a qualitative analysis of aspects of literacy development over five years and the project summary.

Volume 2 of the report provides site reports and case studies of the focus children across Australia. The case studies summarise the focus children's literacy achievements over the five years of the study.

Background to Volume 2

Volume 2 presents the site report of the schools and case studies of 18 of the initial 20 focus children, plus another focus child included later, in five research sites across Australia: The Wattles and Riverside in South Australia, Hillview and Gibbs Crossing in Western Australia and Sweetwater in Victoria. Of the original 20 focus children, one child from the Riverside site moved interstate and was not followed. Two children from The Wattles site moved to different schools within the same state and researchers followed these children. One child was untraceable and was replaced by another child at the Gibbs Crossing site in Western Australia. The sites were chosen to represent a range of Australian contexts, including family financial resources, home language, gender, ethnicity and geographic location.

Site 1 – a site in the northern suburbs of Adelaide in a low socio-economic area which presents a mix of employment patterns.

Site 2 – an inner, urban South Australian site with newly arrived families from Vietnam, South America and Southern Europe.

Site 3 – a remote Aboriginal community on the edge of the Western Desert. This site provided access to a bilingual and bidialectical context in which there is not a strong tradition of participation in organised pre-primary education.

Site 4 – located in one of the economically advantaged western suburbs of Perth.

Site 5 – a suburban area in the regional centre of Ballarat in western-central Victoria. This is an area characteristic of many rural centres in terms of increasing social and economic hardship and struggle. It is a mono-cultural (predominantly Anglo-Celtic) area, with few obvious markers of social difference evident apart from income.

The full case studies are presented in this volume.

Data collection

In the longitudinal study there were two levels of data collection. One level of data collection involved fine-grained case studies of focus children in the five sites. The case study children within each of these sites were originally chosen to represent as fully as possible the range of prior-to-school contexts, and included children who spent their prior-to-school years at home with their families, in long daycare, or in preschool. The case study data included interviews with caregivers and teachers and observations of children in their homes, preschools, daycare centres and in classrooms during the initial four years of schooling.

The 19 case studies in Volume 2 set out to examine what different children take up from the literate and pedagogical practices made available to them at home, in preschool and in the first four years of school. The fieldnotes of the researchers relating to the physical literacy environment, observations of the physical literacy environment and observations of the prior-to-school and school settings were analysed and used in compiling the case studies.

The study employed a mediation phase where the teacher with the site researcher visited the home of the focus children. The aim was for the teachers to collect data on ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) in homes and communities that could be used to build responsive and relevant literacy curricula. The case studies were designed to allow a close look at how teachers work in different communities using everyday funds of knowledge and children’s cultural and linguistic resources to construct a literacy curriculum that allows for and builds on diversity.

The second level of data collection in the research design involved collecting literacy assessment data on not only the case study children, but all the children who were in (or expected to be in) the same Year 1 class as the case study children. The target number of children for this data collection was 120; for reasons to do with transience and the organisations of classes, a total of 109 children were assessed prior to school and 101 in the first year of school and this left a full data collection on 100 children. As the study continued student numbers were reduced further, even though many students were tracked to different schools at the fourth year of school. In the last round of data collection, full data was collected on 78 students. (See Volume 1 for the qualitative analysis of literacy development.)

Methodology

The case studies within the site reports in this volume tracked the children from prior to school through to the fourth year of formal schooling, gathering data on:

- formal and informal early literacy activities
- the views of parents, teachers and children
- the classroom literacy experiences.

The site reports and case studies were compiled from data from observations, interviews, institutional documents and work samples. The observations and interviews centred on the focus children and literacy events. Literacy events were defined as activities mediated by texts, teachers and peer interactions. Fieldnotes described the actions that took place, the context out of which the activity arose and was played out, the participants and the activities which co-occurred with the activity involving literacy. The texts, talk surrounding the event, the topic and the tools children and adults used were noted. Data collection also involved selected interactions that were audio taped and transcribed. Observations and interviews with children took place throughout the school day. In 1999 and 2000 the time spent observing in the school settings was 6 hours per focus child, making a total of 24 hours of observation time at each site. In 1998 the study did not have funding for observation of students, however the assessment tasks were undertaken with some children in this year.

These case study data were accompanied by multiple literacy assessment tasks conducted during the third and fourth term of each year of the study. The assessment tasks developed for the study are described in detail in Volume 1. The prior-to-school assessment tasks included environmental print items developed especially for this study. Other assessment tasks included: concepts about print, writing observation and letter identification (Clay, 1993); reading behaviours on levelled books (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Peterson, 1991); and a test of phonemic segmentation (Yopp, 1995). In the first year of school the children were retested on

each of these items. Some additional items were included in this second round of assessment, in order to reflect children's increased literacy knowledge after attending school. The additional items included the retelling task from the *School Entry Assessment* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1997); *Ready to Read* word test (Clay, 1993) and the *First Steps* spelling and writing levels (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994a; Education Department of Western Australia, 1994b).

In 1998 in the second year of school the children were re-assessed on all of the original assessment tasks and the *Ready to Read* word test. They were also assessed on a retelling task, this time based on the texts selected for the reading behaviours task. We assessed writing samples based on the *First Steps* spelling and writing levels (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994a; Education Department of Western Australia, 1994b).

The assessment items for 1999 and 2000 data collection reflected the students' growth in literacy over time with a few minor adjustments. Reported below is information on those tasks that were altered for these rounds of data collection. The writing task in 2000 began with a brainstorming session, and students were asked to write a descriptive account of life on earth. Stimulus material was provided to classroom teachers to administer the task and an observer was present in the classroom while the task was administered. The task was administered as a whole-class exercise so that children were working in familiar conditions and therefore working in a way which represented their usual working style and output. The task in 2000 was different from the 1999 task where children were asked to write a narrative. The scoring procedure used for the 2000 writing results was the same as that used for 1999. The procedure used to score the writing was developed for the Western Australian State Year 3 basic skills literacy tests.

In 2000, book levels were used once again for those children who had read at book level 25 or less in 1999. The levelled books and accompanying diagnostic Record of Reading Behaviours (RRB) proved useful for those children who read at book level 25 or less in 1999, but was not a useful tool to use with children who had developed oral reading fluency as they did not make the errors needed if the RRB was to be used diagnostically. Students reading at book level 26 are usually proficient decoders and there was no need to check on how they were going in terms of decoding.

Several reading comprehension tasks were built into the assessment activities reflecting the increasing use of reading to learn and comprehension of a range of texts as the students move through the primary school. In 1999 and 2000 the children completed a task with the computer where they were asked to read the computer screen and then navigate within a software program called *Eyewitness Children's Encyclopedia* (1997).

Letter identification was not included in the 2000 round of data collection as it was clear from the 1999 data that it was no longer a discriminator; most children could read 50 of the 54 test letters.

The structure of the site reports and case studies

The site reports provide a summary of the school and describe the local community context, the size of the school and the number of teachers, and discuss particular curriculum initiatives. As the *100 children turn 10* study continued for five years it was important to describe how the school and community altered or remained the same over time. Each site report explores how the school operated within the community and the school's relationships with families and caregivers.

The case studies of the 19 focus children follow sections titled:

- where is [the name of the case study student] now?
- what stays the same and what changes over time?
- teaching that made a difference.

In the section ‘Where is...now?’ the researcher describes the student’s current literacy practices in school and in some cases the literacy practices at home. In the section ‘What stays the same and what changes?’ aspects of literacy development may be described and family changes and changes in literacy development are explored. This section often summarises the child’s literacy learning from preschool through to the fourth year of school.

The analysis of literacy assessment data over the five years of the study has been placed by the researcher in the sections that best describe where the student is now, changes or teaching that made a difference. Throughout the study z-scores were compiled for each year of the study and at times researchers chose to show the z-scores for five years and at other times one or two years. Z-scores are standardised test scores on literacy assessments for the group. The average performance for any item which has been converted to a z-score is zero. A score above zero means a child’s performance is above the average of this group of children. A score below zero means the child’s performance is below the average for this group. It is important to note that a high z-score in 1998 and a low z-score in 1999 on the same item does not indicate that the child’s absolute performance declined. Rather the child’s performance in 1998 was relatively higher (compared to the scores for the group in 1998) than the 1999 performance was (compared to the scores for the group in 1999).

In the section about teaching that made a difference the pedagogy that engaged the students or affected their literacy trajectories in some way is described. This section summarises features of particular pedagogies that made a difference over the five years of the study.

The site reports and the case studies were written by researchers with a variety of research interests and individual writing styles which together contribute a rich resource for understanding children’s literacy development in a range of contexts.

